



Exceptional Circumstances Policy

Purpose of Policy

The purpose of this policy is to ensure fair and consistent response to students experiencing unexpected short-term circumstances which are exceptional for the individual student, beyond that student's control, and which could reasonably be expected to have had an adverse impact on a student's performance in an assessment, or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for a scheduled assessment.

Overview

This policy outlines the principles of exceptional circumstances, sets out the circumstances which would be considered exceptional circumstances, the process for requesting consideration of exceptional circumstances and the evidence required to support applications. The policy outlines requirements for Exceptional Circumstances Committees, the process for the consideration of applications, possible outcomes and process for notifying students of the outcome and maintaining records.

Scope: Mandatory Policy

The policy applies to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, and to the taught components undertaken by research postgraduate students.

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Document control

Dates	Approved: 21.03.24	Starts: 16.09.24	Equality impact assessment: 21.03.24	Amendments: N/A	Next Review: 2027/28
Approving authority	Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee				
Consultation undertaken	Schools, Colleges, EUSA				
Section responsible for policy maintenance & review	Registry Services				
Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Taught Assessment Regulations, Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment Guidance on policy, principle and operation of Boards of Examiners: www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/assessment/boards-examiners Degree Regulations & Programmes of Study: www.drps.ed.ac.uk/				
UK Quality Code	Expectations are covered in the UK Quality Code Advice and Guidance on "Assessment"				
Policies superseded by this policy	Special Circumstances Policy				
Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk				
Keywords	Exceptional Circumstances, Extension, Board of Examiners				



Exceptional Circumstances Policy

1. Principles

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to ensure a fair and consistent response to students experiencing unexpected short-term circumstances which are exceptional for the individual student, beyond that student's control, and which could reasonably be expected to have had a significant adverse impact on the student's performance in an assessment, or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for a scheduled assessment.
- 1.2 Exceptional Circumstances are designed for emergencies and short-term circumstances. Circumstances acceptable under this policy must be exceptional (i.e. serious and unusual) relative to the normal daily challenges that academic study presents, and unpredictable in that the student could not reasonably have been expected either to avoid them, or to allow for them in planning the assessment work or preparation.
- 1.3 Approval of any exceptional circumstances request is not automatic. The decision is at the discretion of the University.
- 1.4 If a student's circumstances are not covered by this policy, the University has a wide range of other options to help students to manage the challenges and demands of academic study.
- 1.5 Students with a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 are expected to engage with the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS) in order to discuss where relevant adjustments may be made, and/or to develop coping strategies which will support them through their study; such arrangements are separate to this Policy (see section 6).
- 1.6 Students who do not have a disability but have known responsibilities or circumstances (e.g. caring responsibilities) that mean engagement with their studies may be impacted in other ways should speak with their Student Adviser in the first instance.
- 1.7 Students who frequently apply for exceptional circumstances will be proactively contacted by their School or Deanery to offer support.
- 1.8 In the case of some professionally accredited programmes this Policy will extend to exceptional reasons for absence from classes where attendance is required in order to meet learning outcomes, e.g. practical, tutorial and clinical rotations in CMVM. These classes will be specifically identified by the School or Deanery and communicated to students at the start of the course.

2. What would the University consider an exceptional circumstance?

- a) Bereavement through the death of a close relative, partner or close personal friend.
- b) Serious short-term physical illness or injury; this includes sudden worsening or a flare-up of a chronic physical health issue.



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- c) Serious short-term mental illness; this includes sudden worsening or a flare-up of a chronic mental health issue.
- d) Serious illness of a close relative (such as parent, child or spouse/partner) or a person who is dependent upon the student for their care.
- e) Victim of a crime whose impact upon a student is serious; this includes the experience of sexual or gender-based violence and harassment.
- f) Adjustments for a disability have not been made in time for a course assessment, where the student can demonstrate that the delay is not their responsibility .
- g) Exceptional personal circumstances, e.g. events that result in a serious impact on a student's ability to engage with academic work during the assessment period in question; this includes unexpected changes to caring responsibilities, and breakdown of a long-term relationship.
- h) For students in paid employment, an exceptional and significant change in their employment commitments, where this is beyond their control.
- i) Other exceptional circumstances that have affected, or will affect the student's ability to meet a deadline or complete an assessment. Such circumstances will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may include military service, military conflict, natural disaster or extreme weather conditions.
- j) Students taking part in elite level sporting events may be permitted to request extensions to coursework deadlines under the Performance Sport policy.

3. What would not be considered an exceptional circumstance?

- a) A long-term or chronic health condition (including mental ill-health) which has not worsened recently or for which the University has already made a reasonable adjustment.
- b) A minor short-term illness or injury (e.g. a common cold), which would not reasonably have had a significant adverse impact on the student's performance in an assessment or ability to complete the assessment on time.
- c) Holidays, including getting married, attendance at weddings, festivals and similar events.
- d) Loss of work not backed up, computer or printing problems;
- e) Poor working practices such as:
 - i. Accidental submission of an incorrect document, wrong file type or a corrupted file;
 - ii. claim of technical issues on behalf of the University with no proof of an error message/ system failure on a University system (e.g. Learn);
 - iii. poor time management;
 - iv. misunderstanding of the examination timetable or instructions on assessment deadlines.
- f) Deadlines for work or exams being set close together.



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4. Requesting consideration of exceptional circumstances

4.1 Under this policy, students can make a specific request for an extension to a deadline for a coursework assessment (referred to below as **Coursework Extensions**). Students can also request consideration of other outcomes where they have submitted an assessment late without an approved extension, not submitted an assessment (including missing an exam), or they feel their performance in an assessment was detrimentally affected by their circumstances (referred to below as **Exceptional Circumstances**).

Coursework Extensions

4.2 It is the responsibility of students to submit their application for a coursework extension to the Exceptional Circumstances (EC) service using the online system:

- no earlier than 10 calendar days before the submission deadline for the relevant assessment (including the date of an examination); and
- no later than the submission deadline for the relevant coursework assessment. (Where a student has an Extra Time Adjustment, this will be the amended deadline.)

Further information about applying for Coursework Extensions is provided in section 7.

Exceptional Circumstances (outcomes other than coursework extensions)

4.3 It is the responsibility of students to submit their application for Exceptional Circumstances to the EC service using the online system:

- no earlier than 10 calendar days before the submission deadline for the relevant assessment (including the date of an examination); and
- no later than the Exceptional Circumstances deadline for the School responsible for the student's programme published on the EC web pages for each Semester.

Further information about applying for Exceptional Circumstances is provided in sections 8-11.

All applications

4.4 Students may submit requests earlier than 10 calendar days prior to the relevant assessment deadline where it is clear that their circumstances will still be having an effect at the point of submission for the assessment. For example, where an exceptional event is scheduled to take place e.g. medical procedure, court proceedings, that would reasonably be expected to result in more than one day's absence and cannot be rescheduled. Where a student anticipates an absence of



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more than a week, they should discuss this with their Student Adviser, before applying under this policy.

4.5 In their application, students should describe the circumstances, state when the circumstances affected them, and all assessments and courses affected. Students should ensure that they provide sufficient documentary evidence. It is advised that students consult their Student Adviser, or Student Support Team when completing their application. The EUSA Advice Place are available for support.

Late applications

4.6 Deadlines for submission of Exceptional Circumstances are set in such a way as to allow ample time for students to submit their applications. The EC service will therefore only consider accepting submissions after the relevant School deadline where students provide an explanation for why they were unable to submit on time, with sufficient evidence to support this. No late applications will be considered after the final deadline for the relevant Semester published on the EC web pages.

5. Confidentiality

The University will treat the information provided by students as confidential in line with the University's Data Protection Policy, and will only share it with staff who have a legitimate need to access the information in order to consider the student's case or to provide students with support.

6. Students with Disabilities

6.1 The University supports students with long-term or chronic health conditions, including mental ill-health, if they are deemed to be disabled as defined by the Equality Act 2010, by putting in place a Schedule of Adjustments to provide reasonable adjustments to study and assessment support arrangements. Students are responsible for contacting the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS) to discuss the adjustments and support that they need.

6.2 Support and reasonable adjustments, including adjustments for fluctuating conditions, should be approved by the DLSS as part of an agreed plan.

6.3 Students with disabilities can claim exceptional circumstances where adjustments have not been made in time for an assessment, and where the student can demonstrate that the delay is not their responsibility. Consideration of disability as an exceptional circumstance may also be appropriate where evidence is provided that the impact of a disability has unexpectedly worsened significantly (whether temporarily or permanently).



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6.4 Students with disabilities are also able to use the Exceptional Circumstances process when they encounter circumstances other than their disability which meet the criteria within the policy.

7. Coursework Extensions

7.1 Students can apply for an extension to a coursework deadline under Exceptional Circumstances on a limited number of occasions, within defined criteria.

- a) Applications will be self-certified and do not require the submission of independent, supporting evidence.
- b) Students should only submit applications that meet the criteria set out in Section 2 “What would the University would consider an Exceptional Circumstance?”.
- c) Coursework extensions will only be offered for in-course assessments. In line with Taught Assessment Regulation 28.2, Schools may specify that coursework extensions are not offered for some in-course assessments.
- d) Students can apply for a Coursework Extension under this process up to **three times** within one academic year, including students with teaching over the summer (e.g. Taught Postgraduate Masters students). For any further applications for late submission without penalty, students should use the Exceptional Circumstances process (see sections 8-11).
- e) One application can cover more than one assessment where the submission deadlines for each assessment fall during the same **four calendar day period**.
- f) Coursework Extensions applications can only be considered before the submission deadline for the relevant assessment. Where students have an Extra Time Adjustment, this will be the amended deadline. Any applications submitted after the relevant deadline must be accompanied by evidence and will be considered under the Exceptional Circumstances process.
- g) Students can only apply for a Coursework Extension under this process once for each assessment (students cannot apply for successive extensions on the same piece of work, for example).
- h) Falsification is a serious offence. If a student is suspected of submitting a fraudulent Coursework Extension application, this will be considered as a potential breach of the Code of Student Conduct.

7.2 The University’s Exceptional Circumstances (EC) service will confirm the acceptance of applications for coursework extensions, where these meet the above criteria. Where an application is accepted, the student will be offered an extension to the deadline for the affected assessment(s) for **four calendar days**.



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7.3 Schools and Deaneries may extend the default length of coursework extension to **seven calendar days** for courses taken primarily by students on part-time programmes, or who are undertaking placement. Schools and Deaneries will advise students in advance via course and programme handbooks where this applies to courses.

7.4 Where the EC Service does not accept an application, they will inform the student of this, providing an explanation for their decision.

7.5 Once a decision has been made by the EC service on an application for a Coursework Extension (whether it is accepted or not accepted), the process of handling the application under this policy is concluded and the application will not be considered further.

8. Exceptional Circumstances (outcomes other than coursework extensions)

8.1 Where a student wishes to request an outcome other than a coursework extension, they must apply for Exceptional Circumstances and submit satisfactory supporting evidence with their request. A request can be submitted in anticipation of the receipt of the supporting evidence.

8.2 Supporting evidence will normally be from a relevant professional, including staff at the University (e.g. Student Advisers, Wellbeing Advisers).

8.3 In most cases, the evidence provided will be expected to give direct confirmation of the circumstances (e.g. a medical diagnosis). In other cases, however, it is understood that the person providing evidence will rely on the student's account of the circumstances, and will instead provide an account of their engagement with the student, and their understanding of the effect of the student's circumstances on the student's ability to engage with their assessments.

8.4 The University does not expect that students should seek medical attention purely for the purpose of requesting evidence to support an Exceptional Circumstances application, for example relating to acute gastroenteritis affecting attendance at an examination. In cases such as these, students are encouraged to make contact with their Student Adviser to notify them of their circumstances and the impact upon their assessments, and to seek support with applying for Exceptional Circumstances. Where appropriate, Student Advisers may confirm their awareness of the student's circumstances in a supporting statement.

8.5 Evidence should be provided in English, or accompanied by translations into English where appropriate. Translations will be checked for accuracy.

8.6 The required evidence is as follows:

- a) for bereavement:
 - no further evidence required.



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- b) for illness:
- a signed and dated letter from a medical practitioner (GP, counsellor, therapist or clinical specialist) that states the dates when the illness affected the student and how the circumstances affected or are likely to affect the student's ability to prepare, submit or attend for an assessment or other event;
 - Where such a letter is not routinely available, a student may provide other formal evidence, such as appointment or referral letters, hospital reports or discharge letters;
 - Where other independent evidence is not available, the student should contact their Student Adviser to notify them of their circumstances and the impact upon their studies, so that the Student Adviser can provide a statement confirming their awareness of this and of their engagement with the student;
 - Where the student has a chronic condition that is subject to flare-ups or a sudden worsening, a signed and dated letter from a medical practitioner (GP or clinical specialist) or the Disability and Learning Support Service (DLSS) that states the nature of the condition and how flare-ups or a sudden worsening are likely to affect the student's ability to prepare, submit or attend for an assessment or other event. Once this evidence has been provided on the first occasion there is no need to obtain new evidence on subsequent occasions although the student will still need to submit a request on each occasion;
- c) for a situation where adjustments for a disability have not been made in time for a course assessment, and where the student can demonstrate that the delay is not their responsibility, confirmation from DLSS of the diagnosis and the date it was made, and details of any delays to the implementation of the required reasonable adjustments;
- d) For situations where the impact of a medical condition has unexpectedly worsened significantly, a signed and dated letter from a medical practitioner (GP or clinical specialist) confirming the nature of the condition and its impact upon the student's studies, or from DLSS confirming the details of any information provided by the student;
- e) for a student awaiting a diagnosis of a condition affecting them or a close relative or dependent other:
- a signed and dated letter from a medical practitioner (GP or clinical specialist) if the student is awaiting a diagnosis that a clinician has arranged an assessment for, that states the dates when the student or patient attended for treatment, when tests were undertaken, and when a diagnosis is expected;
 - A statement from a Student Adviser or Wellbeing Adviser regarding the information shared with them by the student.
- f) for accident or injury to the student:



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- a copy of an accident report provided by a police officer or other public official, or a signed and dated letter from a medical practitioner (GP or clinical specialist);
 - in all cases where a letter is provided it must state the dates when the accident or injury affected the student, the position and qualification(s) of the person providing the letter and their contact details;
- g) For significant adverse personal or family circumstances being encountered by the student:
- a signed and dated letter or appropriate proforma from one or more of the following: University staff member e.g. Student Counsellor, Student Adviser, Student Wellbeing Adviser; an adviser at the EUSA Advice Place; a medical practitioner (GP or clinical specialist), a social worker (stating their position with respect to the student), an officer of the law, a teacher outside the University;
 - the statement they provide must give their position and their contact details and must provide information on the timing and impact of the circumstances upon the student;
- h) for students in employment, who have experienced an exceptional and significant change in their employment commitments, where this is beyond their control:
- where they are in employment: a signed and dated letter from their employer, or their employer's authorised representative, stating that the student has been required by them to undertake work in the interests of the employer and, if relevant, that this was in time that had previously been agreed would be available for the student to study, prepare for assessment or other event, or take an assessment or attend another event
 - where they are self-employed: evidence from their client or the client's authorised representative stating that they have required the student to undertake unforeseen work that was necessary in the interests of the client's business, together with the dates and times when the student had been required to meet the client or undertake the previously unforeseen work;
 - Where the above evidence is not reasonably available, students may provide other evidence, such as screenshots of correspondence with their employer/client, rotas; in these circumstances the student should also contact their Student Adviser to notify them of their circumstances and the impact upon their studies, so that the Student Adviser can confirm their awareness of this.
- i) for military service:
- the individual's call-up papers;
- j) for other exceptional circumstances:
- official documentation relevant to the event which may include court or legal papers;



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- supporting evidence will not be required where a request is based on a student's experience of sexual or gender-based violence.

8.7 Self-certification will not be accepted as evidence for Exceptional Circumstances outside of the agreed arrangements for Coursework Extensions (see section 7).

8.8 Where supporting evidence is provided it will be taken at face value. However, the University reserves the right to make follow-up enquiries to establish the authenticity of the documentation provided. If at any stage of an application it is suspected that the evidence put forward to support the application may have been dishonestly acquired or is itself dishonest, consideration of the application will be suspended and the matter referred for consideration as a potential breach of the Code of Student Conduct.

9. Exceptional Circumstances Committees (ECCs)

9.1 Each School or Deanery is responsible for having one or more Exceptional Circumstances Committees (ECCs) to consider appropriate outcomes in accepted Exceptional Circumstances cases and make recommendations to the relevant Board of Examiners.

9.2 Schools may set up one ECC per Board of Examiners or ECCs which cover a number of Boards of Examiners. The Board sets up an ECC as a sub-committee of the Board.

9.3 To be quorate, an ECC will consist of a Convener, who must be a member of academic staff, and one member of professional services staff. Schools can include additional members (from among academic or professional services staff), but should seek to keep the membership as small as is consistent with robust decision-making, in order to avoid providing sensitive information about students to more people than is necessary.

9.4 If a Board of Examiners is very small and wishes to operate as its own ECC, this requires College approval. The Convener of the Board of Examiners may also convene the ECC but this is not a requirement.

9.5 ECCs will meet before the relevant Board of Examiners meetings take place. ECCs can also conduct business by correspondence where it is necessary to consider cases submitted after the scheduled ECC meeting, as long as all decisions are confirmed by a quorate membership (see above).

10. Process for consideration of Exceptional Circumstances applications



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10.1 Acceptance or rejection of exceptional circumstances requests

In relation to each request for consideration of Exceptional Circumstances, taking into account all information available to it, the EC Service determines:

- Whether there is sufficient evidence regarding the submitted circumstances and their impact on the student's performance in an assessment;
- Whether the submitted circumstances were exceptional for the individual student, whether they were beyond the student's control, and whether it is reasonable to conclude that they would have had a significant adverse impact upon the student's performance in an assessment, or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for a scheduled assessment;
- During what period the submitted exceptional circumstances were affecting the student's performance.

Based on their assessment, the EC Service will determine whether the application is accepted. Where the EC Service does not accept an application, they will inform the student of this, providing an explanation for their decision.

10.2 Determination of outcomes in accepted cases

10.2.1 The EC service will refer all accepted applications for consideration by the relevant Exceptional Circumstances Committee(s) in the School(s) or Deaneries responsible for the course(s) to which the application relates. The decision by the EC service to accept an application is binding on an Exceptional Circumstances Committee (ECC).

Removal of lateness penalties

10.2.2 Where a student's application for Exceptional Circumstances has been accepted by the EC service for an assessment which they submit late (i.e. beyond the original assessment deadline, or any extended deadline offered under section 7 of this policy or as a result of any Extra Time Adjustments), any penalties for late submission will be removed by default at the Board of Examiners (under 10.5 c), **provided that the late submission of the assessment is accepted by the School or Deanery**. Schools/Deaneries will inform students when a late submission cannot be accepted, for example where the marking or moderation process has already taken place. In all cases, including those where late work could not be accepted, the ECC will proceed to consider the other options available to them (under section 10.5) in regard to the student's application. This may in some cases lead to the removal of late penalties being superseded by, for example, the offer of a null sit (10.5 e), or disregarding an unreliable component (10.5 d).



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10.3 Exceptional Circumstances Committee (ECC) consideration

10.3.1 On receipt of an accepted exceptional circumstances request from the EC service, the ECC will consider all of the information relevant to the student's assessment, which may include information regarding the student's performance in the affected assessment(s) (including provisional marks, where available), and their performance in other assessments (as relevant).

10.3.2 The ECC will make a recommendation to the Board of Examiners regarding the appropriate action to take with regard to the affected assessments, courses, or programme. The ECC can either make a specific recommendation or recommend a range of options to the Board of Examiners. These recommendations are not binding on the Board of Examiners.

10.3.3 The ECC will provide a report of its recommendations to the relevant Board of Examiners through the EC online system.

10.4 Exceptional circumstances: general points about Board of Examiners decisions

In coming to a decision where exceptional circumstances are considered, Boards of Examiners must act in the best academic interest of the student. This means that Boards will apply whichever outcome(s) leads to a student achieving the best possible course or programme result, provided that this is consistent with the Board being satisfied that it has sufficient evidence of attainment of relevant learning outcomes (see 10.5), or of performance at the required level in the programme (see 10.6.2).

10.5 Exceptional circumstances: decisions regarding course outcomes

Where a student's exceptional circumstances application has been accepted, the relevant Board of Examiners decides on one or more of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the recommendations of the ECC.

Action	College approval required?
a) No action – the actions available would not be in a student's best academic interest	No
b) No action at course level; flag for consideration in relation to progression or award decision	No
c) Disregard penalties for late submission of coursework	No
d) Disregard missing or unreliable component(s) and derive overall mark/grade from completed work (see 10.5.1)	No
e) Record the course as a 'null sit', with the option of allowing the student to be examined at the next available diet, and / or to submit missing assessment and / or repeat some or all assessments, on a first sit basis	No
f) Permit the student to resubmit a revised dissertation for a postgraduate Masters programme	Yes



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g) Permit the student to take specially prepared alternative assessments, including oral assessment	No
h) If course result is borderline (within 2 percentage points of the pass mark), award pass	No

10.5.1 Where marks/grades for specific components of assessment are missing or deemed unreliable, a Board of Examiners can only derive an overall mark/grade for the course from the existing assessed work if it is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence of attainment of the Learning Outcomes in other components of the course.

10.5.2 Boards of Examiners cannot adjust marks / grades as a consequence of exceptional circumstances.

10.5.3 Where a Board of Examiners applies one or more of the outcomes above at course level, it need not refer the case for further consideration at programme or award level, unless it is not satisfied that the options available at course level are in the best academic interest of the student (see 10.4).

10.6 Exceptional circumstances: decisions regarding progression and award

Where a student's exceptional circumstances application has been accepted, the relevant Board of Examiners decides on one or more of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the recommendations of the ECC.

In rare cases where the Board wishes to request permission for a student to graduate without the required volume or level of credit, the Board must request a concession via the relevant College committee; where the College committee supports the request, they will seek approval for the action from the Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) via a concession.

Action	College or APRC approval required?
a) No further action – the actions available would not be in a student's best academic interest	No
b) Where a mark for a course is missing or deemed unreliable, exclude the affected course(s) from the relevant calculation for the award of credit on aggregate; progression; award of degree; degree classification (including the award of PGT Merit and Distinction)	No
c) Allow a student to graduate without the required number and / or level of credits for the degree	Yes (APRC)

10.6.1 Irrespective of any action taken with regard to exceptional circumstances, Honours and Postgraduate Taught students may also be awarded credit on aggregate for failed courses as normal, in line with Taught Assessment Regulations 52 (Honours students) and 56 (Postgraduate Taught students).



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10.6.2 There is no limit on the total credit volume of courses Boards of Examiners can exclude from calculations in line with 10.6 b). However, Boards must be satisfied that the remaining courses provide them with sufficient evidence of performance at the required level to support the decision being made, e.g. in terms of progression, award of a degree, or degree classification. Where the volume of unreliable course results leaves a Board with insufficient evidence to support a decision, they should consider offering null sits and reassessment as a first attempt, in line with 10.5 e).

10.6.3 For decisions regarding aegrotat degrees and posthumous degrees, see the relevant Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degree Regulations.

11. Notifying students of the outcomes of requests for consideration of exceptional circumstances

The EC service will notify students of the decision regarding whether or not their exceptional circumstances application has been accepted using the online system within five working days of their application being received. The School or Deanery will notify students of any action taken by the Board of Examiners in relation to their exceptional circumstances application using the online system no later than five working days after the publication of ratified marks as noted in the University Key Dates. The School or Deanery will also inform the student's Student Adviser of the decision.

12. Appeal

Students have the right to appeal a decision by the EC service not to accept an application, or an outcome decision made either by the EC service or their Board of Examiners under the Student Appeal Regulations.

13. Reporting and maintaining records on requests for consideration of Exceptional Circumstances

14.1 Where the EC service decides not to accept a request for consideration of exceptional circumstances, the service will record the reason for this decision in the relevant online system.

14.2 The School or Deanery will minute ECC meetings (including meetings conducted by correspondence), recording all decisions and recommendations in the relevant online system. The ECC will report its decisions and recommendations to the Board of Examiners in as concise a form as is consistent with clarity and the student's interest, where possible maintaining the anonymity of the student.

14.3 The EC service and the School or Deanery will maintain records in line with Data Protection guidelines.



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14. Sources of further guidance

Further guidance for students regarding the exceptional circumstances process is available at: www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/students/assessment/exceptional-circumstances

Edinburgh University Students' Association provides further guidance to students regarding exceptional circumstances, and the Students' Association Advice Place can provide independent advice to students regarding the preparation of their requests for consideration of exceptional circumstances.

www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace/academic/exceptional-circumstances

In order to support consistency of handling of student requests for consideration of exceptional circumstances, Colleges, Schools and Deaneries must not produce their own supplementary guidance.

21 March 2024

FOR USE FROM SEPT 2024