

# Exceptional Circumstances Policy

## 1. Scope and Purpose

- 1.1 This document sets out the University policy under which you may request that exceptional personal circumstances which are affecting your learning and assessment are taken into consideration.
- 1.2 The policy applies to applications for **individual circumstances** to be considered and taken into account in relation to the assessment of taught courses of study.
- 1.3 The policy applies to students and apprentices who are enrolled on courses delivered under an educational partnership arrangement unless otherwise agreed at partnership approval.
- 1.4 It does not cover instances where whole groups of learners are affected by circumstances, for example staff participation in industrial action, problems affecting University-wide infrastructure or IT systems, or severe adverse weather. Any issue of this nature should be brought to the attention of the Course Leader for consideration by the Assessment Board as appropriate.
- 1.5 There are two ways in which the University can take exceptional personal circumstances into consideration:
  - (i) Assignment Extension/Exam Postponement; and
  - (ii) Assessment Board consideration.

In both cases you will be required to provide appropriate supporting evidence (see section 5).
- 1.6 Normally you will be expected to seek an extension or postponement as the first response to exceptional personal circumstances, unless this is not possible for valid reasons.
- 1.7 It is your responsibility to ensure that, where exceptional personal circumstances apply, you apply for consideration in accordance with this policy and by the specified deadlines. Failure to do so on the basis that you were unaware of the policy or deadlines will not be accepted as grounds for subsequent appeal.
- 1.8 The University aims to ensure that support is offered to all students and apprentices with exceptional personal circumstances.
- 1.9 In line with our *Equality, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging Policy*, where a student or staff member working with this policy has specific protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, we will make reasonable adjustments to this procedure where it is reasonable to do.
- 1.10 If you require this document in a different format, please contact Registry.

1.11 The Exceptional Personal Circumstances Policy is an internal procedure and is not a legal process.

## **2. Key Responsibilities and delegated authority**

2.1 Responsibility for the management and implementation of this policy lies with the Academic Registrar.

2.2 The Course Leader considers and responds to learners' requests for assessment extensions and/or examination postponements.

2.3 The Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel considers requests from learners for the consideration of exceptional personal circumstances, to inform decisions made at the Assessment Board.

2.4 The relevant Assessment Board receives the outcomes of applications for Assessment Board consideration from the Exceptional Personal Circumstance Panel and considers the outcomes in light of individual profiles. The details of exceptional personal circumstances will not be revealed to the Assessment Board.

2.5 Under this policy and associated procedures any University role or officeholder may act through their appointed nominee.

## **3. Introduction, context and definitions**

3.1 You are responsible for managing your own learning (including assessment), and this includes managing illness and/or difficult personal circumstances. However, there may be instances when these situations are serious and unforeseen. In such situations you are encouraged to use the provisions of this policy. However, if such circumstances are likely to have long-term effects, then you may wish to consider taking a break from your studies, and should discuss this with Student Services, your Course Leader or Course Administrator in the first instance. It is important that you keep your Course Leader and Course Administrator fully informed of any such difficulties at the time at which they occur, because it may be possible for you to be signposted to sources of advice and support which will make an exceptional personal circumstance claim unnecessary.

3.2 The University defines exceptional personal circumstances as circumstances which:

- are outside your foresight and/or control
- are serious and have significantly and adversely impacted your ability to study or to complete one or more assessment
- are not already registered as having additional learning support needs through Student Services
- are supported by independently verified medical or other appropriate documentary evidence that clearly demonstrates the impact of the circumstances on the relevant assessment(s)

3.3 The following is a non-exhaustive list of what the University would regard as circumstances that could have affected your performance and which could not have been remedied in advance of the assessments:

- Bereavement - the death of a close relative / friend / person of significance to you
- Unforeseen caring responsibilities problems for a family member or dependent (of a serious but short-term nature)
- You experience a short-term or significant illness or injury or a close relative/person of

significance to you does

- Pregnancy-related illness or childbirth, but not pregnancy itself
- Significant adverse personal/family circumstances leading to acute stress
- Significant financial problems, e.g., bankruptcy
- Sudden worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions
- Symptoms of a short-term infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others
- The immediate impact of witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident, or any sudden ill mental health associated with the incident
- A crime which has had a substantial impact on you
- Accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable

3.4 The following are examples of what will NOT normally be considered as exceptional personal circumstances:

- IT problems, e.g., loss of data or printer difficulties, which could be avoided through appropriate preparation and keeping adequate copies of or backing up your work or not understanding or following the instructions in relation to online submission of assessments
- Minor transport problems (unpredictable and exceptional transport delays on the day of an assessment may, in some circumstances be considered a valid circumstance for non-attendance, for example, emergency road closures by the emergency services, train delays due to incidents; however, routine delays to trains or buses will not)
- Misreading or being unaware of published assessment timetable/submission dates
- Poor time management
- Not understanding or being unaware of regulations, policies and procedures
- Personal events such as moving house, holidays, or expeditions that were planned or could reasonably have been expected
- Timetabling of coursework/examinations, including assessments that are scheduled close together
- Demands of paid employment (for full-time learners for whom academic study should be regarded as their priority)
- Minor illnesses such as coughs and colds, headaches, upset stomachs or hay fever, unless the symptoms are particularly severe
- General financial issues
- Medical circumstances outside the relevant assessment period or the preparation period
- Chronic health conditions which are considered as typically lasting more than three months and can be managed but may 'flare up' unless there has been a short-term, unforeseen flare-up
- Normal examination stress (it is expected that you will develop the ability to deal with this)
- A religious festival/observance which is not unforeseen; any impact should be discussed with your Course Leader in advance

3.5 **Declared disabilities and long-term health conditions:** If you have a declared disability or long-term health condition for which additional learning support arrangements have been formally put in place the provisions of this policy will not be applicable. However, this policy can be applied if you have evidence, that:

- (i) any circumstances affected you over and above the special arrangements already made during assessments; or
- (ii) the arrangements did not fully compensate for your condition; or
- (iii) there was a sudden or unexpected deterioration of the known condition for which the adjustments already in place were not sufficient to compensate; or
- (iv) you have received a late diagnosis of a disability or other requirement for additional learning support, and it is evidenced that your performance in specific

assessments within the current year or level has been affected.

- 3.6 Should your exceptional personal circumstances continue from one academic year to the next, with support from Student Services, your Course Leader and Course Administrator, you should make arrangements for this to be established as a long-term condition in order that the University can provide you with appropriate support and adjustments.

#### **4. The importance of timely disclosure**

- 4.1 It is essential that you disclose circumstances which you believe are affecting your performance at the time such circumstances occur, and no later than the published deadlines for doing so. Late disclosure on the basis that you felt unable to or embarrassed to, or did not feel comfortable in disclosing, will not be accepted as valid grounds for a subsequent appeal. You should seek advice from the Students' Union or Student Services if you need support in disclosing specific circumstances.
- 4.2 There is provision within this policy if you wish to submit material confidentially (see para 7.3.4).
- 4.3 Should you feel at the time of an assessment that particular circumstances did not affect you, but you subsequently change your mind once you have received your assessment results, this will **not** be accepted as grounds for late submission of exceptional personal circumstances, or for appeal.

#### **5. What you need to make a claim under this policy**

##### **5.1 Self-Certification**

- 5.1.1 Very short term, unforeseen circumstances may be dealt with by self-certification, where adverse circumstances beyond your control have prevented you from completing work to a deadline and where you may be unable or unwilling to provide corroborating evidence. This is similar to when you might self-certify an ability to come to work.
- 5.1.2 To be considered valid, the circumstances for self-certification must meet the criteria outlined in section 3.3 and:
- Have affected you for seven calendar days or less, and
  - Apply to a coursework assignment with an upcoming deadline only, and
  - Where you wish to seek an extension to that deadline of seven calendar days or less (i.e. the length of time that you have been adversely affected)
- 5.13 You must follow the process for seeking an assignment extension as outlined below, with as much detail as necessary to explain how your circumstances have affected your ability to complete your assessment.
- 5.14 You may not self-certify if you are seeking an extension of more than seven calendar days, or if this applies to a dissertation, group work, or any form of practical assessment or examination.
- 5.15 You may only self-certify twice in an academic year (limited to one per semester), and the requests must be for two different assignments.

##### **5.2 Claims involving evidence**

- 5.2.1 Claims other than those involving self-certification require supporting evidence. Evidence submitted to support exceptional personal circumstances claims must be independent third-party evidence. The evidence must include dates which are relevant to the assessment(s) for the claim and must clearly demonstrate the impact the circumstances had on the relevant

assessment(s).

5.2.2 You are responsible for meeting the costs of supplying evidence, however you should normally only be expected to provide the same information once.

5.2.3 Evidence may include:

- medical certificate to cover the period of illness which is affecting the assessment
- death certificate or other evidence (such as order of service for a funeral)
- letter from an independent third-party professional (e.g. dentist, police officer, counsellor)
- a crime reference number
- eviction notice

5.2.4 Appointment letters alone are not sufficient evidence.

5.2.5 Supporting evidence must be submitted in English. If translation is required, the translation must be prepared by a registered translator, and include a statement of confirmation from the translator/translation company that it is an accurate translation of the original document, together with the translator/translation company's contact details. The translation should be made by a person registered with an official organisation such as the Chartered Institute of Linguists or the Institute of Translation & Interpreting. A translator who is employed by a recognised translation company, the latter being a member of the Association of Translation Companies, is also acceptable.

5.2.6 The Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel must be able to confirm your statement by looking at the evidence and so you must ensure that you submit sufficient relevant evidence in support of your claim. The Panel cannot make follow up enquiries to clarify or obtain further supporting evidence. If sufficient evidence is not presented (unless you have clearly specified that you are in the process of securing the necessary evidence) your claim will be rejected.

## **6. False or overstated claims**

6.1 False or overstated claims of exceptional personal circumstances will be considered seriously and may be regarded as an offence under the student disciplinary procedure.

## **7. Arrangements for consideration of exceptional personal circumstances**

7.1 There are two ways in which the University can take exceptional personal circumstances into consideration (please also see the flow diagram in Appendix 2):

- 1) Assignment extension and/or exam postponement – applied for in advance of the deadline or date of the examination to extend your deadline or to take your exam at a later date.
- 2) Assessment Board Consideration – applied for after the assessment if you could not apply for an extension or postponement prior to the assessment.

### **7.2 Assignment Extension and/or Exam Postponement**

7.2.1 To apply for an extension or to postpone your exam, you must complete a Coursework Extension/Exam Postponement Request Form and submit it to Registry together with all supporting evidence as required.

7.2.2 For self-certified exceptional personal circumstances claims applicable for assignment submissions only (see section 5.1), you will only be entitled to a maximum extension of seven calendar days.

- 7.2.3 You should detail the circumstances and explain why the circumstances will prevent you from meeting the deadline or sitting the examination. The form must be submitted prior to when the submission is due or the examination is due to be taken. Evidence can be submitted later if there is an unavoidable delay in obtaining this, however it must be provided before the claim is assessed.
- 7.2.4 The Framework/Course Leader will consider assignment extension requests and decide whether the circumstances are valid. If agreed, an extension will be granted. When an extension is approved for coursework submission, the extension must be granted with a new specific hand-in date. The hand-in date will be set by the Course Leader and will take into account the student, the circumstances and the assessment. The extended submission date will also take account of the assessment board schedule. You may request a further extension if you submit further evidence of continuing/new circumstances before the original extension deadline has passed.
- 7.2.5 The Framework/Course Leader will consider exam postponement requests and decide whether the circumstances are valid. Postponed examinations will normally be sat at the next diet of assessment for that examination (normally a re-sit period).
- 7.2.6 You will be notified of the decision, normally within seven days of receipt of the form, and the decision will be recorded on the Coursework Extension/Exam Postponement Request form. If your claim is rejected as invalid and you submitted your claim close to a deadline or date of an examination then it is your responsibility to accept the impact of any non-submission or non-attendance on your unit result.
- 7.2.7 If the exceptional personal circumstance arises on the day of the examination or assignment hand-in deadline, making it impossible for you to attend or submit your request in advance, you must inform Registry immediately and then complete an Assessment Board Consideration of Exceptional Personal Circumstances Form with full supporting evidence by the deadline.
- 7.2.8 If you do not attend an examination without an approved postponement and do not submit a request for Assessment Board Consideration of your circumstances, you will be given a mark of 0% in accordance with the Assessment Regulations.
- 7.2.9 Late submission of coursework without an approved extension will be handled as set out in the Assessment Regulations.
- 7.2.10 Where evidence is not submitted at the time a request is made, an extension/postponement may be granted provisionally, subject to subsequent receipt of satisfactory evidence. In such case the student must be notified of the consequences should the extension/postponement request subsequently be unsuccessful.
- 7.2.11 If your claim has been rejected and you subsequently have further evidence to support your claim you may submit a revised claim as long as this meets the requirements as set out above and is submitted prior to the coursework deadline or examination.

### **7.3 Assessment Board Consideration**

- 7.3.1 If you have been given an extension to coursework or allowed to postpone taking examination(s), allowances have already been made for the circumstances and you do not need to take any further action.

7.3.2 To apply for Assessment Board Consideration of your circumstances, you should complete an Assessment Board Consideration of Exceptional Personal Circumstances Form.

7.3.3 As well as explaining what the circumstances are, you need to explain how these affected the assessment(s) and why you were unable to seek an extension or postponement. The form must be submitted to Registry together with appropriate supporting evidence:

- a. no later than 5 working days after the last day of the semester 1 assessment period for circumstances affecting semester 1 assessments (or for part-time MSc learners no later than 5 days after an assignment submission or practical assessment date);
- b. *or for circumstances affecting semester 2*, at least 5 working days in advance of the date of the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel held in Semester 2.

These deadlines will be clearly published for learners well in advance of the Panel meeting, normally in the Course Handbook. You must submit a separate claim for each Semester in which you feel your performance has been affected.

7.3.4 All requests for consideration of exceptional personal circumstances are treated confidentially and are reviewed only by those with a specific role in the process. However, should you wish to do so you may submit your case and evidence in a sealed envelope, clearly labelled with your name and student number, and 'Confidential Exceptional Personal Circumstances Request'. In such cases the envelope will be opened by the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel only in the event that you fail the assessment. Should you pass the examination the envelope will be destroyed.

#### **Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel**

7.3.5 Individual cases will be considered by the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel only on the basis of the evidence provided. The details of exceptional personal circumstances will not be revealed to the Assessment Board.

7.3.6 Information regarding the operation of the Exceptional Personal Circumstance Panel is set out in Appendix 1. The Assessment Board will decide upon the assessment outcome based on the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel's decision.

#### **Assessment Board**

7.3.7 The Assessment Board will act as outlined in the Assessment Regulations in respect of a valid exceptional personal circumstance claim.

7.3.8 Exceptional personal circumstances will be taken into consideration only in the event that you fail the assessment for which such circumstances have been submitted.

7.3.9 You are required to complete and pass all units before progressing to the next stage/level of the course.

7.3.10 The Assessment Board will not raise the marks received even where it has been agreed that the circumstances are valid.

#### **Notification of outcomes**

7.3.11 You will be informed of the outcome of an application for Assessment Board Consideration of an exceptional personal circumstances when you receive your results.

## **8. Appeals**

- 8.1 If you have a valid reason for not following this policy and procedure, you may be entitled to appeal against the decision of the Assessment Board in accordance with the *Academic Appeals Policy*. You must provide a valid reason for not submitting the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Form and provide appropriate supporting evidence explaining why you were unable to submit your request in accordance with the published deadlines.
- 8.2 If you wish to lodge an appeal against the decision of the Assessment Board, you may do so in accordance with the *Academic Appeals Policy*.

## **9. Serial or multiple exceptional personal circumstances claims**

- 9.1 Should you submit serial or multiple exceptional personal circumstances claims you may be referred to the *Support to Study Policy* to ensure that you receive the necessary support and to consider whether a postponement of studies may be a more appropriate way to handle your circumstances.

## **10. Confidentiality**

- 10.1 Discussion of exceptional personal circumstances is confidential and will take place in the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel. The discussions of this Panel are confidential. Exceptionally, External Examiners may request evidence concerning how the University is implementing its own procedures.
- 10.2 You should note that it is not possible for the University to obtain information about you from a third party (such as a doctor) without your prior explicit consent.
- 10.3 All information collected under the requirements of this policy/procedure will be processed in accordance with the *Student Privacy Notice*. Data used for internal monitoring and reporting to relevant committees will be anonymised.
- 10.4 All data pertaining to exceptional personal circumstances is retained in accordance with the University retention policy.

## **11. Advice and support on using this Policy**

- 11.1 Advice and support on using this Policy is available from Registry, Student Services, and the Students' Union.

## **12. Monitoring and review of consideration of Exceptional Personal Circumstances**

- 12.1 The Academic Registrar will prepare an annual review of consideration of Exceptional Personal Circumstances across all awards, for the consideration of Academic Standards and Quality Committee, with a view to identifying any trends and considering whether there is a need to revise any policy or practices. This report will not refer to individuals by name.



Version:	3.2
Approved by:	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Academic Registrar
Policy Owner	Academic Registrar
Reference source	Examples from other institutions used as source material (in particular Bournemouth University, Harper Adam University, University of Kingston, University of Southampton, London Southbank University, London Metropolitan University, London Southbank University)
Date approved	30 July 2024
Effective from	August 2024
Review date	2024/25
Target	All staff and all students and apprentices enrolled on courses leading to AECC awards
Policy location	Public website, Sharepoint
Equality analysis	No direct impact. There is provision for reasonable adjustments to be made where required. Monitoring will be undertaken to assess whether there is any differential impact in the handling of cases

## Appendix 1

### Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel

#### Membership

Head of School or nominee (Chair)  
Course/Framework Leader(s) or nominee  
Academic Registrar or nominee

#### Secretary

Course Administrator(s)

#### TERMS OF REFERENCE

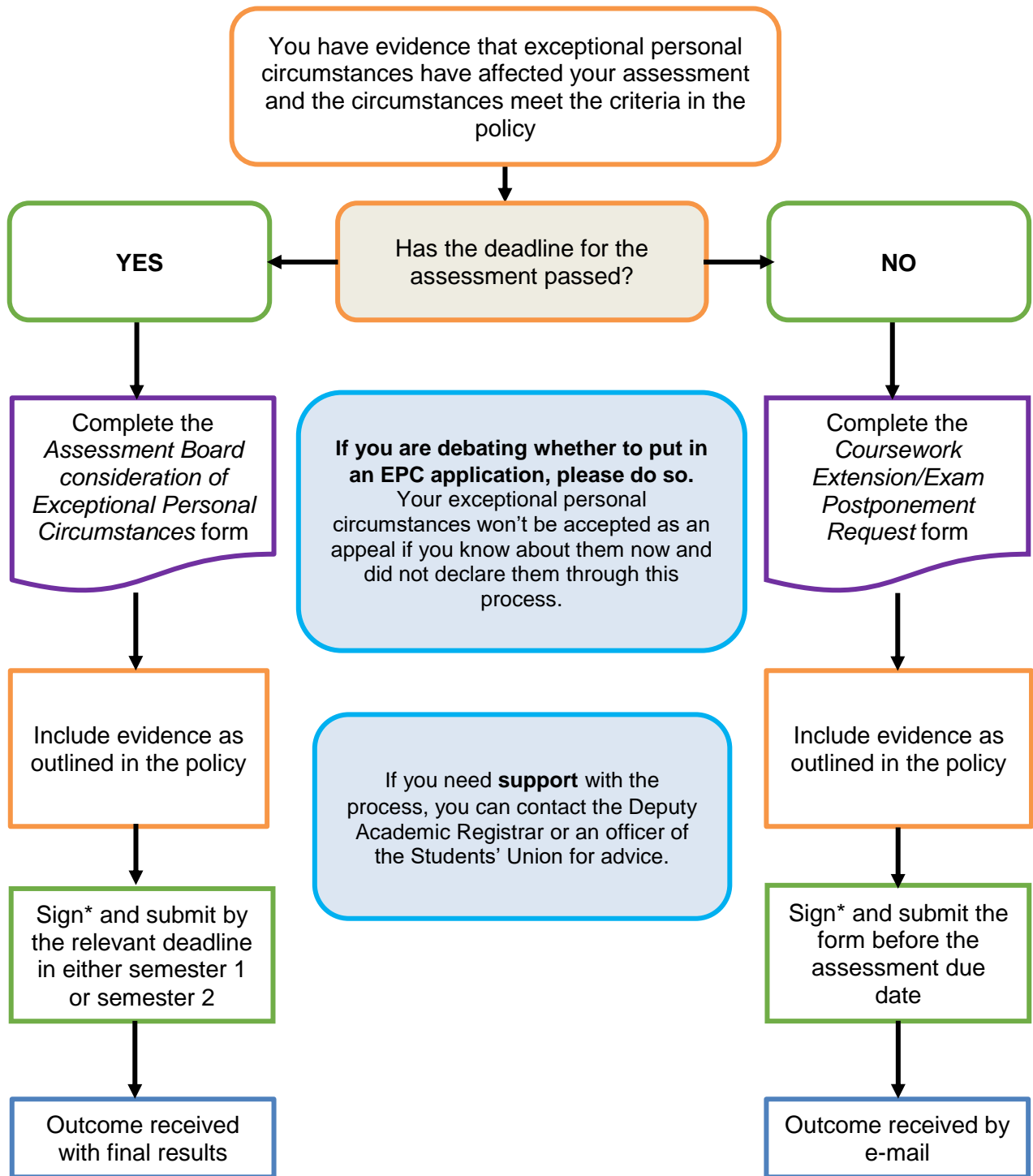
1. To consider whether or not applications for Assessment Board consideration of exceptional personal circumstances are valid under the Exceptional Personal Circumstances Policy.
2. To determine if the student or apprentice has valid grounds for failing to submit or participate in an assessment based **only** on the evidence provided in their application.
3. The Secretary will record the decision in the Student Record System.
4. The final decision of Exceptional Personal Circumstances Panel members is binding.

#### MEETS

In each assessment period where applications have been submitted.

**Quorum:** 100%. Members must send a suitable proxy in their place.

Appendix 2



\* electronic signatures accepted