



Guidance for Students on Extenuating Circumstances (updated January 2021)

1. Introduction

- a. This guidance applies to students who are currently enrolled on a programme of study offered directly by us or at selected partner organisations. It also applies to Degree Apprentices at the University of Birmingham.
- b. You **must** make sure you organise your time so that you can complete your assessments by the deadline set and be prepared for your exam.
- c. You need to build in some extra time in case anything does not go according to plan.
- d. You **must** also back up your work in case your computer fails or you lose data/files.
- e. This guidance does not cover temporary exam adjustments, extensions or deferrals for assessments which are dealt with under different procedures (see Appendices 1 and 2).

2. What are extenuating circumstances?

- a. Extenuating circumstances (ECs) are situations that:
 - i. You could not predict what would happen;
 - ii. You had no control over;
 - iii. Have seriously affected your ability to study or do your assessment.
- b. The following are valid reasons for making a claim for ECs if you are able to show they have prevented you from studying and/or doing your assessments. There are many more reasons than those listed below¹.
 - i. Illness or injury that has lasted for longer than one week and is serious enough to stop you from researching, writing, revising for your assessments and has impacted upon your learning.
 - ii. Death of someone close to you, or the significant, ongoing effects of grief following the death of someone close to you.
 - iii. Being the victim of crime (including harassment and assault).
 - iv. Family difficulties (including crises and serious illness) meaning you need to provide significant support.
 - v. Financial hardship that you could not have foreseen or controlled.
 - vi. Major computer problems (including wifi or system failure during an online assessment).
- c. If you have a Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAP) in place, this will not be accepted as an EC, unless there has been a specific period of deterioration (for example, if you take pills to control a medical condition and have been advised to change your pills, this has a significant effect on you and you are ill as a result. You should submit an EC claim on the basis that whilst your RAP covers your medical condition, it does not take account of deterioration).

¹ Other reasons may be taken into account for non-standard programmes; these will be confirmed by your School/Department



If you have a late diagnosis (for example, you have dyslexia diagnosed in the second semester of the first year), ECs can be considered as neither you nor the University has had a chance to put in place any reasonable adjustments. You should submit all evidence of the diagnosis, as well as the date of diagnosis, to the EC Panel for consideration.

Please note that students who have a RAP in place are not prevented from making a claim for ECs based on other reasons (i.e. reasons not linked to their medical condition such as those in 2b).

Example 1:

You contract chicken pox the day before an exam. You could not predict what would happen, you have no control over your illness and you cannot sit the exam. So long as your medical note states the dates of your illness and how it has stopped you from sitting the exam, your **claim is likely to be successful**.

- d. Claims based on the following will not be successful.
- i. Minor illnesses (such as coughs and colds).
 - ii. Minor computer problems that could have been prevented with adequate planning (for example, not allowing enough time to print your assessments or for interruptions in internet coverage whilst travelling).
 - iii. Stress and anxiety (including panic attacks) caused by the assessment (unless your claim is supported by medical evidence and diagnosed as an illness).
 - iv. Misreading your exam timetable or location details.
 - v. Having assessments close together.
 - vi. Attending events (such as weddings) that are planned in advance of the exam timetable being published.
 - vii. Employment or voluntary work (unless it is as a result of financial hardship that could not have been foreseen).
 - viii. Sports activities (unless the deferral of an examination process could not be used, for example if you have received late confirmation of selection for your team).
 - ix. Extracurricular activities, such as evening classes.

Example 2:

Your book a holiday overseas, which begins three days before the end of the exam period. Your exam timetable is released and you realise that you will be away for your final exam. Your **claim will not be successful** as you had control of when you went on holiday and knew the dates of the exam period.



Example 3:

Your coursework is due at 12pm. You arrive on campus at 11am to print and submit your coursework. The printers you usually use are busy so you go to a different building to print there, but the printers are not working. You manage to print your work at 11:55am and are at the School Office at 12:05pm but you are told your work is late. Your **claim will not be successful** because you have not allowed yourself enough time to print and submit your work.

Example 4:

You experience a technological problem (e.g. wifi or system failure) during an online assessment. You could not predict what would happen and you have no control over the situation. Your **claim is likely to be successful**. (See also section 4 below regarding evidence.)

e. Exam Irregularities and Plagiarism investigation

Where, following an investigation, there has been a decision that poor academic practice or plagiarism has occurred, an application for ECs will not normally be accepted, as this process should not be used to change the outcome of a plagiarism investigation. Instead, where you have submitted an assignment, assessment or other coursework, which has been investigated under the Code of Practice on Plagiarism (2016-17 cohort) or Code of Practice on Academic Integrity (2017-18 cohort onwards) you will need to make the Academic Integrity Officer aware of your extenuating circumstances before or during the meeting, with appropriate evidence where possible. This will be considered when the sanction is being decided rather than in applying the category of plagiarism.

An interruption to an exam or class test due to a query about a suspected irregularity will not be accepted as good reason for ECs in that assessment. Therefore a claim for ECs for that assessment or the relevant module will not be successful.

f. Group Work

For assessments of a single piece of work prepared by a group (i.e. where one mark is given to the group), the group can submit one ECs claim if the circumstances affected all members.

If you as an individual student are affected by ECs, but not the wider group, you can submit a claim to the EC Panel, indicating that the affected assessment is group work. The EC Panel will determine the suitable approach to the group. For example, if the assessment is a single piece of work prepared by a group and results in one mark, the ECs can be taken into account for all members of the group, even though



they haven't all submitted an EC Form. The EC Panel retains the right to exercise discretion in this regard.

Where the group work is based solely upon individual contribution, the claim will be dealt with as an individual claim and on an individual basis.

Confidentiality will be respected as per section 5.

3. What should I do if I think I have ECs?

- a. If you believe you have ECs and can provide evidence of this, you can make a claim using the Extenuating Circumstances Form (ECF). You must submit your claim as soon as possible. Do not wait to submit your ECF for any reason, even if you do not yet have all your evidence. Your School will have individual deadline dates for submission of ECs in relation to exams² and other assessments.
- b. If your ECs happen on the day of an exam (whether it is campus-based or an online examination), you must submit your ECF **within 24 hours of the scheduled end time of the exam** (for example, if you have a 3-hour exam starting at 09:00 am, the scheduled end time would be 12:00pm, therefore you will have 24 hours from 12:00pm to submit your ECF).
- c. Your School or Department will publish the EC procedure in your student handbook. This will include details of the staff member you will need to submit your ECF to.

4. Evidence

- a. You will need to provide evidence with your ECF to support your claim. Evidence should be provided within five working days of submitting your ECF.
- b. In light of the continuing COVID-19 situation which arose in 2020, it is accepted that you may not be able to provide evidence of circumstances that have impacted upon your studies/assessments, whether related or unrelated to the pandemic (this should be indicated in your ECF, providing clear reasons as to why you cannot provide evidence).
- c. You are responsible for getting and submitting all evidence you want to use to support your ECF. We will not gather evidence for you to support your ECF, unless there has been a disruption in a centrally managed examination venue, such as a fire alarm (please refer to section 3.3 of the Code of Practice). If this happens, Academic Services will arrange for a group ECs submission on behalf of all students affected, together with a recommendation for an appropriate outcome. You may opt out of such a group submission or, conversely, you may submit additional information if you feel that you have been particularly affected.
- d. As a guide, we accept the following evidence.

² Exams are generally defined as assessments which are marked in a way which means that individual feedback is not prepared for students within 15 working days.



| Extenuating Circumstance | Evidence includes: |
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| You have had to self-isolate due to the COVID-19 pandemic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can obtain a self-isolation note if <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - you have symptoms of coronavirus - live with someone who has symptoms of coronavirus - are in a support bubble with someone who has symptoms of coronavirus - have been told to self-isolate by a test and trace service <p>To obtain a self-isolation note, the website link is: https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note/</p> |
| You experience a technological issue during an online assessment (see also Example 4 above) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is accepted that this may be difficult to evidence, but you should provide whatever evidence is available (e.g. screenshot) if possible. You should also contact an appropriate member of staff (e.g. invigilator) as soon as possible to explain the situation. |
| You have a serious illness or have had an accident | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter from a doctor, nurse or hospital • Must be on official, headed paper • Must be written at the time of the illness or accident • Must say you are or will be unfit to study at the time of the assessment. |
| A very close relative is seriously ill | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter from a doctor, nurse or medical professional confirming the circumstances • Letter from a doctor, nurse or relevant professional confirming the effect the circumstances are having on your ability to do the assessment • Must be on official, headed paper or have an official stamp • Must confirm the dates of the illness |
| A very close family member or friend dies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical letter explaining how your grief is affecting your ability to do the assessment • Death certificate |
| You are the victim of a crime | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police report giving the date of the crime • Must be on official, headed paper <p>We do not accept crime reference numbers alone without further information about the circumstances/impact</p> |
| You have serious family difficulties | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter from a doctor, solicitor or other professional person confirming the circumstances and dates (must be on official, headed paper) • Evidence from a doctor, nurse or relevant professional of how the problem is affecting your ability to do the assessment |
| There is a significant change to your financial circumstances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bank statements showing your current financial circumstances |



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of support from services set up to assist with students suffering financial hardship • Must be on official, headed paper. |
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e. Evidence must be:

- i. Genuine – we will reject your claim if we find that any of the evidence you submit is false, forged or has been tampered with in any way;
 - ii. Independent – we do not accept letters from relatives or friends;
 - iii. Written in English – if the evidence was written in a language other than English, you must also supply an official translated copy;
 - iv. Dated; and
 - v. On official, headed paper or have an official stamp or seal of the issuing authority.
- f. The evidence you supply does not have to be an original document. We will accept photocopied or scanned documents, but we may decide we need to see the original as well.
- g. We regularly check the evidence received to make sure it is genuine. By submitting your ECF, you are giving us permission to carry out these checks. If you submit evidence which we find is false, forged or has been tampered with in any way, we may start a disciplinary investigation and your claim will not be allowed.

5. What happens after you submit your ECF

- a. We will convene an Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP). The ECP will normally be made up of a maximum of five staff members, which will be from your School or Department.
- b. Your case will be discussed sensitively and confidentially to the ECP. This means that only the ECP will know the details of your case. Should the ECP make a recommendation to the Board of Examiners, the content of your ECF will not be discussed outside of the ECP. If you don't want the ECP to know the content of your ECF, when you submit it you can write "strictly confidential and for the attention of the Chair of the ECP only" on the envelope. This means that only the Chair will see the content and will inform the ECP that evidence has been received and, if appropriate, it is valid to support your claim.
- c. You cannot ask for your grades to be raised under any circumstances (unless there has been a miscount when marking).
- d. An ECP will recommend one of the following. Whilst you can indicate to the EC Panel (on your EC Form) which outcome you would favour most, the EC Panel may agree on a different outcome. The outcome you favour is not guaranteed to be the outcome you receive.

| Possible Outcome | What this means |
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| Allow further sit/submit opportunity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You will have another attempt at the assessment and the mark achieved will not be capped at the pass mark. |



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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Should you fail the additional attempt, you will be able to reattempt the assessment, following the usual University legislation.• The mark from the additional attempt will replace any mark that was affected by your ECs |
| Allow further re-sit/re-submit opportunity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You will have another attempt at the assessment but this mark will be capped at the pass mark.• Should you fail the assessment, you will not be able to reattempt it.• The mark from the re-sit/re-submit opportunity will replace any mark that was affected by your ECs |
| Waive late penalties | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Any penalties applied to your work for being handed in late will be removed• If the assessment was a resit, then your mark will still be capped at the pass mark.• If the total mark received after the penalties have been removed is below the pass mark, you will fail the assessment. |
| Repeat the year in full (internal) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You will need to attempt the year again, but your marks will not be capped.• Your original marks will be replaced by your repeat year marks.• Should you fail any of the assessments, you will be able to have another attempt at these.• You <u>will</u> be expected to attend teaching sessions.• As an internal student, you may incur additional fees for this year (for example, on a pro-rata basis or an additional year of tuition fees). |
| Resit the year in full (external)* | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You will need to attempt the year again and your marks will be capped at the pass mark.• Your original marks will be replaced by your resit year marks, unless you passed the original assessment.• Should you fail any of your assessments, you will not have another attempt at these.• You <u>may</u> be expected to attend teaching sessions.• As an external student, you will not normally be required to pay additional fees |
| Proceed with low credit | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You have to pass 100-credits to move to the next level of your degree. You will still need 100-credits as a minimum, but you could move to the next stage with a failed mark.• This may become an issue if you fail any other modules later in your studies. You should speak with your Personal Academic Tutor to discuss how this might impact on your studies. |



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| Marks scaling | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaling is the adjustment of marks for a group of students. • Scaling may be applied if there has been a disruption in an examination venue, e.g. a fire alarm; it is therefore not listed on the ECs form as an option for students to request. • A decision to scale marks will only be taken in discussion with Academic Services and with the agreement of the external examiner, following consideration of the impact of the disruption upon student performance. • Scaling will be applied to all students affected by a disruption rather than to individuals. • Scaling is not guaranteed as the outcome of any disruption in an examination venue; an alternative outcome may be deemed more appropriate. |
| ECs carried forward | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your circumstances will be considered when a Board of Examiners (BoE) is discussing your degree classification at the end of your studies. |
| Award Notwithstanding Regulations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This option may not be available if you are studying for a professional certificate or a body outside of the University accredits your programme. You should check with your Personal Academic Tutor before requesting this option. • You may receive a qualification or higher degree classification, if you have failed to pass the requirements but have ECs. |
| Action already taken | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have already had an extension for coursework, etc. |
| No action required | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your ECs have been rejected and no allowances will be made. |

***Please note that the decision to allow a resit of the year due to COVID-19 related issues will be taken by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Education) or their nominee**

6. Recommendations and Decision

- An ECP will be held after the deadline for your ECF but before the BoE meets. The ECP will make a recommendation about your ECs and the BoE will then make the final decision taking into account the recommendation of the ECP.
- Where the ECP takes place in January, your School/Department will confirm the outcome/recommendation to you and will advise when you can expect to receive the BoE decision (expected to be in June).
- Following the ECP in June (after the May/June assessment period) or September (after the August supplementary period), you will receive the final decision once the BoE has taken place.
- If you do not understand or are not satisfied with the outcome, you should speak to your Personal Academic Tutor. Your School/Department will also have an Extenuating Circumstance Officer (ECO) who you can contact about the outcome of your claim.



Further Examples:

Example 1: ECs relating to pandemic – not sufficiently explained or evidenced

You request ECs on the basis that you have been affected by the pandemic situation in recent weeks. You provide no explanation of the precise circumstances or the impact upon your academic performance, and they provide no supporting evidence.

Your claim **should not** be accepted as you have not demonstrated sufficient grounds for your request. You have provided no evidence, nor any explanation of why this is the case. As noted in the student guidance, it is accepted that you may not be able to provide evidence this year, but you need to provide clear reasons for this lack of evidence. Also, as in any other year, you need to provide details of your circumstances and the impact it had on your study/assessment.

Example 2: ECs unrelated to pandemic – not sufficiently explained or evidenced

You request ECs on the basis that you have been experiencing financial difficulties due to a relationship breakdown. You say that you can provide evidence in the form of online bank statements and email correspondence with Citizens Advice. However, you do not reply when asked to provide the evidence you mention, or to explain why you have been unable to provide it.

Your claim **should not** be accepted. You have not provided the evidence you say that you have despite being chased for it, nor have you explained why you are now unable to provide the evidence. As noted in the student guidance, it is accepted that you may not be able to provide evidence this year, but you need to provide clear reasons for this lack of evidence, which you have not done in this case. Also, given the nature of the evidence, its availability would not have been affected by the pandemic (unlike case below).



Example 3: **ECs unrelated to pandemic** – explained but no evidence

You request ECs on the basis that you have been unwell with migraines during the assessment period. You explain that you have not been able to provide evidence because you have been unable to obtain an online or telephone GP's appointment yet. You explain that you periodically suffer from migraines and they tend to flare up at times of stress. You confirm that you have previously been granted ECs for the same reason as you had previously been able to provide medical evidence.

Your claim **should** be accepted. Although there is no evidence, you have provided a reasonable explanation for not having been able to obtain this, and information about an ongoing medical condition (that could potentially be verified). Accepting this claim would be in the spirit of the relaxed approach adopted since summer 2020.

Example 4: **ECs relating to pandemic** – explained but minimal evidence

You request ECs on the basis that your parent has been ill with Covid-19 over the Christmas period. Due to worrying about them and looking after them while at home, you claim that your revision was disrupted and you have therefore not performed well in their January assessments. You provide a copy of an email confirming your parent's diagnosis, but it is not possible to ascertain from this what the impact has been upon you. You indicate that you cannot provide any additional evidence because your GP's surgery is experiencing delays in offering appointments and medical notes in non-urgent cases, which applies both to you and to your parent.

Your claim **should** be accepted. Although the evidence is not particularly strong, the fact that you have a copy of a diagnosis email indicates that it is likely this was sent to someone close to you, and it is likely that you have experienced delays in GP services. Accepting this claim would be in the spirit of the relaxed approach adopted since summer 2020.



Further examples where evidence has not been provided:

| ECs Claim likely to be Accepted | ECs Claim likely to be Rejected |
|---|--|
| You have not taken up residence at University, for any reason, and as result have an unfavourable working environment/poor access to technology or WiFi | You make a request and only cite being in a pandemic, without any additional information |
| You cite worsening of your general mental health (not necessarily diagnosed) as a result of the pandemic/lockdowns/lack of typical student experience | You cite issues with 'bottlenecks' in deadlines |
| Computer issues – laptop has broken/crashed. Lack of access to computer because it is shared with family members or similar. | You cite academic demands of the programme/modules |
| Caring for family members or similar , for any reason; or caring situations/responsibilities worsened by the pandemic, such as assisting with access to medical care etc. | You cite travel issues or requirements (where there is no additional reason for travel at that time) |
| Caring for small children and or home schooling – regardless of relationship to child. | Being in quarantine/isolation for COVID where there are no additional circumstances. |
| Isolation as a result of COVID-19 which results in lack of access to resources/technology. | |
| You have had to take on additional part time work/placement hours where there are additional mitigating reasons for doing so and this has impacted time to study. | |



Appendix 1 - Short Extensions to Coursework Submission Deadlines

It is not proposed that the system or process for requesting short extensions will change. As before, students should contact the appropriate member of staff (e.g. Wellbeing Officer) in their School to discuss options and implications of applying for an extension.

However, in recognition of the additional difficulties that students are likely to face in obtaining evidence for minor ailments in 2020-21 the following arrangements will apply for submission deadlines for coursework

- Students will be strongly encouraged to meet originally published deadlines. However, they will be able to submit coursework up to 5 working days after the published deadline without penalty on their work **by using the extension process**.
- Taught Programmes Teams (or equivalent) will apply the usual penalties from 5 working days after the original deadline. Students requiring extensions beyond these first 5 working days will apply in the usual way, completing the EC application form and submitting evidence.
- If students submit their work after the published deadline, their work will normally fall into the second submission 'window' for the purposes of marking turnaround. That is, markers will only begin to look at their work three weeks after the original submission deadline, from which point usual timescales for turnaround will apply.
- This extended deadline does not apply to exams.
- There may be assessments (e.g. where marking is time-critical, such as during the supplementary period) where Schools may decide that penalties must apply from the original date of submission. Where this is to apply, students will be made fully aware of this.
- Schools and Colleges will inform students of any additional details for managing this process.

Arrangements for Examinations

In this academic year, most exams have been redesigned from a traditional on-campus proctored format to an online format. In many cases, 'windows' for submission will be set to account for the range of circumstances a student might encounter. In some subjects with time-limited assessments (i.e. those with specific professional body requirements), additional arrangements are in place if a student encounters difficulties on the day of the sit. Please refer to your School for the relevant local guidance.



Appendix 2 – Assessment Adjustments flowchart

Engaging with the Extenuating Circumstances process is not the only way for a student to have a situation which has affected their assessment taken into account. The below flowchart provides some information about the different types of scenario that can impact on assessment and provides guidance about the most helpful and appropriate process in each case.

