

Extenuating Circumstances Policy

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Introduction

Purpose and Scope

1. Throughout their studies, students are required to complete and submit, or sit, a wide range of assessments. This will require students to balance their workload and use time-management skills to ensure that assessments are submitted to stated deadlines. However, Northeastern University London (the University) recognises that there may be serious adverse circumstances outside of a student's control that prevent them from completing assessments.
2. The aim of the Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Policy is to:
 - 2.1. Make clear the serious adverse factors that the University will consider as Extenuating Circumstances and the process to be followed for submission.
 - 2.2. Ensure fair and equal treatment of all students when considering Extenuating Circumstances.
3. For the purposes of this Policy, all summative assessment elements for the following programmes are included:
 - 3.1. Undergraduate degree programmes
 - 3.2. Postgraduate degree programmes
 - 3.3. Work Related Learning degree programmes
 - 3.4. Mobility programmes
 - 3.5. Degree programmes delivered by collaborative partners

Definition

4. The University defines Extenuating Circumstances as:

“serious or significant circumstances which are unforeseen and beyond a student's control and could significantly impair their academic performance in one or more assessed activities, possibly over a short period of time.”
5. Students include apprenticeship learners. This policy does not apply to Formative Assessments for apprenticeships as these are not mandatory. For End Point Assessment, considerations of an extension of any kind will be governed by the guidance and End Point Assessment Plan as published by the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education. If extensions are allowed, then learners will follow the respective EPA Plan guidance first, and/or this EC Policy if appropriate.

General Principles

6. Students are strongly encouraged to complete their assessments at the scheduled time or as close to the teaching as possible. Multiple extensions and deferrals can lead to long delays which in turn negatively impact performance and therefore are not normally permitted.
7. The University can only accommodate requests for extensions to deadlines for written assignments. Oral presentations, where possible, are deferred and assessed as soon as possible within the sitting but may be deferred to the next sitting. Examinations are deferred to the next sitting.
8. Students are encouraged to seek support from the [Student Wellbeing Coordinator](#) (SWC) and carefully consider whether it is in their best health and academic interests to submit an EC application. Learners on work related learning programmes should seek support from their designated [Success Manager](#) (SM) in the first instance.
9. Students who encounter circumstances that adversely affect their attendance or tuition for a period in excess of 21 days should discuss this with [Student Support and Development](#) (SSD). Learners on work related learning programmes should seek support from their (SM) It may be in the student's interests to take a break in studies, until such time as they have been able to resolve the circumstances in question.
10. Students with permanent or long-term conditions that impact their ability to study should contact SSD in order to receive a Learning Support Plan (LSP) which will set out the support and reasonable adjustments available to them, which may include extended deadlines. Such students will not be eligible for Extenuating Circumstances as a result of their condition unless they suffer a significant acute episode which may then fall under the criteria for Extenuating Circumstances.

The 'Fit to Study' Principle

11. The University operates a 'fit to study' approach to Extenuating Circumstances. This means that all students who submit an assessment are, by doing so, declaring themselves fit to be assessed.
12. In the event that a student submits an assessment but in retrospect believes that they were too unwell at the time to have effectively judged their fitness, they should claim through the academic appeals procedure, providing evidence to support their claim that they had extenuating circumstances but were unable to determine their fitness to study at the relevant time.

Timing of an EC Application

13. Students are expected to take responsibility for managing their own course workload and assessment deadlines. Students are also expected to take reasonable steps to manage their mental and physical wellbeing and to seek support promptly if they encounter issues. Therefore, the expectation is that students will normally be able to identify barriers/issues when they arise and will submit an EC application in advance of an assessment deadline or examination.

Confidentiality and Data Protection

14. When the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) is consulted, Registry/Business Relations Manager (BRM) will redact or non-disclose personal information that could identify the student. Registry/BRM will ensure that applications and evidence are handled confidentially, securely and in keeping with relevant Data Protection legislation.
15. The University reserves the right to escalate concerns in line with their duty of care. See [Student Confidentiality Statement](#) for additional information.
16. The University will respect the confidentiality of information supplied by a student in support of an application for Extenuating Circumstances. By submitting an Extenuating Circumstances Application Form and supporting evidence, the student agrees to the University holding their personal data for the purposes of processing an Extenuating Circumstances claim. The University will hold this data in accordance with their notifications under the General Data Protection Regulation and other Data Protection Laws and the University's records retention policies.

Ineligible Extenuating Circumstances

17. Applications must be made within the 21 days preceding the submission deadline or examination. Applications made more than 21 days in advance of the submission deadline or examination will not be considered.
18. Extenuating Circumstances do not encompass normal life challenges that individuals are expected to deal with routinely. The following incidences will not be considered as valid for submission under this Policy:
 - 18.1. Minor illnesses such as colds, sprains, etc.
 - 18.2. The downtime of University computer networks (except for extended periods of time) and problems with personal IT equipment.
 - 18.3. Loss of computer or computer data (data should be backed-up) or not having the correct software installed on device.

- 18.4. Poor work practices, e.g., unintentional submission of incorrect assessments, misreading of deadlines.
 - 18.5. Accommodation and travel problems.
 - 18.6. Personal/part-time job commitments¹.
 - 18.7. Personal holidays, social or family events.
 - 18.8. Peaks in assessment work demands.
 - 18.9. Religious festivals: these are known in advance and students should build in any associated commitments to their assessment planning for all assessments except examinations.
 - 18.10. Financial difficulties.
 - 18.11. Complaints against staff or in relation to programme delivery. These are managed through the University's [Complaints Procedure for Students](#).
 - 18.12. Students should plan their work so that they can accommodate the disruption of minor illness and fluctuations in mood and motivation.
19. A second EC application cannot be normally made for an assessment element that has already received an approved deferral or extension through the EC Policy, unless in the case of an extension, there is a new significant unforeseen circumstance.

Procedure

- 20. [Extenuating Circumstances Application Forms](#) must be completed fully, including the student's preference for a deferred assessment element or an extension.
- 21. Students must provide evidence to support their claim. Annex A provides further details of the type of evidence required based on the reason.
- 22. All applications will be considered by Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP), following the guidelines outlined in [Annex A](#).

Making an Application

- 23. Students should submit an [Extenuating Circumstances Application Form](#) and supporting evidence to the [Success Manager](#) (for work related learning programmes) or [Registry](#) (for all other programmes) within the 21

¹ Unforeseen circumstances relating to work commitments for Learners on work related learning degree apprenticeship programmes are eligible criteria for extenuating circumstances.

days preceding the submission deadline or exam date indicating their preference for either a deferred assessment element or an extension.

23.1. Deferred assessment element: a deferral is when the student is permitted to take the assessment at the next available opportunity without any additional penalty, such as a capped final mark. The next opportunity is usually during the retake period where students who have deferred their first attempt at the assessment will take it as a first attempt and not as a referred assessment retake.

23.2. Extension: an extension is when a student is permitted to submit their assessment (written assignment) normally seven days after the published deadline. This is the new deadline for submission. Any lateness of this submission will be subject to the Late Submission Penalties as defined in [AQF7: Academic Regulations, Part C: Assessment Regulations](#).

23.2.1. The date of the extension will be seven days from the original deadline for all approved EC applications submitted on or before the published deadline.

- Where a student has already submitted their EC application and is awaiting the outcome, they may submit their assessment in the two day late period when the submission window on Canvas is open. If the EC is accepted the normal late penalty will not be applied, but if the EC is rejected the penalty will remain. After the two day late window the submission portal will normally be closed, and will only be reopened for a student if their EC application for an extension is approved. At that point a student may submit a further version(s) of the assessment until the new deadline date. Students submitting the assessment prior to the deadline are declaring themselves [Fit to Study](#) and their EC application will not be considered.
- Where the timing of the next EC Panel meeting results in a student being notified that their EC has been approved on the day of the new deadline, students will be

provided with a further extension of 24 hours to the deadline to permit them a reasonable window for submission.

23.2.2. The date of the extension will be seven days from the date of the meeting of the EC Panel for approved retrospective EC applications.

24. In order to support students to progress on their programme, students have the opportunity to apply for only one deferral per assessment element. Students can request a maximum of two consecutive extensions per assessment element but only where all eligibility requirements have been met (see [Ineligible Extenuating Circumstances](#)).
25. Retrospective applications
 - 25.1. Where, for good reason, students are unable to submit their EC application before the submission deadline or examination date, they are permitted to submit an EC application with additional supporting evidence indicating the reason(s) if they were unable to submit before the deadline. This will be classed as a retrospective application and must be submitted no later than seven calendar days after the date of the submission deadline or examination date.
 - 25.2. In exceptional circumstances EC applications may be accepted for consideration more than seven days after the deadline or examination, where the student is able to provide compelling evidence that they could not have applied at an earlier point.
 - 25.3. EC Applications cannot be accepted or considered for assessments for courses once they have been reviewed by a Progress and Award Board (PAB). After a PAB students should utilise the Academic Appeals Policy to raise any extenuating circumstance which they could not have raised at an earlier point.

Evidence

26. A claim for Extenuating Circumstances must meet the University's published criteria and be accompanied by valid evidence, showing the impact of the circumstances on the student's ability to sit or complete a particular assessment (as stated in [Annex A](#)).
27. Students are encouraged to speak to the SWC/SM for advice on whether their circumstances meet the stated criteria and on how to make an effective application. Supporting evidence should clearly provide the date(s) of the circumstance and refer directly to how the extenuating

circumstances affected the student's ability to complete or sit assessments.

28. A statement from a parent/guardian/spouse/partner will not be accepted as evidence without additional, independent documentary confirmation.
29. Where a student has been receiving regular, ongoing support from SSD for a long-term mental health or medical condition and the student cannot obtain a doctor's appointment in good time, a statement can be obtained from SSD, confirming the student's engagement with the service during the relevant period, for an occurrence of an acute episode of their condition. This SSD statement will be considered acceptable evidence for the purposes of an EC application. SSD cannot provide a statement for students who are newly accessing services or who have not been in regular contact with the service.
30. The student must present all evidence in English. Where, for example, an overseas student is taken ill in their home country and corroborating evidence is provided in the language of that country, then it should be accompanied by a translation, certified officially as being accurate e.g., by a Public Notary or by a member of staff who is fluent in that language.
31. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that all supporting evidence is submitted with the application form, otherwise the application will not be reviewed by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) and can be rejected.

Extenuating Circumstances Panel

32. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) will normally meet on a weekly basis, but may meet more frequently should the Panel feel this is necessary.
33. Registry will convene the ECP meetings.
34. The ECP members will consist of:
 - 34.1. Head of Registry [Chair].
 - 34.2. A member of Registry [Secretary].
 - 34.3. One member of faculty from the Extenuating Circumstances standing ECP.
 - 34.4. For work related learner EC applications, the Director of Business and Partnership Development & Apprenticeships, or nominee.
 - 34.5. For Collaborative Partner EC applications, a member of the collaborative partner programme team.

35. The information considered by the ECP will be anonymised so as to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all students.
36. The Student Wellbeing Coordinator (SWC)/Business Relations Manager (BRM) or nominee will be present during the ECP, to provide specialist advice to the Panel should this be requested. The SWC/BRM will NOT be involved with the decision-making aspect of the ECP.
37. A decision will be based on at least two of the ECP members being in agreement with one being the faculty member.
38. Registry will provide regulatory guidance to ECP on the discharge of their functions. The ECP will make a judgment on whether the circumstances raised by the students would have impacted on their ability to undertake the assessment at the relevant time. In considering submissions, ECP decisions will be guided by:
 - 38.1. Whether the circumstances align with [Annex A](#).
 - 38.2. The adequacy of the documentary evidence provided and whether it aligns with the requirements of [Annex A](#).

Extenuating Circumstances Panel Outcomes

39. The ECP's decision will be entirely based on the evidence provided by the student. An ECP cannot endorse Extenuating Circumstances where no evidence has been submitted. Decision on an outcome can be 'pending' where exceptional events mean delay in obtaining evidence e.g., death of a family member.
40. Where they deem it necessary, the ECP may exceptionally require the student to submit further evidence. However, ECPs will not interview students as part of the decision-making process.
41. Where an ECP accepts the extenuating circumstances and associated evidence as valid, then the ECP will award a deferred assessment or an extension.
42. Where an ECP does not accept that the extenuating circumstances and/or associated evidence are valid, then the ECP will not award a deferred assessment, or an extension and the assessment and course outcome will be determined in accordance with [AQF7 Part C Assessment Regulations](#).
43. Registry/BRM will record the decision of the ECP and inform the student of the outcome. For collaborative partner students, the BRM will inform the collaborative partner programme team of the outcome, who in turn will inform their student of the outcome.
44. The decision of the ECP will be conveyed to each student at the earliest opportunity and within three days of the ECP held to consider the EC

application. Where an EC has been rejected, they will be informed about the appeal procedure.

45. If the application is approved by the ECP, the student's assessment submitted within the new extended deadline or deferral date will be marked in accordance with the normal regulations. If the request is not approved and the submission deadline is missed, the Late Penalties Policy will be implemented (see [AQF7 Part C Assessment Regulations](#)).
46. Students with approved ECs who do not submit their written assignment within the extended deadline, and have no further approved extenuating circumstances, will be deemed to have failed that assessment element and the mark recorded will be 0%.

Delegation of Authority

47. The ECP has delegated authority from the Progression and Award Board (PAB/PAB (WRL)) and ultimately from Academic Board to determine the outcome to award a deferral or an extension for all summative course assessment elements. The decisions of an ECP are reported to the relevant PAB/PAB (WRL).

Appeals

48. This section applies to student appeals against the decision of an Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP).
49. Students are expected to submit an appeal in a responsible manner. Where the University receives a frivolous or vexatious appeal, the matter will be referred under the [Disciplinary Procedure for Students](#).
50. Students may seek support from Student Support and Development (SSD) when writing an appeal. An appeal can only be lodged by the student and cannot be made by a third party, other than in circumstances where, at the time allowed for the appeal to be lodged, the student is suffering from such physical or mental incapacity as to prevent the student acting for themselves.

Procedure

51. A student may make an appeal against a decision of the ECP by completing an [Appeal Form for Students](#) and submitting it together with supporting evidence to Registry, within 14 days of the outcome of the ECP being conveyed to the student, where:
 - 51.1. There has been a significant procedural flaw or irregularity that compromised the fairness of the process.

- 51.2. New material evidence (which must be supported by explanation of why it is being submitted at this late stage).
- 51.3. There is a bias or reasonable perception of bias during the procedure.
- 51.4. An outcome, decision and/or penalty, being unreasonable or disproportionate.
- 52. The standard of proof in appeals is on the 'balance of probabilities' rather than 'beyond reasonable doubt'.
- 53. In making an appeal, the burden of proof is on the student to show that one of the matters listed above applies.
- 54. The Academic Registrar shall assess whether there are valid grounds for an appeal within seven days.
- 55. If the student making the appeal is registered on an undergraduate double degree, a designate from the Office of the Provost will be included in the appeal review.
- 56. The Academic Registrar, on the basis of evidence, may either:
 - 56.1. Uphold the appeal in which case the Academic Registrar will reconsider the case on the basis of the original EC submission and the content of the appeal. The Academic Registrar may then decide to retain or amend the decision of the ECP.
 - 56.2. Inform the student that there are no grounds for an appeal and reject it.
- 57. The decision of the Academic Registrar is final and no further appeal to the University may be permitted. The Academic Registrar will notify the student that the internal appeals procedures have been completed and will issue a Completion of Procedures (COP) letter. The letter will draw the student's attention to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, to whom any final appeal can be made.

Office of the Independent Adjudicator

- 58. At the end of the procedure, the complainant will receive a Completion of Procedures letter. At this point if the student remains dissatisfied, they have the right to refer the decision to the OIA, within 12 months of the date of the Completion of Procedures letter. Details are available [here](#).
- 59. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) is an independent body set up as a result of the Higher Education Act 2004 to run a student complaints scheme. Membership of the OIA is a requirement of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and the Office for Students.

Reporting, Monitoring, and Reviewing

60. A report with statistical information relating to Extenuating Circumstances will be presented to the Course Assessment Board (CAB/CAB WRL) on an annual basis.
61. CAB/CAB (WRL) will monitor the data and make recommendations to Academic Board as appropriate.
62. Academic Board will review the policy and procedures for their effectiveness.

Version History

| Title: Extenuating Circumstances Policy Approved by: Academic Board Location: Academic Handbook/ Policies and Procedures/ Academic Policies and Procedures | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------|--------------|----------------------------------|
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| 3.1 | October 2020 | October 2020 | Registrar | April 2024 |
| 3.0 | September 2020 | September 2020 | Registrar | April 2024 |
| | | | | |
| Referenced documents | Academic Appeals Policy and Procedures; Student Welfare Policy; Complaint Procedure for Students; Extenuating Circumstances Application Form; Appeal Review Form | | | |
| External Reference Point(s) | UK Quality Code Theme: Enabling Student Achievement; Assessment; GDPR | | | |

Annex A: Extenuating Circumstances and Valid Evidence

| Category Reference: | Valid Circumstance | Examples of Valid Supporting Evidence | Timeframes ² |
|---------------------|---|---|-------------------------|
| A | <p>Acute Health Issue/Flare Up</p> <p>A serious short-term illness or, new diagnosis of a long term illness that is likely to incapacitate the student for an extended time during the period they might have reasonably been expected to prepare for submission or for sitting an assessment. This encompasses personal injury/accident with extended impact.</p> <p>or</p> <p>A serious acute episode of a long term condition or a significant change in the treatment of a long-term condition resulting in significant side effects that are likely to incapacitate the student for an extended time.</p> | <p>An independent doctor's medical certificate relevant to the period of the claimed Extenuating Circumstances and stating that the student was unfit to study.</p> <p>A signed statement from an independent doctor in evidence of the requirement to attend hospital.</p> <p>A letter from SSD stating the student experienced health/mental health problem(s) and utilised on-going support from University services.</p> <p>A statement from a recognised independent professional relevant to the period of the claimed Extenuating Circumstances and stating that the student was unfit to study.</p> <p>Photograph of the prescription scripts or prescription boxes with the student's name and date of prescription clearly visible.</p> <p>Copy of a hospital discharge report.</p> | Maximum of 21 days. |
| B | <p>Illness of a Dependent</p> <p>Acute illness/accident affecting a dependent/close relative that</p> | <p>An independent doctor's medical certificate signed to verify the illness, or</p> | Maximum of 21 days. |

² The valid circumstance must have occurred within the 21 days preceding the submission deadline or date of examination.

| Category Reference: | Valid Circumstance | Examples of Valid Supporting Evidence | Timeframes ² |
|---------------------|---|--|--|
| | required the constant attention of the student. ³ | other medical evidence signed by an appropriate independent medical professional, together with a statement by the student, explaining why their personal attention was necessary and no other family member could be expected to provide support. | |
| C | Bereavement Death of a close relative, partner, or close friend. ⁴ | Production of a copy Death Certificate, Coroner's report, or order of service. | Maximum of 21 days. |
| D | Court Attendance Jury Service or attendance at Court or a Tribunal as a witness, defendant or plaintiff, on the date the assessment was due to be submitted or assessment sat OR impacting on the period during which the student might reasonably have been expected to prepare for submission or revise for the assessment. | Official correspondence from the Court or Tribunal confirming attendance requirement. | Maximum of 21 days. |
| E | Victim of Crime The student was the victim of a crime that was reported to the appropriate authority for investigation and the nature of the crime was such that it was likely to have prevented the timely submission of an assessment or sitting an assessment; or to have impacted adversely on the student during the period in | Copy of police/crime report. A statement from a recognised independent professional that is relevant to the period of the claimed extenuating circumstances and stating that the student was unfit to study. | Maximum of 21 days. Where future issues arise, which are linked to the original crime, e.g., court attendance, other relevant categories of this Policy |

³ A close relative is defined as someone from the student's immediate family, such as parent or sibling, or a member of the family with whom the student has lived.

⁴ This does not include pets.

| Category Reference: | Valid Circumstance | Examples of Valid Supporting Evidence | Timeframes ² |
|---------------------|--|---|-------------------------|
| | which the student might reasonably have been expected to prepare for submission or for sitting an assessment. | | should be used. |
| F | Military Reserves The student is in the military reserves (Navy/Army/Air Force) and is required to undertake annual training. | Official correspondence from the Commanding Officer stating that the commitment cannot be moved to another date. | Maximum of 21 days. |
| G | Sport or Scholastic Commitment at National/County Level The student is selected to compete at national or county level at sporting or scholastic events that require absence from the University for a period of five days or more within the 21 days prior to when the assessment is due to be submitted or on the day that an examination is timetabled. Training requirements associated with sporting or scholastic competition commitments are not deemed valid Extenuating Circumstances. | Official correspondence from the relevant sporting or scholastic competition body confirming the requirement to be available on specified dates. | Maximum of 21 days. |
| H | Apprenticeship Work Commitments | Written confirmation from Line Manager or Employer. | Maximum of 21 days. |
| I | Other Exceptional and Personal Circumstances that do not come under the categories listed. Where students believe they have experienced severe and exceptional circumstances that are not listed here but would reasonably be considered as valid Extenuating | Where the Extenuating Circumstances are considered to be valid, students will be advised by the SWC of the nature of the evidence required to support the submission. | Maximum of 21 days. |

| Category Reference: | Valid Circumstance | Examples of Valid Supporting Evidence | Timeframes ² |
|---------------------|--|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Circumstances, then they should discuss this with SWC in good time to meet any stated submission deadlines. | | |
| J | Religious Festivals Were, a significant religious festival falls on the same date as a timetabled t examination. | Advisement of a religious festival. | Day of examination. |