



**EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES
CODE OF PRACTICE**

i. Preamble

This Code of Practice applies to students undertaking Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught programmes and taught modules on Doctoral Research programmes. It explains the operation of University's exceptional circumstances process for students and staff.

Students who are studying on programmes subject to professional accreditation should refer to their course documentation or contact their School for advice regarding exceptional circumstances. This is because they may be subject to specific requirements of the relevant professional body, that are different to the rules set out in this document.

Postgraduate Research Students (PGR) who are affected by exceptional circumstances relating to anything other than a taught module should refer to the [PGR Code of Practice](#) which sets out the procedures they should follow.

Student specific guidance is also available via www.keele.ac.uk/ec. User guides on the e-Vision system can also be accessed via this link.

ii. Introduction: What is an Exceptional Circumstance?

During a period of study, students may encounter significant personal difficulties that, for a short time, affect their ability to study for or complete academic assessment(s) including examinations. These are referred to as Exceptional Circumstances and are defined as:

*'A circumstance that is **beyond your control and could not have reasonably been foreseen and acted upon that will prevent you from completing an assessment at or by the specified time or will have a significant negative effect on your performance in that assessment.***

University [Regulation B3](#) explains how exceptional circumstances are dealt with. Students who wish to have their exceptional circumstances considered must follow the rules set out in the Regulation.

To be valid, a claim for Exceptional Circumstances needs to relate to a time period relevant to the assessment in question and to have an impact on the student's preparation for the assessment. The circumstances being described would be expected to relate to a situation occurring either:

- Close to the date the assessment is due to be undertaken or submitted.
Or
- During the period when the student would reasonably be expected to be preparing for the assessment.

The circumstances should also be likely to:

- Prevent the student from completing an assessment at the specified time.
And / Or
- Have a significant negative effect on the performance of the student on the date an assessment is due to be undertaken.

iii. Grounds for an Exceptional Circumstances Claim

Circumstances that may meet the University's definition are listed below.

- i. **Acute illness or personal injury**- Sudden, acute illness or personal injury

OR

Sudden unforeseen exacerbation of a long-term or chronic condition- Sudden, acute exacerbation of long term or chronic condition, affecting the student to a greater extent than normal.
- ii. **Extended illness or injury (more than 5 calendar days)**- Extended illness or personal injury
- iii. **Illness of another person**- Sudden, acute illness, injury or exacerbation of long term/chronic condition affecting another person, that requires the close and frequent attention of the student.
- iv. **Bereavement**- Death of close member of family, partner, or close friend.
- v. **Significant domestic and/or personal problems**- Significant problems in the student's domestic or personal circumstances for a short period.
- vi. **Court attendance**- Jury Service, Attendance at Court, a Tribunal or another official meeting as a witness, defendant or plaintiff.
- vii. **Unforeseen work commitment**- **Student must be studying part-time, by distance learning or be a postgraduate student who has completed the taught element of the course and is writing up their dissertation to claim this circumstance.** The event in question must be an unanticipated, non- negotiable work commitment arising from their primary employment.
- viii. **Unforeseen representation of county or country at sport**- Student selected at short-notice to represent country or county at a sporting event requiring absence from the University.
- ix. **Active exercise of citizenship**- An unanticipated and/or non-negotiable commitment to duties associated with an elected office, membership of a voluntary organisation, or service with Reserve Forces.
- x. **Transport difficulties**- Major difficulties with public or personal transport. It should be noted that the University has separate guidance relating to [adverse weather](#) conditions which may also be relevant to a claim of this nature.
- xi. **Victim of criminal activity**- The student was the victim of a crime.
- xii. **Other** - Exceptional circumstances that do not fall under any of the criteria defined above.

The School Exceptional Circumstances Panel decide whether or not the grounds of the claim can be accepted. Claims are considered on a case by case basis.

Circumstances that do not normally meet the University's definition of exceptional circumstances include:

- Mistaking the date/time of an examination or coursework deadline
- General pressure of academic work e.g. a number of assignments with similar deadlines, as students are expected to plan their work schedule
- Employment commitments unless they are a part-time student with a full-time job
- Alarm failure on the morning of the examination
- Holidays
- Family events
- Personal computer failure as student should have taken adequate precautionary measures e.g. backups
- Leaving it to the last minute to access IT equipment/printing facilities and then finding that they are not available, unless there has been a documented systems failure.
- Non compatibility of IT equipment with University IT equipment, as it is expected that students should have planned and checked that it was possible to transfer files from their computer to the University systems well before the assessment deadlines.
- Religious observance – students should submit 'special provisions' claims to the School responsible for the assessment, or for centrally administered examinations to the Exams team as explained at the following link:
<https://www.keele.ac.uk/recordsandexams/examinations/informationforstudents/examarra ngements/religiousobservance/>

Claims for consideration of exceptional circumstances must be accompanied by evidence. The evidence requirements are set out in the next section.

Support to Study

Some circumstances may be better addressed through other university procedures, such as, Support to Study, Fitness to Study and Leave of Absence. Students are encouraged to discuss their situation with their Personal Tutor or one of the following to ensure they are fully informed of the options available to them:

Student Support Services (SAS):

<https://www.keele.ac.uk/students/student-services/>

Advice and Support at Keele (ASK):

<https://keelesu.com/advice/>

Students should bear in mind that making a claim for exceptional circumstances to defer an assessment will result in a greater number of assessments to take at the next assessment period, resulting in a greater workload. The process should be used in exceptional situations only.

Long Standing Health Conditions and Disabilities

Long standing or ongoing personal or health issues and recognised disabilities are not usually considered as exceptional circumstances unless there has been a sudden change in the student's condition that could not reasonably have been foreseen.

It is the responsibility of the student to disclose a recent diagnosis of a disability or a change in the impact of a disability that has previously been disclosed to the University at the earliest opportunity if they wish for the University to provide access to relevant advice, guidance and support. If a disability is disclosed for the first time as part of an exceptional circumstances claim, advice should be sought

by the EC Panel from the School Disability Liaison Officer or the Disability and Dyslexia team within Student Services.

Students with a chronic illness or disability are encouraged to access the support services available via the Disability and Dyslexia Support within Student Services to ensure reasonable adjustments for their specific learning requirements and examinations. Students who have reasonable adjustments agreed as part of a learning plan to support a long term condition or specific learning disability are not required to submit a claim for Exceptional Circumstances for implementation of the identified support, arrangements of this nature are agreed in advance of assessment periods via the Disability and Dyslexia Support team and the School Disability Liaison Officer.

A Student who is subject to a Learning Plan **may** need to submit a claim if there is an acute or unforeseen exacerbation of their symptoms or a change in their condition (see 3 (i)).

Claims Regarding Unforeseen Events

Events arising as a result of failure of University systems or facilities, affecting a large number of students close to the date of a scheduled assessment may in some cases be considered as an exceptional circumstance. If the event affects a significant number of students, then the University may decide to take action without the need for students to make an exceptional circumstances claim. If the University decides to take this type of action, appropriate communications will be issued to students explaining what will happen and what they need to do. Students should seek advice from their School or from Student Services if they believe they have been affected by this type of situation and are not sure what action to take.

Submitting Coursework to the Wrong Drop Box

Where a student submits coursework on time but to the wrong KLE drop box by mistake, the School will normally accept this explanation and mark the work without penalty. There is no need to submit a formal EC claim in this situation, students should liaise with their School directly.

iv. Evidence

Claims for exceptional circumstances must be supported by evidence, although, self-certification is possible for claims of Acute Illness or Injury for a duration of 5 calendar days or less.

Evidence must be from an independent source and not from a person who has a personal relationship with the student. The evidence should be on the relevant official letterhead or, if provided by email, the address of the author should be visible to ensure the origin can be determined.

All claims require a student statement detailing the nature of the circumstances and how they impacted upon the student in relation to the assessment in question.

More information on the requirements for evidence is provided below.

Table 1 – Types of Evidence

	Evidence	Notes
i	<p>Self-Certification For claims of acute illness or injury only.</p>	<p>To self-certify an eligible claim, students need to tick the 'I am self-certifying' box on the e-Vision submission screen. The student statement should state clearly the dates in question.</p>
ii	<p>Medical Evidence About the Student Only. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical Certificate or 'Fit Note' signed by the medical practitioner whilst the illness or incident was affecting the student • Other medical evidence such as certificates of attendance at surgery or hospital • A doctor's written opinion given after receiving the student's permission to release information 	<p>The evidence should relate to the student and be provided by a medical practitioner, registered with a recognised professional body.</p> <p>Medical evidence should include the following information – it may be advisable to share these points with the practitioner to ensure that they provided the relevant information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brief statement of the circumstances or incident in question • Dates and outcomes of any consultations • Dates of the affected period – which should cover the dates of the affected assessments • Information on expected recovery time, if applicable • If difficulties are chronic or likely to be persistent, information on the likelihood of future serious episodes <p>If the exceptional circumstances are to do with the illness of another person, medical information about them should not be submitted to the University. The EC panel require evidence of how that person's illness has affected the student. For example they may have seen their GP or a counsellor or may have discussed their circumstances with Student Services. They could also have provided practical assistance to the other person such as accompanying them to medical appointments and be able to provide a parking ticket or similar practical evidence. It is up to the EC Panel to determine whether the evidence provided is acceptable.</p>
iii	<p>Documentary Evidence</p>	<p>This refers to evidence that may reasonably be expected to be available in light of the circumstances of the claim, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Death Certificate (if the claim relates to bereavement). If unavailable, an Order of Service or an alternative form of evidence may be accepted, at the discretion of the EC panel. • Information from the police (if the claim relates to a crime) • Information from the court or another professional body (if the claim relates to legal proceedings or another official process)

iv	Letter of Corroboration from a Professional Person	<p>This evidence may arise as a result of an official process, as with the evidence listed above.</p> <p>It may also refer to a letter from a member of University staff if the circumstances claimed involve an issue related to a University process, for example, an administrative issue. Letters may also be provided by an employer if the circumstances claimed arise from the student's employment.</p> <p>The letter must be from an independent person who does not have a personal relationship with the student. The letter should be on the relevant official letterhead or, if provided by email, the address of the author should be visible to ensure the origin can be determined.</p>
v	Other appropriate evidence to corroborate the claim	<p>It is acknowledged that in cases of claims in the category of 'Other' the relevant evidence may not meet the categories listed above. In these cases, students are urged to seek advice from the School or Student Services on what evidence may be acceptable. The general principles that evidence should be independent and auditable still apply and the final decision as to whether or not the evidence is acceptable sits with the School EC Panel.</p>

Students should upload their evidence to the EC system electronically. However, original copies of evidence should be retained for students' own records as these **must** be made available to the University if requested.

If the evidence is not in English, students are required to provide an authenticated translation (i.e. displaying the credentials of the translator for verification) of the documentation. Untranslated evidence cannot be accepted and the University cannot arrange translation.

If the student does not wish the evidence to be digitised for reasons of confidentiality, where there is a valid reason to accept the request, a representative from the school may verify the evidence and submit a statement confirming that they have seen it and can vouch for its validity. This applies in exceptional situations only, acceptance of which is at the discretion of the EC Panel.

Concerns regarding authenticity of evidence will be investigated in accordance with the provisions of [Regulation D4](#) and the [Academic Misconduct Code of Practice](#), if the offence is proven the standard penalty applies which is termination of studies.

Self-Certification

Where illness is for a period of no more than 5 calendar days, students may self-certify their claim, provided the dates and times of illness are clearly expressed in the student statement. The 5 day limit refers to the duration of illness rather than to the length of extension that may be requested, although any extension should be proportionate to the disruption of work caused by the illness.

Where there is reason to doubt the veracity of self-certification (e.g. repeated self-certification is evident) the School EC Panel may ask the student to provide further medical evidence.

Late Evidence

If evidence is not available at the time of submission, the student is required to indicate when it will be available and the reason why it will be late. EC Panels should use their discretion to decide if the reason for the delay is valid and whether the evidence may be accepted. If the evidence is accepted the claim should proceed as usual.

The student is responsible for providing acceptable evidence and Schools cannot obtain evidence on a student's behalf. Schools are not required to chase evidence. If it has not been provided with a claim, it is the responsibility of the student to ensure they produce the relevant evidence within the required timescale or by the deadline set by the School.

The deadline for submission of late evidence is decided by the EC panel. This is normally not more than three weeks after the evidence is requested. If the student misses the evidence submission deadline, the claim will be rejected. Students who are affected by exceptional circumstances close to the end of the semester should be mindful that the timescales for them to obtain their evidence may be very short. It is important that they keep in touch with the School at this time to ensure they are aware of when the evidence must be submitted.

v. Submission of Exceptional Circumstances Claims: Process and Deadlines

Students should submit their Exceptional Circumstances claim at the earliest possible opportunity during the semester. There will be a deadline set by the School which is the latest point at which a claim may be submitted, as explained in more detail in section 5.

Types of Request

Depending on the circumstance and the form of assessment involved, students making an Exceptional Circumstances claim can make one of three requests:

- i. **Extensions:** Exceptional Circumstances affecting coursework will normally be addressed by an extension being granted. Where appropriate, an extension would normally refer to a short period, linked to the period affected by the claim. This would act to compensate the student for the time they lost due to the circumstances being described.

The maximum permitted length of an extension is 28 calendar days though a shorter period will normally be agreed. If longer than 28 calendar days is required a reassessment opportunity should be requested. If a student has requested an extension of longer than 28 calendar days and the circumstances of the claim are accepted, the EC panel may decide to agree a re-assessment opportunity instead.

The original deadline for submission of the work stands until the outcome of the extension request is received. If the request is rejected, work should be submitted on the due date. If

work is not received on the due date and no extension request has been approved then the usual consequences for late or non-submission will apply.

- ii. **Reassessment Opportunity:** If exceptional circumstances affect attendance at an assessment or require longer than the permitted length of extension, a re-assessment opportunity may be granted. The assessment will be at the same attempt as the opportunity affected by exceptional circumstances. E.g. If the assessment affected was a second attempt, the re-assessment will be a further second attempt.
- iii. **Placement Extensions:** An extension to complete a Placement may be granted where valid exceptional circumstances have prevented the student from completing it within the usual timescale.

Re-Assessment will usually take place at the next opportunity. If this is not practical due to the circumstances of the student or the timescales within the programme then a later date may be set by the School. In cases where this is agreed, the rationale for the decision must be clearly logged in the minutes of the EC Panel.

The consequences for late submission are set out in [Regulation D1](#), section 13.

Students submit their claims electronically via a guided application process on e-Vision. If a student is unable to submit their Exceptional Circumstances claim themselves (e.g. because hospitalised), members of Student Services and ASK in KeeleSU are able to complete a submission on behalf of a student. The submission will be treated as though it was submitted by the student. Claims submitted on paper forms will not be accepted.

All decisions made by School EC Panels are recorded on e-Vision, providing automatic notification to students as well as greater transparency in decision-making across Schools. Students should check their University email regularly to ensure they receive and are able to respond to communications about their claim promptly. Any queries about a claim or decision should be directed to their School in the first instance.

Keele students at partner institutions are expected to follow the same process by submitting their claims online to Keele, via the usual Exceptional Circumstances process. Management of the submissions will be via the Keele School EC Officers, with partner institutions also having access to the system for the EC Panel members to make the decisions.

Deadlines

For undergraduate students pursuing programmes that use standard university semester and examination schedules, the availability of assessments modules within the e-Vision system is linked to semester dates. Assessments become available within the exceptional circumstances system to submit claims during semester and the system closes to new claims five calendar days after the end of the semester. Following this date assessments are no longer accessible to make a claim. For Schools or programmes not following the semester schedule, Schools will develop guidance for their students confirming their local arrangements. Students who are required to undertake re-

assessment will be able to access these modules following approval of their re-assessment at the examination board.

Schools **must** set a deadline for students to submit a claim by. This deadline is not linked to the cut off for assessment availability but may not be set any later than five calendar days after the end of the semester. The deadlines for submission of Exceptional Circumstances each semester must be clearly published to students by each School. If a student misses the deadline, they may, in very exceptional circumstances submit an academic appeal. To be valid, the appeal must explain why the student was unable to meet the missed deadline. If the reason for the late claim is not valid the appeal will be rejected.

The deadline for the submission of Exceptional Circumstances is intended to provide consistency across the Schools in the time provided to the student to obtain and submit their evidence. If a student is still awaiting evidence of their Exceptional Circumstances and the deadline is approaching, they should submit a claim stating clearly that their evidence is pending and indicating an anticipated date when the evidence will be provided.

Claims Related to Completed Assessments

If a student has completed an assessment but feels that their performance may have been affected by exceptional circumstances, they may still submit a claim in the normal way. The EC Panel will consider the claim and make a decision as usual, however, if the student has attempted all components and has passed the module the claim relates to, the outcome will not be actioned and no further assessment attempt will be granted. For Undergraduate Students, the claim will be noted and may be considered should they later fall within the University's borderline criteria. More information about assessment and marks can be found in [Regulation D1](#).

Final Year Students

Finalist students who submit a claim for Exceptional Circumstances relating to their semester two modules should be aware that undertaking summer re-assessment will prevent them from graduating in the summer ceremony.

vi. Responsibilities

a) Students

- i. Students are responsible for submitting a claim for Exceptional Circumstances via the University procedure at the earliest opportunity.
- ii. Students are responsible for providing the relevant evidence in support of their claim in a timely manner and within the relevant deadline.
- iii. Students are responsible for retaining hard copies of their evidence for verification by the University if required.

b) Schools

- i. **Schools are responsible for providing students with information on the Exceptional Circumstances procedure in student handbooks and as part of course induction activities.**

Each School will ensure that the Code of Practice is drawn to the attention of students. As a minimum, the Code of Practice and information on local Exceptional Circumstances arrangements should be brought to the attention of students at the start of each student's programme as part of the induction process. A statement on the Exceptional Circumstances process, availability and sources of further guidance, details of points of contact and submission deadlines for each semester should be provided in student handbooks each year.

ii. Schools are responsible for processing claims for exceptional circumstances within a reasonable time period.

Each School will appoint a named EC Officer. This would normally be a member of the School administrative staff (for larger Schools, there may be 2 or more named EC Officers).

Each School will have an Exceptional Circumstances Panel (ECP). Normally there will be one ECP per School. Schools may choose to constitute separate Undergraduate and Postgraduate ECPs if appropriate. Schools with large numbers of programmes may also decide to constitute separate ECPs for these programmes.

Membership of the ECP will be determined by the Head of School and will normally consist of three to five academic staff (the precise numbers and membership of the Panel should be determined by Schools). There should be some continuity of membership of the ECP from year to year wherever possible. It is suggested that a minimum term of three years may be advisable to ensure consistency in decision making and that membership changes should be staggered. Guidance for panel members to support them in their decision making and to encourage consistency in the operation of panels across the University is provided later in this document. Guidance on specific cases or the application of the Code of Practice may be sought from either the Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Team or the Governance team within Student and Academic Services.

The EC Officer will allocate Exceptional Circumstances claims to members of the EC Panel within the School as determined by the School processes.

EC Panel meetings will be held before discipline examination boards in the Schools and after the deadline for the submission of EC claims. This is to enable recommendations on Exceptional Circumstances claims to be made to discipline examination boards. For undergraduate programmes using the standard semester schedule, Examination Board meeting dates are centrally coordinated. For postgraduate programmes, or programmes not following the standard schedule, meetings will be organised to suit the requirements of the School/programme.

iii. The School Exceptional Circumstances Panel is responsible for considering student claims and making decisions on whether any action should be taken as a result.

Cases will be discussed with the utmost sensitivity and the details are confidential to the EC Panel. Members of the ECP must not discuss cases outside the meeting, unless there is a need, for the purposes of processing the claim, to consult an ECP in another School, within which the confidentiality will still be preserved, or if the claim becomes part of a broader disciplinary investigation in the case of vexatious Exceptional Circumstances submissions. The EC panel may also consult Student Services due to concerns regarding the welfare of the student, or if there is a Safeguarding concern.

Decisions should be made by the Panel and communicated to the EC Officer for uploading onto e-Vision as soon as possible after the decision has been made. The decisions are ratified by the Examination Board.

Minutes must be taken at the ECP. The minutes must not include detailed discussions of individual cases or student names but must include a clear rationale for the decision that has been made and entered onto the e-Vision system.

Schools must ensure that discussions regarding requests for consideration of Exceptional Circumstances take place at the ECP only, and not at the Board of Examiners. Boards of Examiners should only be informed of the ECP's recommendations relating to each student and not be reconsidering the details of individual student cases. However it is for the Examination Boards to determine the reassessment format and the date of any reassessment.

Documentation from the ECP, together with their decisions, should be made available for scrutiny by one or more of the External Examiners and the Exceptional Circumstances Sub-Committee (ECSC) which has an overarching quality assurance function.

A representative from the ECP should be present at the discipline examination board.

iv. The Exceptional Circumstances Sub-Committee has an overarching quality assurance function and will meet three times a year to review the outcomes of the School ECPs and to report to Senate on the operation of the Exceptional Circumstances system.

Membership comprises 3 senior academic staff (one from each Faculty, appointed by the Dean), the Chair, who should be a senior academic, nominated by the Vice-Chancellor, and the Director of SAS or their nominee. There should be some continuity of membership of the ECSC from year to year where possible. It is suggested that a minimum term of three years may be advisable to ensure consistency.

The ECSC should be scheduled to convene after the ECPs have met. The dates will be coordinated centrally by the Governance team.

Minutes will be taken at the ECSC. The ECSC will report to Education Committee.

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