

To: SCA Members, Chairs of Boards of Examiners, Chairs of Boards of Studies; Chairs of Exceptional Circumstances Committees, Assessment Administrators and Student Service Managers

Cc - DHoFOs

The Standing Committee on Assessment has reviewed and changed elements of the Exceptional Circumstances policy and processes (including self-certification) for implementation this coming academic year. This is one part of work that will continue into the academic year 2023/4 for implementation in 2024/5. We will particularly be reviewing the process more fully. We will be in touch about this in the course of the next academic year.

The changes for 2023/24 are intended to reduce the complexity of cases and continue the practice of allowing decisions to be delegated out of EC committees. We have also sought to reduce some of the technicality and restrictiveness of the current policy so that it supports students better at the same time as putting fewer burdens on those administering these processes. We are also formally incorporating (and clarifying and refining) adaptations we made during this year. Central to these changes is a principle of proportionality that schools and departments should adopt in implementing all aspects of the EC policy.

I have set out the changes a bit more fully below (and the revised EC policy will follow later this month). They are:

- We are encouraging schools/departments to **delegate the making of EC decisions** to allow them to be made more efficiently. Most aspects of EC claims do not require academic judgement and many simpler decisions do not require consideration by a committee. Use of a committee does not support students effectively in most cases, places extra burdens on processes and is not consistent with guidance from the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#). We are therefore encouraging all EC committees to consider what decisions can be delegated to individual (or smaller groups of) PSS or academic colleagues and what sorts of decisions or types of adjustments you wish to retain at committee level.
- We have **revised the definition and scope of some EC claims** (e.g. medical circumstances, bereavement) and updated others to reflect the current post-Covid context (i.e. to remove adjustments that were lockdown specific but to reflect that some effects may be ongoing for some students).
- We have reviewed the general principles about using evidence to determine EC claims and adjustments. A principle of **proportionality** should be adopted: the more that is requested, the more proof there should be. Requirements in the policy for 'professional evidence' will be replaced by a principle that **evidence should be 'independent, objective and reasonably contemporaneous'**.
- **Deadlines for resolving claims and receiving evidence will be relaxed** (e.g. removal of three week requirements) and modified to fit within the semester structure. We want to reduce pressure on students to secure evidence while still ensuring that claims can be resolved in good time ahead of necessary deadlines (e.g. module boards).

- We are **retaining the current policy on three uses of self certification** per academic year. We hope that the adjustments above and below mean that the updated exceptional circumstances policy (alongside reviews in Disability Services around SSPs) means that students are sufficiently well supported for us not to need to increase the number of uses.
- We are going to incorporate into the EC policy some adjustments we made this year to ensure the current three-uses self certification policy is fairer and meets key needs:
 - We will incorporate the system of **letters for certain groups of 'vulnerable' students** to support requests for additional short extensions and deferrals for assessment. We will review exactly how this works and incorporate it into the EC policy.
 - We are also going to retain the **'bunched assessment' provision** we put in place this year so that students can use the EC process to see self-certification adjustments for any assessment within 72 hours of an assessment for which they self-certify. This will also be written into the EC policy.
 - We are also going to add a provision that will allow students a **'refund' of unnecessary self-certification use** (i.e. where the SC claim could have constituted a valid exceptional circumstances claim and there were good reasons for the student having made a self-certification claim instead, they may use the EC process to request an additional short extension or deferral of a later assessment to compensate for the 'wasted' use of self certification) .
- We will **review the EC form** to ensure that it enables decisions to be made more quickly and that information that departments need in order to make appropriate decisions to support their students are captured;
- We have retained the principle that evidence should be in English but have developed a process by which **translations of evidence might be obtained more simply**.
- We are going to clarify the provisions in the policy around the **confidentiality** of use of EC processes to ensure that information about the fact of EC claims and adjustments (but not the details about the claims themselves) can be more widely shared in schools and departments in order to support student welfare more effectively.

We have been mindful of the increased pressure on students and on departments as a result of semesterised assessment periods. As I am sure you can recognise, this is not an easy task: we have tried to get the balance right but will certainly be looking to review this year's developments as part of the ongoing review.