

## Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For forms and student guidance related to exceptional circumstances, contact department administrators or Student Support Services.

## EC1. Exceptional Circumstances

### EC1.1 Preface and Principles

If a student's performance in, or completion of, summative assessment has been seriously impaired by medical or other unforeseen exceptional adverse circumstances, then this may be taken into account under this policy. No allowance can be made, within this process, for circumstances affecting attendance or other work during the module, except where the assessment itself is closely linked with the attendance.<sup>25</sup> Departments can approve authorised leave for students whose circumstances are affecting them for up to 28 days. In these cases, the student is expected to catch up on the missed material in time for the assessments unless the timing of the circumstances coincides with the assessment itself. For more long-standing conditions<sup>26</sup> and circumstances the student will be expected to have made full use of the appropriate support services provided by the University (e.g. Disability Services) in order to have relevant adjustments made, and/or to develop coping strategies which will see them through their study. Where necessary, students with conditions or circumstances which cannot be resolved or accommodated within a programme of study may need to consider temporary leave of absence from the programme of study in order to allow them to re-engage when they are better able to benefit from the programme.

Circumstances acceptable under this policy must be exceptional (i.e. serious and unusual) relative to the normal daily challenges that academic study presents, and unpredictable in that the student could not reasonably have been expected either to avoid them, or to allow for them in planning the assessment work or preparation. For example, *It is recognised that the assessment process itself can cause students to be more anxious or stressed than at other times of the academic year, and this should be considered to be one of the normal challenges that academic study presents. Except in a very small number of cases, where the impact is serious and incapacitating, this would not be considered as a valid exceptional circumstance.*

The aim of the exceptional circumstances process is to ensure that fairness and academic standards are maintained for all our students who endeavour to manage the challenges

<sup>25</sup> Because this policy applies only to assessment of taught material (including ISMs on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes), it is unlikely to apply to most research degree programmes. It does, however, apply to any taught modules, including those which are included in primarily research-based programmes.

<sup>26</sup> The definition of a disability is a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on a person's ability to do normal daily activities. Long term is defined as lasting one year or more or likely to last one year or more. 'Normal daily activities' includes mobility, manual dexterity, lifting, hearing, eyesight, speech, memory, and the ability to concentrate, learn or understand. It includes, but is not limited to, physical and cognitive impairments and long-standing or recurrent mental ill-health.

inherent in academic study. It is imperative that only exceptional circumstances are accepted.

The University offers a range of student support services and opportunities to enable students to manage the challenges and demands<sup>27</sup> of academic study. The various support services are accessible to all students and do not require referral. It is therefore important that students understand that using support is not a sign of weakness, rather it is a feature of academic success for some students to access the support services in order to identify and develop successful strategies. It is an expectation of the University that students will access the relevant services if they require them, sometimes signposted by their college, their supervisor or other members of the academic community.

Please note, there is no provision for adjusting a student's assessment mark or (other than in some specific situations) degree class.<sup>28</sup>

## EC2 What Qualifies as exceptional circumstances?

### EC2.1 Table: What qualifies as exceptional circumstances?

Circumstances	Notes
Exceptional Medical Circumstances	E.g. hospitalisation, or incapacitation through injury, illness, or mental health crisis.
Close bereavement	The following relatives are accepted as 'close': partner, child, parent, sibling, grandparent, and grandchild. Housemates or very close friends may also be considered as 'close', though evidence of the relationship may be required.
Victim of a serious crime	
Disabilities for which reasonable adjustments are not yet in place and where the delay is not due to the student	
Exceptional and unforeseeable transport difficulties	E.g. major transport incidents, cancelled flights. This does not include every-day issues e.g. traffic congestion, missed buses or trains.
Interviews for work-placements or for	

<sup>27</sup> These may include financial, emotional, mental health or disability related issues or may result from difficulties in terms of housing, visa application or other difficulties that are not unusual for some students.

<sup>28</sup> See [section EC.9](#).

employment which cannot be changed	
Legal proceedings requiring attendance	
Exceptional Personal Circumstances	E.g. events that result in a serious impact on a student's ability to engage with academic work during the assessment period in question.

**Please note** that the ECA Committee is empowered to make recommendations to Special Cases Committee in relation to Exceptional circumstances which it wishes to accept but which are not covered above. It cannot approve such claims unilaterally.

***EC2.2 The following never qualify as exceptional circumstances:***

1. Loss of work not backed up, computer or printing problems
2. Accidental submission of an incorrect document (e.g. an assignment from another module or an incomplete earlier draft of the assignment)
3. In the event of electronic submission, the following will not be accepted as exceptional circumstances:
  - a. the student submits the wrong file type or a corrupted file;
  - b. the student begins their upload after the deadline has passed;
  - c. a claim of technical issues on behalf of the University with no proof of an error message/ system failure on either the VLE or the University network.
4. Misreading of the examination timetable or instructions on assessment deadlines
5. English not being a first language
6. Deadlines for work or exams being set close together

***EC2.3 The following are not normally regarded as exceptional<sup>29</sup>:***

1. Weddings
2. Constraints arising from paid employment (FT students)<sup>30</sup>
3. Holidays
4. Relationship breakdown<sup>31</sup>
5. Moving house
6. Disabilities for which reasonable adjustments have been made
7. Financial difficulties
8. Planned health appointments

<sup>29</sup> The circumstances outlined in this section may only be regarded as exceptional where there is evidence not only that they occurred (or are due to occur) but that this occurrence was unforeseeable/unavoidable, and there is evidence of the impact of this on the student's assessment.

<sup>30</sup> Part-time students and students on Apprenticeship programmes may apply for Exceptional Circumstances on the grounds of 'exceptional circumstances arising from employment', but the student would need to show evidence of an unusual and unpredictable level of impact of work. The fact of a part-time student's employment is not, in itself, exceptional.

<sup>31</sup> Exceptions can be made for divorce or relationship breakdowns of an equivalent scale. Evidence would need to be provided of the duration of the relationship, and the impact on the student.

9. For an electronic submission of an assessment, a delay of up to 30 minutes between starting and completing the file upload process<sup>32</sup>

**EC2.4 Evidence**

i. Each application must be accompanied by satisfactory supporting evidence, normally from an independent and relevantly-qualified third party professional. The evidence must give direct confirmation of the circumstances, from which it is possible to infer their effect on the student’s ability to engage with work in general, or assessment tasks in particular, made at the time of those circumstances or as soon as possible thereafter.

ii. Evidence must be provided in English or, where the original evidence is in a different language, with a translation by an independent professional third party into English. Translations by students will not be accepted.

iii. The evidence needs to indicate the period of disruption, including the duration of the impact. A doctor, for example, may be willing to report a retrospective account given to them by the student after the event, but in itself this does not carry weight as evidence if the doctor simply notes that a student reports the impact.

iv. Similarly, the University’s Open Door Team is only able to provide the type of evidence required when a student has used, or is currently using, the services provided by the team to *address* the circumstances.

v. In the event that the professional concerned did not see the student at the time of the assessment but believes that their condition would have prevented them from engaging not only with assessment, but also with professional support services, a claim can still be considered. The professional’s evidence in such a case would need to explain the extent to which the circumstances would have prevented engagement with professional services.

vi. Students who are too ill, or suspect themselves to be too contagious, to attend a doctor’s surgery or other support service at the time of their assessments should engage with telephone or online services, or contact Student Support Services about telephone or email consultations.

<b>Circumstance</b>	<b>Examples of evidence that would support a claim</b>
Exceptional Medical Circumstances	A letter from a doctor, nurse or other health professional confirming the exceptional and unforeseen nature of the exceptional circumstance and the impact on the student. Health professionals must be registered with an appropriate accrediting body, and though evidence of such accreditation will not be required in the first instance, it may be requested should the ECA

<sup>32</sup> Thus a submission which was started less than 30 minutes before the deadline but which did not complete until after the deadline would not qualify as exceptional, unless there was evidence that a major technical issue had occurred. Students are therefore advised to allow at least 30 minutes for the upload process.

	Committee determine that it is necessary. Any submission that notes <b>only</b> that ‘the student reports that...’ is not acceptable, as it is not independent third party evidence of either the circumstances or the impact on the student.
Close bereavement	A death certificate, an obituary or confirmation from an independent relevant professional e.g. a solicitor or an undertaker or an order of service from the funeral ceremony. Where not a relative, the ECA Committee should see evidence of closeness of the relationship in the form of a statement from a third party or a tenancy agreement (in the case of a housemate). The evidence must show that the death had an impact on the student, not just that the person who died was close to the student. If the student is severely affected by the death of someone not considered as ‘close’ under this policy, they would need to have evidence from an independent third party of the serious impact on them.
Victim of a serious crime	Documentation from the police indicating that the student has reported a crime <b>and the nature of the crime; an insurance claim, or medical report. A letter from a relevantly qualified professional outlining the circumstances and the impact on the student.</b>

Disabilities for which reasonable adjustments are not yet in place and where the delay is not due to the student	A letter from Disability Services.
Exceptional and unforeseeable transport difficulties	Evidence of a major transportation incident, or a letter from the relevant transport company confirming the nature of the delay. Evidence will also be required that the circumstances described affected the student in question.
Interviews for placements or for employment which cannot be changed	Evidence showing that the interview date cannot be rearranged.
Legal proceedings requiring attendance	A letter from a solicitor or a court.
Exceptional Personal	A letter from a student support practitioner, counsellor, religious

Circumstances impact on the student's ability to engage in assessment activities.	Leader, member of College staff or other professional third party directly confirming that, in their professional opinion, the circumstances have had a serious impact on the student's ability to engage in assessment activities.
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**EC2.5 Reasons for non-acceptance of exceptional circumstances**

The following examples are indicative but not exhaustive.

- i. The student has not submitted the claim within seven days of the assessment, and has not provided or evidenced good reason for failing to do so.
- ii. The full information required by the exceptional circumstances form is incomplete. If claims are incomplete, the department will prompt the student for the necessary documents before any decision to reject the claim is made.
- iii. No independent documentary evidence has been supplied to support the request (letters from family, fellow students or academic supervisors are not normally sufficient on their own but may be submitted in addition to independent third party evidence).
- iv. The timing of the circumstances cited would not have adversely affected the assessment(s).
- v. The nature of the circumstances cited is not over and above the normal difficulties experienced in life.
- vi. Sufficient adjustment has already been made for the same circumstances; the evidence has already been used to support adjustment for the same assessment and no new evidence has been provided.
- vii. The circumstances in question relate to a disability for which reasonable adjustments have been made but which the student has not engaged with to a reasonable extent. For example where mentoring or specialist tuition is provided and agreed but the student decides not to attend.
- viii. The claim is submitted after the assessment marks have been ratified by the Board of Examiners. Claims submitted after ratification cannot be considered by an ECA Committee. Such claims must be considered as formal University appeals.

**EC3 Applications for ECA Committee consideration**

A student who wishes exceptional circumstances to be considered must apply to the ECA Committee associated with their Board of Studies, by submitting the completed University claim form and by providing the required evidence.

Claims must be received no later than one calendar week after the deadline for the assessment or date of the examination. An application for an extension to a submission deadline should normally be received at least two working days before that deadline, to allow time for consideration in advance of the deadline.

Claims can be submitted in advance of evidence becoming available - if a student is unable to provide evidence within 7 days of the assessment deadline, they should submit the claim and note the expected date of evidence provision. Evidence must be submitted as soon as possible and in any event no later than either:

- a) Three weeks after the assessment deadline or;
- b) The date of the Board of Examiners meeting at which marks for the assessment will be ratified (whichever is earlier.)

In the event that a student submits a claim more than seven days after the affected assessment, and/or misses the advertised departmental deadline for the submission of any claims, but submits an evidenced claim before the ratification of the marks by the Board of Examiners, the claim can still be considered, but the ECA Committee must apply the additional test of whether the student had 'good reason' for not submitting the claim in good time prior to considering the claim itself. If the student cannot provide independent evidence of a 'good reason' that they could not have claimed in good time, the claim may be rejected regardless of the strength of the claim.

## EC4 Outcomes

### *EC4.1 Outcomes available in response to Exceptional Circumstances*

The following outcomes are available in response to an accepted ECA claim. The assessment may or may not have been taken/failed outright.

- i. The opportunity to take or submit the assessment 'as if for the first time', during the August resit week (for undergraduates), or at another appropriate time. If the assessment is set for a time other than resit week, the ECA Committee would be expected to take into account the additional workload for the student and the need to advise the student accordingly.
- ii. An extension to the deadline for an assessment. In the case of finalists, permission to complete the assessment after the scheduled end of the programme will result in a postponement of graduation which may require permission from the Special Cases Committee.
- iii. The opportunity to take 'as if for the first time' a different form of assessment than the original assessment. (Alternative assessments cannot be an assessment in a format that the

student has never before encountered). This will usually be for practical reasons, e.g. so that the assessment can take place in time for the next stage of the programme. Unlike resit attempts, students granted sits as if for the first time need not be given a set notice period prior to the new assessment attempt (5 weeks for UG, 3 weeks for PGT), as it is not expected that the student will require additional preparation time in order to improve their results. Students should, however, be given a reasonable amount of time to complete the assessment task at hand.

iv. Additional work to complete the original learning outcomes of the module, e.g. where practical work has been only partially completed.

v. Recommendations to Special Cases Committee for the award of a taught aegrotat degree where the conditions of the policy on aegrotat degrees are met<sup>33</sup>.

vi. If a single module mark is created from a number of marks from assessments testing the same learning outcomes, the following rule may apply. The ECA Committee can, in order to produce a module mark, recommend to the Board of Studies waiving no more than 20% of the overall module mark. This is permitted only where the learning outcomes for the module have been measured by the remaining assessments for that module. Where the various elements of a module are intended to test different learning outcomes, such waiving of marks is not permissible. This procedure may be followed for up to a maximum of 40 credits per stage, provided that the learning outcomes for the module(s) have been achieved.

vii. A revised submission (referral) of work already submitted may be permitted. Where this is allowed, ECACs should apply due consideration to ensuring the student is not unduly advantaged.

viii. If an ECA claim is accepted on assessments at the end of a stage, but the student has met the necessary progression requirements using the affected attempts, the ECA Committee may allow a student to sit the assessments as if for the first time at the next available opportunity whilst pursuing the next stage. This is permitted in a maximum of 40 credits in a given stage. In this case only, the student will retain the better of the affected mark and the 'sit as if for the first time' mark for the sake of progression and award.

The following are never permitted:

- substitution of marks;
- changing of marks;
- repeating tuition from a previous stage once the next stage has been commenced.

<sup>33</sup> See Section EC.10.

**EC4.2 Sits 'as if for the first time'**

When a student is offered the opportunity for a sit 'as if for the first time', the student is permitted to *decline* that opportunity, and in such cases the original affected mark will stand. Students will not be able to choose between marks gained at the first and second attempt, and the original mark will become void when the second attempt takes place. Failure to attend or submit 'as if for the first time' will be treated as declining the opportunity to do so. Students will be made aware of their original mark, if available, at the time of being offered a 'sit as if for the first time' as an outcome of submission of exceptional circumstances. Departments should set a date at the end of the stage by which students must inform them of their decision to accept or decline the sit(s) 'as if for the first time'. This will be a different deadline for finalists in order to allow award results to be processed in time for graduation. In order to make an informed decision about which sits 'as if for the first time' to take, the student should have access to all of their marks for the stage.

## **EC5 Composition of the Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment (ECA) Committee**

i. Exceptional Circumstances claims must be considered by an Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment (ECA) Committee which must be a sub-committee of the Board of Studies. This includes consideration of exceptional circumstances arising during an assessment. There is to be at least one ECA Committee for each Board of Studies covering all programmes within the remit of that Board of Studies. Combined programmes will be covered by the Board of Studies of the Department in which the Programme Leader is based but can be overseen by a separate ECA Committee at the discretion of the Board of Studies.

ii. *Membership of ECA Committee*

An ECA Committee must consist of five members of academic staff selected by, but not including, the Chair of the Board of Studies in consultation with the Head of Department. The quorum for meetings of the ECA Committee is three, and an ECA Committee meeting must not take place unless it is quorate. The term of office for members of the ECA Committee should normally be three years (renewable).

iii. *Combined-subject membership of ECA Committee*

It is not necessary for Programme Leaders of combined programmes to be on an ECAC or to be routinely consulted. They should be consulted/involved as required.

iv. *Chair and administrator of ECA Committee*

The Chair of the Board of Studies /Chair of the Combined Board of Studies in consultation with the Head(s) of Department should appoint a fixed Chair of the ECA Committee from its

members. ECA Committee meetings should be serviced by an administrator, and all decisions must be recorded.

v. Students are not permitted to attend the ECA Committee meetings.

vi. *Conflict of interest*

In cases where a formal complaint has been lodged against a member of the ECA Committee by a student making a claim of Exceptional circumstances, or there is an evidenced conflict of interests for a member of the ECA Committee, that member should exclude themselves from consideration of the relevant case(s). If, as a result of such exclusions, the ECA Committee has insufficient members to conduct its business, then the Chair of the ECA Committee may propose to the Standing Committee on Assessment that alternative members should be co-opted.

vii. Decisions may be made either at a face-to-face meeting, or virtually (via email, or other suitable medium), but in either case, at least three members of the Committee must be involved in any decision and adequate records kept of the decisions.

viii. In the event that an ECA Committee cannot come to an agreement about whether or not to grant an ECA claim, the benefit of the doubt will be given to the student and the claim should be accepted.

## EC6 Guidance for ECA Committees

ECA Committees will be guided, in their decisions, by the principles outlined in sections EC2-3 above. If Exceptional circumstances are identified, one of the remedies in section EC4 will be applied.

The following will apply in relation to ECA claims:

i. Where assessments are affected by exceptional circumstances the normal time-scale for completion of the programme should be adhered to as far as possible.

ii. Exceptional circumstances must be considered and any action decided and applied before the end of the stage of the programme during which they occur.

iii. Consideration of exceptional circumstances should take place at least every two to four weeks where any claims have been made. As far as possible, approval of arrangements to alter the deadline for completion of module assessment (whether coursework submission or formal examination) must be made in advance of the deadline.

iv. Exceptional circumstances claims submitted against open assessments at least 72 hours prior to the original deadline must be considered in time for the student to make the original deadline in the event that their claim is denied. Students submitting extension requests should be advised to work to the original deadline unless/until they have received notification of the acceptance of their claim.

- v. External Examiners must not be involved in the exceptional circumstances procedure.
- vi. It is expected that most re-assessments and attempts 'as if for the first time' will be taken or will have a hand-in date during the resit week in August<sup>34</sup>. Marking of assessments will be completed by the end of August each year.
- vii. Where a student is taking an assessment 'as if for the first time' the new mark will stand. The original mark cannot be used except with the approval of Special Cases Committee on a case-by-case basis. Such approval is expected to be very exceptional. For example, this may be considered where the 'sit as if for the first time' is, in itself, affected by accepted exceptional circumstances, and the original attempt, but not the 'sit as if for the first time', meets the progression requirements.
- viii. Where the sit 'as if for the first time' is itself separately damaged for a continuing student with no more than 40 credits of affected modules, and the marks in the affected modules would otherwise allow progression to the following stage, the student can be allowed to progress to the following stage. The 'sit as if for the first time' can be completed in the subsequent year, and the student's 'best attempt' will be used.
- ix. Consideration of exceptional circumstances must always take place prior to consideration of the assessment result by the Board of Examiners/Board of Studies.
- x. If the ECA committee has been notified of exceptional circumstances at the appropriate time but the evidence has not been supplied, it may make a provisional decision if the following conditions are met:
  - a. The student has stated the nature of the evidence;
  - b. The student has stated why it is not currently available and the ECA Committee accepts the reason(s);
  - c. The student has stated when the evidence will be available;
  - d. The student is informed that if the evidence submitted does not meet the required standard, the provisional decision will be rescinded.
  - e. The student is advised that they may complete the assessment at the standard time in order to ensure that they are not unduly penalised in the event that their claim is not ultimately upheld.

*Example: A student has an accident close to the time of assessment and medical evidence has been requested but not supplied by the doctor in time for ECA Committee consideration.*

**A deadline for appropriate evidence in such cases should be set at no more than 3 weeks after the submission of the original claim. In the event that the evidence is not provided by this date, the provisional acceptance must be rescinded.**

- xi. When an ECA claim is submitted after the ratification of the assessment marks in

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<sup>34</sup> This will vary for certain programmes, such York Online programmes, but exceptions will be outlined in programme handbooks.

question, and when the conditions relating to evidence are not met, or if the claim has been submitted beyond the seven-day deadline for submission of a claim and the ECA Committee does not consider that there is good reason for this, the ECA claim cannot be accepted and the student must follow the procedure for academic appeals through Special Cases Committee if they wish to have their circumstances considered. In such cases, the ECA Committee should notify the student that their claim has not been upheld, the reason for this, and that the student has the right to appeal to Special Cases Committee.

*xii. Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment and Academic Misconduct Policy*  
Circumstances which might be acceptable as exceptional under this policy will not necessarily be acceptable as a defence against the award of penalties in relation to academic misconduct. For the treatment of exceptional circumstances with respect to academic misconduct, please refer to the Academic Misconduct Policy.

*xiii. Exceptional Circumstances Policy and Equality*

The Policy should be applied in accordance with the University's equality policies, which are located at [www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/policies/index.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/eo/policies/index.htm)

## **EC7 Procedure for the consideration of exceptional circumstances**

### *i. Deadlines for submission of exceptional circumstances*

The deadline for exceptional circumstances claims will be seven days after the affected assessment. Any claim submitted late without good reason should not be considered, and the student should be informed of their right to appeal to the Special Cases Committee within 28 days.

When students are incapacitated they must complete the University's Exceptional Circumstances Claim Form within a week of the normal deadline for completion of the assessment, although they may be accepted later where the claim form is accompanied by compelling evidence detailing good reasons for late submission. Claims of exceptional circumstances must not be considered at the ECA Committee level without completion of the form and provision of supporting evidence. Third party applications for consideration of exceptional circumstances should not be accepted unless it can be shown that the student lacks capacity.

Exceptional circumstances claims submitted during the period of an open assessment with appropriate evidence should be considered before the deadline for the assessment. In such a case, the Chair and one other member may make a decision.

### *ii. Timing of meetings*

The (Combined) ECA Committee must consider all outstanding cases at the conclusion of each Common Assessment Period, and more frequently when required. The meeting must be

held in sufficient time to allow its recommendations to be input into the student record system (SITS), that is, at least three working days prior to any relevant Board of Examiners meeting in order that these recommendations may appear on the relevant reports.

### iii. *Confidentiality*

Consideration of exceptional circumstances cannot be anonymous but should, however, remain confidential i.e. shared with relevant members of the committee on a need to know basis. Students cannot share information pertaining to exceptional circumstances but demand that it not be shared in consideration. Discussions and decisions should not normally be disclosed outside the ECA Committee and the recording of decisions. Students should be encouraged to discuss their circumstances with their supervisor, but circumstances should not be disclosed by the ECA Committee. It should be noted, however, that in cases where a student makes an appeal against a decision of the ECA Committee, the documentation may need to be seen by the Chair of the Board of Studies (and relevant professional support staff) for comment if requested by the Special Cases Committee in its investigation of an appeal. In addition, the Chair of Board of Studies (and relevant professional support staff) may need to see the documentation if a recommendation needs to be made to the Special Cases Committee (for example, for a programme extension). Members of the Special Cases Committee and the Special Cases team may also need to see exceptional circumstances claims and evidence, to consider appeals, advise ECA Committees and consider recommendations from ECA Committees.

iv. Where the student is offered an attempt 'as if for the first time', the options which will be available if that attempt is failed must be explained to the student before the attempt takes place. Where a student fails an assessment taken 'as if for the first time' during the August resit week, or where the assessment is itself affected by exceptional circumstances, a leave of absence may be needed to accommodate any further assessment (or re-assessment).

v. The student must be informed in writing of the decision within three working days of a decision being made, including explicit reference to their right to appeal to Special Cases Committee within 28 days of the formal notification if they are dissatisfied with the decision and signposted to where they can access independent advice and support from YUSU/ GSA. Where a claim is rejected or partially rejected, reasons must be given for the decision, in sufficient detail for students to make an informed academic appeal if they wish. Notification of the decision from a University email address to the student's University email address is acceptable.

vi. When the procedure has been completed, the Exceptional Circumstances Claim Form and supporting evidence should be retained on the student's departmental file in a sealed envelope or in a password protected electronic file. This should state that the information contained can only be accessed by a member of the ECA Committee or the Chair of the Board of Studies in the event that Special Cases Committee, or a member of the University investigating a complaint, request their comment as part of an appeal/complaint being investigated, or if the Board of Studies is required to make a recommendation to Special Cases Committee on behalf of the ECA Committee.

vii. The student record system (SITS) should be updated with all decisions as soon as possible and, in any case, within a week of each formal meeting.

viii. Where exceptional circumstances are claimed against a module delivered outside of a

student's home department(s) (including where modules are delivered by a partner department on a combined programme), students may be offered extensions or sits as if for the first time at the next available opportunity. Any additional or alternative assessments can only be offered with the agreement of the host department, and where pedagogic and practical concerns make them practicable.

ix. Any requests for consideration of exceptional circumstances which fall outside this procedure should be submitted to Special Cases Committee for consideration.

## EC8 Students with Disabilities

Students with physical or mental impairments that have a substantial and long-term negative impact on their ability to study should seek support and reasonable adjustments to assessment through Disability Services. Support and reasonable adjustments, including variable adjustments such as extensions for fluctuating conditions, should be approved as part of a Student Support Plan, and should not be accommodated using the Exceptional Circumstances Policy.

Students with disabilities can claim exceptional circumstances where adjustments have not been made in time for an assessment, so long as the delay in the implementation of the adjustments was not caused by the student. Consideration of disability as an exceptional circumstance may also be appropriate where evidence is provided that an abnormal or unforeseeable temporary change or increase in severity of the disability has occurred. The ECA Committee would need to consider whether the student had the experience or time to manage the situation. Students with disabilities are, of course, also able to use the Exceptional Circumstances procedure when they encounter circumstances other than their disability which meet the criteria of the policy and go beyond their disabilities.<sup>35</sup>

## EC9 Adjustment of Undergraduate degree outcomes in light of exceptional circumstances

Adjustment of undergraduate degree outcomes (e.g. raising of degree class) is **never** allowed as a response to circumstances that can be dealt with through the normal ECA procedures. Only the outcomes in section C above can be applied, and these will only apply to individual assessments.

However, in rare cases a recommendation for a higher class of degree can be made to Special Cases Committee where it has *not been possible* for exceptional circumstances to be submitted and considered before the end of the stage of the programme during which they occurred. The award of a higher class of degree would only be recommended following full

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<sup>35</sup> Where students have disabilities which are unpredictable or variable in nature, and where there is evidence that extensions may be required on some work, disability services can recommend that these be dealt with outside of the exceptional circumstances policy. But in these cases, the recommendation must be included in the Student's Student Support Plan, and be approved by the department (who must assure the Standing Committee on Assessment that such extensions are in keeping with the learning outcomes of the programme) (See: Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback, Section 4.3.2).

and formal consideration of the individual circumstances of any such case, and only as a result of applying one of the additional borderline ratios (see below).

*Example: A student is diagnosed with a disability which is of an on-going nature, e.g. dyslexia, during their third year. Adjustments are made for that academic year, an improvement in academic performance is noted and the student's final mark is borderline. Assessments in previous stages (when no adjustments were made) are therefore likely to have been affected by the disability.*

All such recommendations will be considered by the Special Cases Committee, and must be received by Wednesday of week 10 of Summer Term in order to allow them to be considered before the Summer Senate and graduation.

In the event that such a recommendation is accepted by the Special Cases Committee, the following ratios will be applied to the credit weighted stage averages in order to determine whether the student reaches the required average for the higher degree classification:

	2nd Stage Affected	3rd Stage Affected	4th Stage Affected
Bachelor's Degree	1:3	N/A	N/A
Integrated Masters	1:3:3	4:3:8	N/A
	2:3:8		N/A

*Please note: any exceptional circumstances which affected the final year of study must be addressed using the provisions in the other sections of this policy, including extensions and sits as if for the first time.*

The consideration of such a case does not require that the student be in a 'borderline' area before the alternate weighting is applied, although departments should not make a recommendation to Special Cases Committee where the application of the ratio would make no difference to the student's degree classification. Should the recommendation be approved, the award mark which is shown on the student transcript will remain the traditional 2:3 or 2:3:3 ratio. Only the degree classification itself will change.

## EC10 Policy on Aegrotat Degrees

In the event that a student is rendered, or can be reasonably judged to have become, permanently unable to complete their studies as the result of documented medical, personal or compassionate circumstances, the Board of Examiners may propose that a student be awarded an aegrotat award.

- i. Any aegrotat proposal should be for the next exit point after the student's most recent progression. In order to support such a proposal, the Board of Examiners must present evidence that the student is likely to have met any programme level learning outcomes, and to show that the student was achieving at the appropriate level for the award in question. In order to be considered, the student will normally have been enrolled for more than half of the teaching or research period between the exit award for which the student is already eligible

and the progression or award point for the level of award being proposed.

ii. For research degree and the ISM stage of Taught Postgraduate degrees, the Boards of Examiners must present a statement from the supervisor indicating the scope of the project, and evidence that the student was likely to achieve the standard of research appropriate for the award. The proposal must also be supported by at least one piece of written work which indicates that the student is capable of producing work at the appropriate level (potentially produced during the taught portion of the degree). Where appropriate, the supervisor's report should point the external examiner and the Special Cases Committee to the salient points of the written submission.

iii. Successful completion of a confirmation of study examination for a research student is not necessarily an indication that such a student should be considered for an aegrotat PhD rather than an MPhil, but rather any proposal for an aegrotat research degree should be based on the extent and quality of the research completed (whilst making allowances for its incomplete nature), and measured against the standards of the award in question without the benefit of a viva.

iv. The recommendation of an aegrotat award of the MPhil should be made if the examiners are of the view that the available sections of the thesis are of good presentation and style and with the supervisor' report shows evidence of the student's proficiency in the methods and techniques of research, demonstrating and adequate knowledge and discussion of the literature in a specific field of study. It must show initiative, independence of thought and must be a distinct contribution to scholarship.

v. The recommendation of an aegrotat award of the PhD degree should be made if the examiners are of the view that the available sections of the thesis are of good presentation and style and, with the supervisor' report, show evidence of being a significant contribution to knowledge and of the student's capacity to pursue further research without supervision. The thesis must contain a significant amount of material worthy of publication.

vi. Aegrotat awards will not be classified. They will make reference to the subject studied, though non-aegrotat award at the same level may not.

vii. All proposals for aegrotat awards must have the approval of an external examiner before being put to the Special Cases Committee. This includes research degrees, where an external examiner may need to be appointed through the normal processes.

## EC11 COVID-19 - Changes to Exceptional Circumstances process

Please note: The guidance on the procedure for submitting a claim was updated and approved by SCA on 19th August 2020. **It is in effect from 28 September 2020.**

Covid-19 has had a significant impact on many aspects of life and while the situation is not as severe as in the period dating from March 2020, the University acknowledges that students are still facing circumstances which may impact on their studies. The University is doing everything it can to allow students to continue to engage in their study, and to allow them to make academic progress where this is reasonable for them. However, we understand that this is impacting everyone differently, and that for some students it may not be possible to properly engage with their study or assessment at some points during the 2020/21 academic year. Although Covid-19 is now expected and ongoing, it should be noted that its impact on individual students may still be unforeseen.

The list of valid exceptional circumstances that relate specifically to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic are as follows:

- A. Illness with symptoms of COVID-19 (or similar symptoms).
- B. Unexpectedly challenging circumstances in the student's domestic situation that could not reasonably have been anticipated or prevented - e.g. member(s) of their family are ill or self isolating, consequent caring responsibility, etc.
- C. Circumstances are such that access to reliable internet and/or required technology (for revision, or reliable submission of assessments) is unexpectedly unavailable during the course of the assessment.
- D. Other severe impacts of COVID-19 (impact on mental health, interaction with existing disability, etc.).

If you are experiencing a genuine impact as a result of COVID-19, as well as any other exceptional circumstance which would normally be covered by the Exceptional Circumstances Policy, the following principles apply:

**Application:** You can apply for exceptional circumstances in the usual way using the existing form.

**Evidentiary requirement:** Each application should be accompanied by satisfactory supporting evidence unless a good reason is provided to explain why this evidence cannot be obtained. Satisfactory supporting evidence is normally sourced from an independent and relevantly-qualified third party professional (see EC2.4 for further details).

**These provisions apply during the 2020/21 academic year but may be subject to SCA review in the event that the Covid-19 situation worsens.**

Procedure for online exams:

- Students are allowed to submit an ECA claim citing any of the above circumstances or any circumstances normally covered by the Exceptional Circumstances Policy
- A student who does not submit the online exam can submit an ECA claim if the non-submission is as a result of exceptional circumstances
- A student who submits the online exam can also submit an ECA claim if they believe that exceptional circumstances have affected their performance in the exam
- The ECA claim must be received within 7 days of the end of the submission window
- The outcome of successful claim would be a SAIFFT at the next opportunity (not an extension)

It's important that you know that though we will allow extensions and assessments as if for the first time in the Summer (likely the Late August assessment period for the latter), if those assessments are similarly affected, or students fail to meet the progression criteria at the delayed attempt, it is unlikely that they will be able to recoup the assessment in time for the start of the next academic year, and so will likely need to take a Leave of Absence.