

ECA Policy for 2021/2

1. Background:

Quick summary of the three sets of ECA rules that have been in operation over the last 18 months.

Normal (pre-pandemic) rules: Evidence required in all circumstances. Claims will be accepted for exceptional and unforeseen circumstances only.

Initial 2020/21 Rules: Evidence required for claims, except where there is good reason that evidence cannot be provided (e.g. cannot access GP, self isolation etc). This was agreed by SCA in summer 2020, and published as an extraordinary amendment for 2020/1 only. Also SCA agreed on a set of “Covid” circumstances that would be applicable during the pandemic.

Current 2020/21 Rules: All evidence requirements removed in December 2020. Published as an amendment for 2020/1 only.

The removal of evidence requirements during 2020/1 has greatly increased the number of Exceptional Circumstances claims, with an estimated 30,000 claims in the 2020/21 academic year. Continuation of this is considered unworkable.

A full review of ECA policy and implementation will be undertaken during 2021/2 in any case, but interim rules need defining from September 2021, without any guarantees available about the ongoing status of the pandemic. Also note that in December 2020, the OiA published a good practice framework on ECs, in which they state that it is good practice to allow self-certification for short illnesses for some assessments (e.g. exams). This will be folded into the review, but should be borne in mind when considering responses to the pandemic circumstances for 2021/2.

The group considered that the likely scenario for the pandemic circumstances is that students will largely be on campus, and not in lockdown, but with high levels of covid disruption due to high infection rates, some students still being (stuck) overseas, some isolation requirements etc. It is expected that the NHS services will be accessible for students, but will be under pressure due to caseload and treatment backlog. The group felt that the University had a responsibility to ensure that the policy encourages students to seek medical (or other) help when they need it, but not to create a situation where students access NHS services solely for the purpose of getting evidence for an ECA claim. This necessarily means that some form of self-certification will be required. The group felt that given the uncertain nature of the pandemic, the policy for 2021/2 should be (a) sufficiently flexible to allow students to handle regular short-term disruption to working patterns with a minimum of fuss, and (b) ensure that students are encouraged to seek medical, or other, help for circumstances which impact for the medium to long term.

The following is the policy for the 2021/2 academic year only. However, it is anticipated that some form of (controlled) self-certification will be implemented in the future and this will be investigated during the year.

The proposal is that, for 2021/2, circumstances affecting student assessments are managed using a dual approach:

The usual **Exceptional Circumstances affecting Assessment** policy will apply, with **evidentiary requirements restored** (albeit with some pandemic-related adjustments).

... in parallel with...

A self-certification policy, to cover short-term disruption to assessments, which allows students to **defer exams** (and other exam-type short-turnaround/unseen assessments) and to **obtain short extensions** to open coursework assignments. This would be handled outside of the ECA process completely, and without any evidentiary requirement.

Details below:

2.1 ECA Policy (Guide to Assessment) for 2021/2

The pre-pandemic ECA policy will be applied, with the evidentiary requirement restored, as the standard expectation. In light of the continued pandemic circumstances, the following modifications are proposed.

2.1.1 The following are added as valid exceptional circumstances:

- Unexpectedly challenging circumstances in the student's domestic situation, due to the pandemic, 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.
- 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.
- Other severe impacts of COVID-19 (impact on mental health, interaction with existing disability, etc.).

2.1.2 The following are added as acceptable forms of evidence:

- A digital confirmation of a positive COVID-19 test (as evidence for illness)
- A digital confirmation of a self-isolation requirement (where that isolation is having an unforeseen and direct impact on assessment).
- Screenshots or photographs indicating a relevant internet connection problem or disfunctional IT equipment

2.1.3 The following caveat is added in relation to evidence:

- If it is evident from the information provided by the student that obtaining independent third-party evidence for an ECA claim is not possible or practicable, given the pandemic circumstances, and that self-certification for these circumstances was not possible or appropriate, the ECA committee may waive the requirement for such evidence. This is expected to be rare.
- Student-facing guidance states that ECA claims are expected to be accompanied by evidence. In the rare event that a student believes that it is not possible to obtain evidence, and that self-certification was not possible, they should submit the claim, explaining why, and provide corroborating information.

2.2 Self-certification Policy and Procedure

2.2.1 **Purpose of self-certification.** Self-certification, in the context of this policy proposal, is intended to serve a number of purposes. Firstly, given the pressures on the health services, students should only engage with medical services if they require treatment or medical advice. They should not be required to engage with such services for the purpose of obtaining evidence for minor illness that does not need treatment. Secondly, there is recognition that in the current fluctuating pandemic situation, there can be short-term disruption to students; studies, arising from domestic circumstances, self isolation, travel difficulties, internet connectivity and technical issues, etc. These can be impactful in the short term, and challenging to evidence. Finally, this is intended to offer reassurance to students that we recognise the degree of uncertainty that the pandemic brings, and that they are trusted to manage short-term illness and disruption without the need to engage formal processes.

2.2.2 **Reasons for Self certification.** When a student asks for self-certification, approval will be automatic, as long as the criteria are met and the request is made on time. Students will be required to state the reason for the claim - i.e. one of the following:

- Exceptional Medical Circumstances (Physical Health)
- Exceptional Medical Circumstances (Mental Health)
- Exceptional Medical Circumstances (Physical and Mental Health)
- Exceptional Personal Circumstances
- Inadequate IT resources

Departments will be encouraged to track these approvals to look for patterns in student behaviour, to enable staff/supervisors to offer advice to students regarding support they may need.

2.2.3 **Scope:** Self certification will apply to most, but not all, forms of assessment. It will apply to all forms of examination, including online examinations (see 2.2.4), most forms of open coursework (see 2.2.5) but will not apply to some specific forms of coursework - e.g. talks, practicals, or other assessments where extensions are not feasible (see 2.2.6).

2.2.4 **Self-certified deferral of examinations.**

- Students will be able to self-certify to **defer** examinations.
- Examinations will be deferred to the next available opportunity, and will be treated in the same way as the originally scheduled assessments (SAIFFT or Resit AIFFT).
- Students may only apply for deferral before the start of the exam window. Deferral is not possible once the examination (window) has opened/started.
- If a student defers the exam, and then subsequently submits the exam, it will not be marked.
- An ECA claim can be made for an exam, as usual, whether or not the exam has been attempted. Evidence will be required for an ECA claim.
- The following forms of examination will be available for deferral through self-certification:

Types of assessment eligible for deferral through self-certification	
SITS Code (as displayed on E:Vision)	Description
EXAM	Closed Examinations
AURL	Aural Examinations (Listening tests)
OPEN1A	Online Examinations
OPEN*	Open examinations up to 2 weeks of various durations

2.2.5 Self-certified extensions for coursework

- Students will be able to self-certify to obtain a short extension to open coursework assessments.
- Extensions obtained through self-certification will be for **four days**
- Students may only self-certify up to the submission deadline. Self-certified extensions can not be requested after the deadline has passed.
- If an extension of four working days is not sufficient to cover the circumstances, an ECA claim should be submitted. A student may submit an ECA claim even if they have applied for self certification. ECA claims will need to be evidenced.
- An individual assessment task may only have one self-certified extension. If a further extension is required, the student will need to submit an ECA claim.
- The following forms of coursework will be available for extensions through self-certification:

Types of assessment eligible for extensions through self-certification	
SITS Code (as displayed on E:Vision)	Description
CSWK	Coursework/Essay

DISS	PGT Dissertations
PROJ	UG Projects

2.2.6 Coursework not eligible for self-certification: Some coursework types are not eligible for self-certification. ECA claims can be submitted, as usual. ECA claims will need to be evidenced.

Reasons why self-certification is not possible include:

- Assessment is taking place in a specific timetabled event (e.g. practical assessments, talks and other presentations)
- The assessments is for Group work activity
- The assessment is for an external placement
- Extensions are not possible for a piece of course work (e.g. worked solutions have to be released on a specific day)
- The following forms of coursework will be **not be** available for self-certification:

Types of assessment are not eligible for self-certification	
SITS Code (as displayed on E:Vision)	Description
ATTD	Attendance Requirements (PSRB Requirements only)
OSCE	Objective Structured Clinical Examination
ORAL	Oral Examination/Presentation/Seminar
PLAC	Placement
PRAC	Practical
RHRS	Rehearsal (Music Dept Only)
GRP	<i>Groupwork (this 'type' would need to be created and identified by departments from the existing 'CSWK' assessments)</i>
CSWK-NOEX	<i>Coursework where extensions are not feasible or practicable.</i>