

Title: Extenuating Circumstances Procedures for Students
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4P: Extenuating Circumstances Procedures for Students

Summary Notes for students

- The University's extenuating circumstances policy only covers significant short-term matters;
- If you have a long-term issue that impacts on your attendance/learning speak to your course leader or seek advice at the Student Hub as soon as possible. It *may* be possible to make up for missed learning through the University's Special Action procedure;
- The University's extenuating circumstances policy also allows you to request an extension to an assignment submission deadline where you have extenuating circumstances; if your EC application is approved you will be able to submit your assessment at any time up to 5 working days after the submission deadline without any academic penalty. You cannot apply for an extension to an examination date. It *may* be possible to re-schedule other forms of time-constrained assessment and you will need to speak to your academic tutor;
- You must decide if you are going to sit/submit the assessment on time. If you cannot sit or submit on time you need to decide if:
 - i. your extenuating circumstances mean you will not be able to take the assessment at the due time and need to ask for a deferral so that you can sit/submit at the next opportunity without penalty. Do not submit any work. Submit an Extenuating Circumstances form with evidence. Ask for a Defer i.e., to take the assessment at the next available opportunity without academic penalty;
 - ii. you will be able to complete the assessment if you have an extension to the deadline date as this will then allow you to complete work you may already have started. Submit your work late at any time up until 5 working days after the deadline date. Submit an Extenuating Circumstances form with evidence; ask for an extension to the deadline date.
- You must decide if your extenuating circumstances are valid - check against the University's criteria (see Annex A);

- You must obtain and submit valid evidence to support your extenuating circumstances - check against the University's criteria (see Section 2P, Annex A);
- You must submit your extenuating circumstances form as soon as possible after the circumstances have occurred;
- Your extenuating circumstances submission will be considered by an independent University panel which will include a representative from the Students Union;
- You can make a confidential submission that will only be seen by the Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel;
- The extenuating circumstances policy is intended to support students who experience difficulties that impact on their ability to submit assessments. You will need to consider a number of matters when deciding if you are able to submit an assessment or not; perhaps you do not have issues that meet the EC criteria and would be better submitting late with an academic penalty in accordance with the assessment regulations. A summary of some of the things you may need to consider and the processes involved is attached.

PLEASE READ THE POLICY AND FOLLOW THESE PROCEDURES CAREFULLY

Introduction

1. If you are experiencing any sort of short term problem that impacts on your ability to complete or undertake an assessment you should consider whether you should complete the assessment or submit an extenuating circumstances (EC) claim. The University's operates a 'fit-to-study' policy which recognizes that you are the only person who knows the impact of an extenuating circumstance and when you will be 'fit to study' again. You will have to decide whether you can finish your assessment work on time, could finish the work with an extension to the deadline or will not be able to finish the work at all (or sit an examination) in the required time and need to attempt it at a later date.
2. Where you think you may have grounds for an EC submission, and wish the University to take these circumstances into account, please check your situation against the criteria and/or seek advice at the Student Hub. You should also read the University's Extenuating Circumstances Policy. If you are suffering problems that are likely to be for an extended period of time the University may still be able to help you, but you must seek advice at the Student Hub who will refer you to the appropriate department. The University will not normally take retrospective action.

Definition

3. First of all you should note the University's definition of extenuating circumstances:
4. *"Significant, unforeseen and normally short-term matters that result in a major short term impact on a student's ability to be able to complete, or submit, or attend an assessment."*
5. The emphasis is on significant matters. We all suffer stress from time to time and the daily events of life do not always help us perform to our best: such things as work overload, colds, financial problems, transport problems etc. are all part of the normal demands of life and are things that we will always have to cope with. Extenuating circumstances are matters which hopefully will rarely happen to you, but if they do they will have a debilitating impact on your ability to undertake your studies for short periods of time. Pay particular attention to the examples in paragraph 16 of the policy which details the things that would not be approved by the EC panel. If you are in any doubt whatsoever about your eligibility to claim under the EC policy then please seek the advice at the Student Hub.

Course related problems

6. Extenuating circumstances deal with events that are personal to you as an individual student and are not related to course matters that might exceptionally impact on all students. You can only make a submission under the EC policy on an individual basis. The policy does not cater for student groups as a whole e.g. where there may be course associated problems that are affecting a particular group or sector of the student body. If these are matters that impact directly on formal assessment e.g. external noise in an examination venue, then your school will be made aware of this and will take it into account when considering your work.

7. The University will do all it can to prevent course delivery problems but sometimes events happen over which we have little control e.g. when lecturers are sick, or if there are unforeseen equipment failures. We will take all steps we can to cope with such events and therefore hope that you do not have to complain about matters relating to your learning experience. In the exceptional event that you do, then these should be dealt with under the Student Complaints Procedure if necessary.

'Fit to study'

8. The University works to a 'fit to study' principle relating to extenuating circumstances. This means that it is up to you to determine whether any adverse circumstances would have a detrimental impact on your performance and, having considered that, it is your decision to then submit an assignment or sit an assessment/examination. By submitting an assignment, or sitting an assessment, you confirm that you consider yourself fit to do so.

9. Once you have decided that you are 'fit to study' and sit an assessment or submit an assessment by the deadline date, you cannot then submit an extenuating circumstances form.

10. If there is any reason why you think a particular set of circumstances mean you are not 'fit to study' then you should check to see if the circumstances are eligible under the extenuating circumstances criteria. Remember that extenuating circumstances are significant matters and examples of such matters are given in the EC criteria and attached to these guidance notes.

Submission of extenuating circumstances claim

11. It is entirely your responsibility and decision to submit a claim under the extenuating circumstances policy. Your application for extenuating circumstances to be considered by the EC Panel should be made on an EC form which is available from the Student Hub and can be downloaded from the portal.

12. The University's policy statement outlines the evidence we expect you to be able to produce to support a successful claim and it is your responsibility to ensure that you obtain the essential evidence to support your claim. In all instances this must corroborate the stated circumstances. Supporting evidence is absolutely crucial and your submission cannot normally be considered without it. Note that medical self-certificates will not be accepted by extenuating circumstances panels. For claims under this policy which relate to illness, you must contact your doctor at the time you are sick so that he/she can confirm your illness. A note from your doctor stating that you were seen on a particular date and you merely *told* him/her that you *had been* ill, will not be accepted by the Extenuating circumstances panel.

13. The University is very keen to support students who are struggling with issues that merit consideration as extenuating circumstances; help is available both in resolving any issues relating to the circumstances themselves and in submitting an appropriate submission to the extenuating circumstances panel. You are therefore advised, in the first instance, to seek advice at the Student Hub who will provide you with any assistance you need or refer you to the appropriate department. The Solent Students' Union will also be able to advise you on completing your submission.

14. The personal data information requirements of the EC form are quite straightforward but you do need to think carefully about the assessments that you are claiming to be affected by extenuating circumstances. Dependent on the nature of the circumstances, you may wish to claim for more than one assessment. In this case you must make this clear on your form and your

evidence must cover the timing of all the assessments. The EC panel will not be able to determine this for you and will only consider extenuating circumstances in respect of the named assessments on the form. The form also requires that you state the way in which the extenuating circumstances meant that you were not 'fit to study' e.g. how they prevented you from undertaking an assignment. Remember that we expect students to plan work to cope with some unanticipated problems and that events submitted under the EC policy must be significant issues.

15. Extenuating circumstances forms must be submitted as a **matter of urgency after the event**. Forms can either be submitted at the Student Hub or via email to assessments@solent.ac.uk. Academic Services will publish the final deadline dates for submission to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel on the University Portal.

Extenuating circumstances panels

16. Your submission will be considered by an Extenuating Circumstances Panel that includes representatives of University staff and Students' Union. They will approve EC submissions solely on the appropriateness of the circumstances and the evidence enclosed. Provision of independent evidence is exceptionally important since it forms the basis of a fair system for all students.

17. An Extenuating Circumstances Panel will not consider a claim without independent evidence. You also need to be aware that a panel will not accept as independent, a statement from a relative, friend or even course leader.

18. Please note that all supporting evidence must be presented in English. If, for example, you are taken ill abroad and corroborating evidence is provided in the language of that country, then it should be accompanied by a translation, certified officially as being correct e.g. by a Notary Public.

19. The Extenuating Circumstances Panel makes a simple decision: the submission is either approved or rejected. This decision is then reported to the assessment board that sits to consider your results. Where an Extenuating Circumstances Panel accepts the circumstances and associated evidence as valid, then the Unit Assessment Board will make an appropriate academic decision for the units for which you have submitted EC. It will either:

- i. Award a 'Defer' for the assessment for which extenuating circumstances is accepted. *If this is your first attempt at an assessment* then a 'Defer' normally means that you will be able to take the missed assessment at a later date as if for the first time and therefore without an academic penalty
AND/OR
- ii. Approve the full mark achieved for the assessment for which you requested an extension to a submission deadline.

Remember that it is possible that failing to take an assessment may impact on your eligibility to progress to the next year of your course; you should read the University's assessment regulations to check this if you are considering applying for extenuating circumstances.

20. If an extenuating circumstances panel does not accept that your circumstances and/or associated evidence are valid, then the Unit Assessment Board will not award you a deferred result or approve an extension. This means that you will be given an academic penalty in respect of any assessment submitted late or submitted/sat at a later date.

21. The decisions of an Extenuating Circumstances Panel remain the ultimate responsibility of the Chair of the Panel; the Chair may take the final decision where the Panel is unable to agree an outcome.

22. Decisions are informed by the criteria set out in Annex A to the EC policy and whether the circumstances outlined and the associated evidence provided are within the criteria and align with the assessment dates involved.

23. Panel decisions will be recorded within the Student Records System, against the individual student record and against each individual assessment as follows:

- i. ECA = Extenuating Circumstances Accepted
- ii. ECRC = Extenuating Circumstances Rejected - circumstances not valid
- iii. ECRE = Extenuating Circumstances Rejected - evidence not valid
- iv. ECRCE = Extenuating Circumstances Rejected - circumstances and evidence not valid

24. You will be advised of the decision of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel within 5 working days of the Panel sitting. Decisions will be made available via the student results portal. Dependent on the timing of the Panel you may not know if your EC submission is approved in advance of any submission deadline. If you are seeking an extension to a submission deadline then you may have to submit your work late without knowing if the EC request for an extension is approved. In submitting an EC application you need to pay particular attention to Annex A of the EC policy statement which outlines valid EC circumstances and examples of valid evidence.

25. If you feel you have grounds to appeal the decision of an Extenuating Circumstances Panel you can only do this once you have received your full unit results in accordance with the 'Academic Appeals Policy'. Remember that the Extenuating Circumstances Panel will not consider EC claims submitted as an appeal after results are released unless there are strong evidenced reasons why you could not have submitted EC earlier in the year when the incident occurred.

Scheduling of Meetings

26. EC Panels will meet on a regular basis across the academic year. The Panel dates and associated submission deadlines will be published by Academic Services on the University Portal, normally at the beginning of the academic year. Where required in order to ensure a timely response, the Panel may hold meetings additional to the schedule times and you will be advised of any extra dates promptly.

27. EC Panels will also meet to consider academic appeals that involve extenuating circumstances after results have been released.

28. In order to accommodate the 21 calendar day deadline for the submission of academic appeals, the Chair may have to take action on behalf of the EC Panel to determine the outcome of any appeals involving EC that are received after the Panel sits. Panels are scheduled to capture the majority of submissions and with a view to minimizing impact on any progression issues.

29. You are expected to submit by the deadline for the assessment period (weeks 1-15, 16-30) of the academic year in which the incident occurred if you don't then the reason for delayed submission should be stated on the EC form.

Evidence Based

30. The key words in any extenuating circumstances claim are serious, significant and evidence based. The EC policy and associated procedures reminds students that minor life-style issues such as small-scale difficulties, cough, cold, hay fever, a few sleepless nights, are not relevant to extenuating circumstances and that students are expected to cope with the normal demands of daily life. The policy especially excludes the following as acceptable extenuating circumstances:

- i. the down-time of University computer networks (except for extended periods of time) and problems with personal IT equipment;
- ii. loss of computer data (such data should be backed-up);
- iii. accommodation and travel problems;
- iv. personal/part-time job commitments;
- v. personal holidays;
- vi. peaks in assessment work demands;
- vii. religious festivals; these are known in advance and students should build any associated commitments in to their assessment planning;
- viii. financial difficulties;
- ix. complaints against staff or in relation to course delivery. These are managed through the University's Student Complaints Policy.

Data Protection Act 1998

31. By submitting an extenuating circumstances form you are agreeing to the University holding this personal data for the purposes of processing your claim. The University will hold this data in accordance with its notification under the 1998 Data Protection Act.

Confidentiality

32. If there are issues relating to your extenuating circumstances claim that you wish to remain confidential then you can indicate this on the submission form and place the evidence in a sealed envelope marked 'Confidential for the Chair of Extenuating Circumstances Panel.' The form itself should not be confidential as staff need to know which assessment(s) you are making a claim against. Where you wish the circumstances of your claim to be confidential the evidence will be disclosed to the Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel only, who will take the decision regarding the outcome of your submission. Do not let confidentiality issues prevent you asking for help; academic and professional services staff will always act in your best interests and support you in confidence within the policy requirements.

False claims

33. You should note that submitting a false claim or false documentation is a serious matter and would be dealt with under the University's Student Academic Misconduct Procedure.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. I did really badly in one of my exams because there was something that was really worrying me. Can I claim extenuating circumstances?

No. The University operates a 'fit to study' approach. This means that in sitting an examination you confirm that you are fit to undertake the exam and cannot submit extenuating circumstances as well. Remember that extenuating circumstances are serious adverse events that have happened to you and it should therefore be quite clear to you whether or not you are fit to take the assessment.

2. I have just recovered from flu. I was ill in bed for nearly a week and could not work on my assignment; I don't think I will be able to finish it by next week's deadline. I had done quite a lot of work and I don't want to have to start again with a resit piece of work even if I can get the full mark. Should I submit what I have done and hope for the best?

If you have medical evidence that you had flu (doctor's note) then you can submit an EC application for an extension to your deadline date. You can then have up to another 5 working days in which to submit your work. If the EC is approved you will be given the full mark for your work without any academic penalty.

3. I just could not get my assignment finished on time and handed it in a day late - I don't think I have any extenuating circumstances. What happens?

If you have not submitted valid and approved extenuating circumstances for an extension then the work will be given an academic penalty on marking.

4. I finished my assignment in time and was travelling to Uni to hand it in but I had a car accident on the way and got taken to A&E. I could not therefore get my assignment handed in on time. Is there anything I can do?

It is obviously preferable that you do not leave handing in your assessments to the last minute. In such cases you should hand in your assignment as soon as possible and within 5 working days of the deadline date. You should also had in an extenuating circumstances form with independent evidence regarding the car accident and ask for an extension to the submission deadline date.

5. I have a holiday booked and will not be back in time for my resit exam and want to claim extenuating circumstances; what do I do?

You cannot claim extenuating circumstances; the University does not recognize personal holidays as valid extenuating circumstances. The examination periods are advised well in advance and students should avoid those dates when booking holidays.

6. I have a personal problem that is really bothering me and I cannot concentrate on my work; will the extenuating circumstances policy help me at all?

First of all if you have something that is preventing you studying you might wish to get some help. The sooner things are resolved the sooner you can get on with your studies. In the first instance you should seek advice at the Student Hub who can refer you onto the relevant department for more support where that is required.

7. *How do I know when I have to submit my extenuating circumstances claim?*

Extenuating Circumstances Forms and evidence should be submitted urgently and as soon as possible after the circumstance has occurred. Academic Services will advise the final deadline dates for submission to the Extenuating Circumstances Panel through the University Portal.

8. *Who considers my extenuating circumstances claim?*

Your Extenuating Circumstances Form and evidence will be considered by the University's Extenuating Circumstances Panel that includes representatives of University staff and a member of the Students Union.

9. *There are times when my religious commitments impact on my studies but I see that under the EC policy I cannot have this taken into account?*

You are right that circumstances specific to religious matters are not included within our list of accepted extenuating circumstances. This is because we need a common approach for all students and because the University's Assessment Policy expects course teams to take into account established religious holidays when setting assessment dates.

10. *What happens if my assignment hand-in date clashes with other important events? I will be unable to hand it in and do not appear to be able to make a claim under the extenuating circumstances policy.*

You should have early notification of the hand-in deadlines of all your units. Plan to submit your assignment early if necessary - you do not have to wait until the deadline; the deadline date is the very latest you can hand the assignment in! If you do have a problem speak to the relevant unit tutor as soon as possible so that they can advise you further.

11. *My extenuating circumstances are very personal and I don't really want them made public - do I have to submit them on a form?*

You do have to submit your extenuating circumstances, with evidence, on the University's Extenuating Circumstances Form if you wish them to be taken into account. However, if there are issues relating to your extenuating circumstances claim that you wish to remain confidential then you can indicate this on the submission form and place the evidence in a sealed envelope marked 'Confidential for the Chair of Extenuating Circumstances Panel.' The form itself should not be confidential as staff need to know which assessment(s) you are making a claim against. The nature of the problem and the evidence will then only be disclosed to the Chair of the extenuating circumstances panel, who will take the decision regarding the outcome of your submission.

12. *I have read your EC policy and it is quite clear that it only takes into account short term matters. I have a problem that I know is going to mean I may miss quite a lot of time at University - can the University help me?*

It may be that you need to be formally assessed for special needs provision or that you need to suspend your studies until such time as the matter can be resolved and you can return to the University fully fit to study. It is also possible that you may be eligible for support under the University's Special Action Procedure where we will consider your particular circumstances and decide if we are able to make special arrangements for additional support to help you complete your studies.