



Extenuating Circumstances and Coursework Extensions: Guidance for EC Panels and Boards of Examiners

Documentation Management

Document Record

Maintained by:	Quality Assurance
Owned by:	Senate
Approval Date:	September 2017
Location of Master Document:	https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/s/QSO/Team/Exams and Assessment/Extenuating Circumstances

Version Control

Document Version	Amendments	Amended By	Date	Approved By
3.0	Policy updated to reflect introduction of extenuating circumstances guidance and amendments to SR4	Head of Quality Assurance	September 2017	Senate
3.1	Minor amendment to wording	Head of Quality Assurance	September 2017	Senate
3.2	Guidance for Assigning Grades section updated	Head of Quality Assurance	October 2017	Senate
3.3	Updated following approval by University Education Committee	Quality Assurance Manager	March 2019	UEC
3.4	Longstanding and chronic health conditions section updated, and case studies added in appendix 1.	QA Clerical Officer	March 2019	Assistant Director (Academic Services)
3.5	Retrospective Extenuating Circumstances added.	Assistant Director (Academic Services)	January 2020	Assistant Director (Academic Services)

<u>CONTENTS</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Regulations	4
Coursework Extension Requests	4
Extenuating Circumstances and EC Panels	4
Considerations and Actions by Boards of Examiners	6
Longstanding and Chronic Health Conditions	8
Case Studies	9

Regulations

Senate Regulation 4 sets out clear procedures for Extenuating Circumstances Panels (EC Panels) and actions which Boards of Examiners (BoE) may take where ECs are accepted.

Coursework Extension Requests

Requests for a 5 working day extension should be submitted at least 48 hours before the submission deadline, in accordance with the Coursework Submission Policy. The Chair of the relevant EC Panel, or their nominee, shall consider the extension request in a timely manner, and usually within 48 hours. The EC Panel Chair may:

- Consider the reason for the extension not to be significant, and decide that the normal deadline and any normal late submission capping should apply;
- Decide that the request should be accepted, and specify a revised submission deadline of up to 5 working days; or
- Decide that the reason for the request is serious and/or long term, suggest that the student seek further academic and welfare support, and ask the student to submit a claim for ECs instead.

If a request for an extension is not accepted, the student will not normally be able to apply for ECs in relation to that missed deadline, unless, for instance, they have further evidence of their circumstances having worsened.

An extension of up to 14 working days may be given for a major project, e.g. the Final Year Project, and up to 4 weeks for a Masters' dissertation. Extensions to Masters' dissertation deadlines must also be approved by the Chair of the BoE.

Extensions of more than 5 working days (other than for major projects, as above) should only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) or the Associate Dean Quality Assurance.

The Coursework [Submission Policy](#) sets out the penalties for late submission. Work submitted more than 5 days after the deadline will not normally be accepted for marking.

Where the Chair of the EC Panel takes action in relation to extension requests, a record of such decisions should be brought before the EC Panel at its normal meeting before the BoE.

Extenuating Circumstances and EC Panels

General principles of consideration

In reaching a decision as to whether a student's ECs should be accepted, EC Panels are required to consider the evidence, and take into account the following:

- Circumstances which could reasonable have been foreseen by the student will not normally be accepted as ECs;
- The circumstances should be **significant** and unavoidable, and **beyond the control of the student**. Panels should have reference to the [Guidance for Students](#) which gives examples of what are not generally considered to be ECs; and

- Both the timing and the duration of the ECs presented, and the impact of the circumstances on the student's ability to undertake that assessment, should be consistent with the student's performance having been negatively affected by the circumstances in the relevant assessment(s).

Consideration of student submissions by EC Panels should be confidential but not anonymous. The rationale for this for EC Panels is that discussion of ECs relating to students at BoEs can remain anonymous. EC Panels should not have access to students' marks or grades when making decisions, just the EC submissions of the students.

EC Panels accept or reject submissions made by students, following the principles set out in SR4.29 and amplified in the Guidance for Students. Acceptance of ECs means that the EC Panel will recommend that the BoE should take the ECs into consideration and take appropriate action. Rejection means that the EC Panel will not recommend that the BoE take the circumstances into consideration. EC Panels must properly record the reasons for the decisions for each student.

Where the EC Panel determines that ECs should be accepted, the Panel should indicate, to the relevant BoE (with students' names anonymised), the assessments for which ECs have been accepted.

It is important that BoEs have sufficient information about the impact of the ECs on the student's profile to enable them to make appropriate decisions which will maximise the student's ability to meet their potential. Therefore, the EC Panel should inform the BoE of the severity of the impact of the ECs. The EC Panel should not make specific recommendations to the BoE regarding the action it should take; the BoE makes decisions in the light of the accepted ECs and the student's profile (see below).

Students should be informed of the dates of the EC Panel where their ECs will be considered (unless Chair's action is taken). The outcome of the EC Panel's consideration (i.e. acceptance or rejection of a decision, with an explanation for this) should be communicated to a student within 5 working days of the date of the Panel meeting of Chair's decision.

Retrospective Extenuating Circumstances

The EC process encourages students to take proactive steps to ensure that any circumstances do not impact on their assessments, and assumes that students will consider this before they are assessed. However, some conditions or difficulties may compromise decision making, including a student's ability to recognise the impact that any ECs are having, and also the ability to make an informed decision about submitting coursework or attending an assessment. If a student experiences an extenuating circumstance that they believe may affect their performance in an examination or other 'live' assessment, but take it anyway, or if they submit coursework on time, but feel that it has been affected by ECs, they are advised to submit ECs. However, when submitting their ECs, they additionally need to provide a good reason for why they did not follow the normal ECs procedure before attempting the assessment in question.

When making a decision on Retrospective ECs, the Panel must follow the usual principles of consideration, but must also consider the reason provided by the student for not proactively engaging with the procedure.

A 'good reason' is where the student has provided an account of how their ECs have compromised their decision making and/or adversely impacted upon their concentration or personal organisation, leading to them not recognising the need to submit ECs prior to an assessment. Medical professionals and other specialists (e.g. counsellors) understanding that compromised decision making and/or poor personal organisation may be a characteristic of a number of conditions/difficulties. These include

mental health problems, such as low mood, depression and anxiety; insomnia; disordered eating; obsessive compulsive behaviour; substance abuse and addictions; and any traumatic events or personal difficulties that cause high levels of stress or distress.

Students do not need to supply additional evidence to support their 'good reason', but some may choose to. Although this is not a requirement, students are told that an EC Panel may not be able to accept their reasons for the submission of retrospective ECs without evidence.

Consideration and Actions by Boards of Examiners

All students, including those with accepted ECs, are considered anonymously at Boards and therefore no details of the ECs can be discussed.

BoEs should take action(s) as set out in SR4.40 in relation to each assessment for which ECs have been accepted by an EC Panel. These are set out below, along with associate guidance for BoEs.

New attempt at assessment – Reassessment

SR4.40(a) Where a student has failed one or more affected assessments, the Board may set aside any grade/mark already assigned, and allow the student a new attempt in the relevant assessment(s), according to an appropriate schedule to be determined by the Board. If the assessment affected was a first attempt, the student will be eligible for an uncapped grade or mark in the affected block.

This will normally be the action taken by a BoE in respect of a failed assessment, and allows the student a new attempt for an uncapped grade or mark if the assessment affected was a first attempt, or capped for a second attempt. This approach allows progression and/or awarding decisions to be made following the demonstration of achievement by the student.

Waive the assessment(s) or block

SR4.40(b) Where a student has failed the affected assessment(s), the Board may determine to waive the affected assessment(s), but only if the programme learning outcomes have been met through the student's other assessments.

The BoE may wish to make use of provided 'modellers' to model potential outcomes for the student, based upon the waiving of such failed elements. Both blocks and elements of blocks affected by ECs can be waived in such a manner. BoEs should not waive the major assessment which forms part of either a final year project or Master's dissertation block.

The BoE should remind itself that degree awards are based on the student demonstrating that they have met the programme level learning outcomes. The programme specification will set out where (in which blocks) the learning outcome are tested, and it is, therefore, possible for the BoE to determine that a student has achieved that learning outcome by obtaining a pass grade in another block.

ECs noted and considered at final BoE

SR4.40(c) Where a student has passed the affected assessment(s), the Board should note the ECs, and at the final Board, where the student's award is considered, the ECs should be taken into consideration when determining the classification of the final award. If appropriate, SR4.41 should be used to agree an increased classification.

Where a student has had ECs accepted for an assessment, but received a pass grade, any impact of the ECs will be assessed at the final BoE, in the context of the student's overall profile.

The BoE may determine that a student's performance has been affected to the extent that the degree classification does not reflect their ability. In such circumstances, the Chair of the BoE should make use of SR4.41, by presenting its recommendations to the Chair of the University Education Committee for consideration and approval on behalf of Senate. For example, the BoE may wish to recommend that the student is awarded a higher classification. Such a recommendation should be informed by careful modelling of potential outcomes for students, showing the detrimental impact the affected assessment had had on the student's overall profile and classification.

Where the BoE determines that the accepted ECs had no likely impact on the overall degree classification (e.g. where the grade in the block affected by the ECs is in line with other blocks) it will record its decision.

New attempt at assessment – Passed assessment

SR4.40(d) Exceptionally, where a student has passed the affected assessment(s) and the Board has determined that there has been a significant impact of the ECs, the Board may set aside any grade already assigned, and allow the student a new attempt in the relevant assessment(s), according to an appropriate schedule to be determined by the Board. If the assessment affected was a first attempt, the student will be eligible for an uncapped grade or mark in the affected block.

Whilst students affected by ECs will not be required by BoEs to undertake further attempts at the affected assessment(s) unnecessarily, BoEs may wish to offer students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in cases where it would not be appropriate to use other decisions defined by Senate Regulations.

Assigning a grade

SR4.40(e) Exceptionally, the Board may assign grades to elements of assessment where extenuating circumstances have been accepted. Guidance on arriving at an appropriate grade is provided. Grades will not normally be assigned in this manner unless there are result(s) available in at least one other element of assessment in the same assessment block to guide the Board, and only if the programme learning outcomes have been met through the student's other assessments. Grades will not normally be assigned by Boards in this manner in assessment blocks totalling more than one third of the credits at any given level.

This allows BoEs to use their discretion to assign grades as an alternative to requiring the student to undertake a new attempt in the relevant assessment, in exceptional cases where it would not be reasonable to set, or expect the student to undertake, a new attempt during the normal reassessment period. The setting of a suitable assessment should be the default course of action for students who are progressing to the next level; an example of when a BoE may consider exercising its discretion to assign a grade may be a final year Undergraduate who may be disadvantaged in the job market if they are required to undertake a new attempt at an assessment due to ECs.

Whilst a BoE may assign a grade to a failed element of assessment, where appropriate, it has no explicit powers of discretion concerning progression and award in the light of accepted ECs (other than making a recommendation to the Chair of the University Education Committee).

When considering an appropriate grade to assign to a failed element of assessment for a particular student with accepted ECs, BoEs should assure themselves that all available pertinent information has been used in deriving a grade. This information should, wherever possible, include the following: -

- The performance of the student of for other assessments in the module/assessment block;
- The overall performance of the cohort for the particular assessment;
- The observations and actions of the Panel of Examiners which considered the assessment; and
- The performance of the student on similar methods of assessment and/or similar subject matter in the level.

If, during any pre-BoE considerations, it becomes apparent that SR4.40(e) is to be used, colleagues should contact the Quality Assurance Office to discuss the various options and the guidance above.

Exceptional actions

SR4.41 states that, in exceptional cases where a BoE considers that, in the light of the ECs, the constraints set out in SR4.40 are not appropriate, the BoE should present its recommendations to the Chair of the University Education Committee for consideration and approval on behalf of Senate.

Decisions by BoEs considering ECs at a resit Board

BoEs should take care to make consistent decisions at resit Boards in relation to accepted ECs. Waiving a failed affected assessment would not normally be appropriate if the original BoE decision for the first attempt was that the student was required to undertake a reassessment – whether that first attempt was affected by ECs or not.

Longstanding and Chronic Health Conditions

By definition, longstanding and chronic health conditions fall outside of the scope of ECs, as any effects are not usually unexpected. Moreover, the support students should be receiving from the University should be taken into account, and would not usually merit a claim for ECs. Students are advised to contact their College at the start of each academic year, and following the generation of their Support profile, or as soon as possible after any changes to their needs or diagnosis, in order to explore any assessment changes that they may require. Prior to an assessment date or deadline, students will need to confirm with their College if they are using some or all of these changes, to ensure staff are aware; if not, they are advised to submit or undertake the assessment in the usual manner.

However, there may be occasions where ECs should be considered, such as where support may not have been arranged, or been in place for very long, and/or the nature or impact of the student's condition has changed.

Students with support profiles in place who experience a sudden worsening or increase in the impact of their condition should discuss this with their Department and Disability Adviser as soon as possible. Where reasonable and practicable to do so, the Department should make adjustments to students' assessments, without the need for ECs to be submitted.

Case Studies

Case 1

Scenario: Student A requests an extension of 2 weeks for her coursework, due to a recent cluster of migraines, and provides a doctor's certificate which confirms she has been affected by such circumstances for the last week.

There are 4 possible outcomes here: -

- The Chair may find the reasons for the request to be insignificant, in which case the normal deadline and late submission capping will apply.
- In accordance with the Coursework Submission Policy, requests for an extension of more than 5 working days may only be granted in exceptional circumstances. If the student's request merits an extension, the Chair of the EC Panel must decide whether this case merits such discretion being exercised. If yes, approval must be sought from the Deputy Dean (Academic Affairs) or the Associate Dean (Quality Assurance).
- If no exceptional extension is merited, but the Chair decides an extension should be granted, they may specify a revised submission deadline of up to 5 working days.
- Alternatively, the Chair may decide that the reason for the request is serious and/or long term, and refer the student for further support, and recommend they submit a claim for ECs instead of an extension request.

Given the medical evidence confirms the student has been affected for a week, option 2 seems to be the most appropriate here – granting the student an extension for the time the evidence shows her to have been unwell for, rather than the 2 weeks she has requested. The Department should also consider referring the student to sources of support too, in case this is a recurrent health condition which would be most appropriate dealt with under the Longstanding and Chronic Conditions process.

Case 2

Scenario: Student B submits ECs because his Grandfather passed away just before his January exam. He did sit the exam, but knows that due to the ECs, he had not revised as much as he should have, and he wasn't in the right frame of mind to attempt the paper. He provides a copy of the death certificate, dated over the Christmas period, and the order of service from the funeral – which took place the day after his exam. The student's ECs are accepted, and he receives a mark of 35 in the paper.

There are 2 possible outcomes here: -

- If the student has failed the assessment, the BoE should set aside his attempt in January, and allow the student a new attempt at the examination. This should be uncapped if it was the student's first attempt. This is the usual course of action in such cases where the assessment has been failed.
- If the student has failed the assessment, the BoE may decide not to award a reassessment, but rather waive the examination if the learning outcomes have been met through the student's other assessments. The BoE should consider, with reference to the programme specification, whether there were any other component parts which would demonstrate this, such as a coursework component for the same module.

The default position here would be to grant the student a reassessment (normally uncapped, unless this was a resit assessment). Should the BoE wish to waive the assessment, they will need to

demonstrate why this option was deemed appropriate, as well as being able to evidence that the learning outcomes have been met.

Case 3

Scenario: Student C submits ECs because she was mugged the week before her January exam. She did sit the exam, but was still very shaken and was not in the right frame of mind to attempt the paper. She provides a copy of the police crime reference number and confirmation that she has contacted with the University's counselling service. The student's ECs are accepted, and she receives a mark of 42 in the paper, this is significantly lower than her other grades, which average a high 2.1.

There are 3 possible outcomes here: -

- At the final BoE, the BoE should consider the student's ECs and their impact, in the context of the student's profile. If the BoE determines the ECs had no impact on the overall degree classification, it will record its decision. But where the BoE finds the student's performance has been affected to such an extent that their degree classification does not accurately reflect their ability, the BoE may wish to recommend to the Chair of UEC that the student is awarded a higher classification.
- If the BoE determines that the ECs have had a significant impact, they may exceptionally set aside the grade assigned and allow the student a new attempt in the assessment. This should be uncapped if it was the student's first attempt.
- The BoE may, exceptionally, assign grades to elements of assessment where ECs have been accepted, following the provided guidance on arriving at an appropriate grade. Grades should not normally be assigned in this manner unless there are result(s) available in at least one other element of assessment in the same assessment block, and only if the programme learning outcomes have been met through other assessments.

Option 3 may only be used in exceptional circumstances, and there is no evidence of any such circumstances here. Whilst option 2 is also to be used in exceptional circumstances, it is clear that the mark attained by the student is out of line with her other grades. Therefore, the BoE may wish to consider exercising its discretion to grant the student a new attempt, rather than following option 1, and taking account of the student's ECs at the final BoE.

Case 4

Scenario: Student D suffers from severe anxiety and depression. He has a support profile in place and is supported by the Disability and Dyslexia Service. He has a flare up of his condition in the few days leading up to one of his coursework submission deadlines, and contacts his Department.

Unless the student has not been receiving support or not receiving support for very long, or the nature or impact of their condition has changed, they should not be advised to submit ECs. Instead, they should discuss this sudden worsening or increase in the impact of their condition with their Department and Disability Adviser as soon as possible. In this case, Student D should liaise with his Adviser and Department, and the Department should make local adjustments to the student's assessment, such as providing him with an extension, without the need for him to submit ECs.

Points to note

- If a student does not submit adequate evidence, or enough information on their EC submission, those considering the ECs should proactively contact the student, rather than rejecting the ECs, and defer making a decision until further evidence or clarification is provided.
- As we owe a duty of care to all members of the University community, those reviewing ECs should always consider whether the student should be referred to support services.

Case 5

Scenario: Student E turns up to her examination; about halfway through the allotted time, she suffers a panic attack. She elects to continue with the examination and submits retrospective ECs the following day. As part of her submission, she states that following the panic attack, she felt anxious, panicked and stressed, and thought it was best to continue with the examination, rather than leaving and submitting ECs. A Student Observation Sheet, completed by one of the invigilators, confirms the student's panic attack.

Before considering the student's ECs themselves, the EC Panel should consider whether the student has a 'good reason' for submitting retrospective ECs. In this case, it appears the student has a good reason for sitting her examination – her panic attack midway through was unforeseen, and the after effects of the attack demonstrate why she continued with the assessment. The Panel should now move to consider the ECs themselves.

Case 6

Scenario: Student F submits his coursework on time, but then submits ECs four days later, stating that he had the flu at the time of his assessment, but he attempted it because he didn't know of the existence of the ECs Procedure.

Before considering the student's ECs themselves, the EC Panel should consider whether the student has a 'good reason' for submitting retrospective ECs. The EC Procedure is referenced in a number of places, including student handbooks, regulations, on our student support pages, and on the Students' Union website. In this case, it appears that the student does not have a good reason for not engaging with the ECs Procedure; the Panel should not move to consider the ECs themselves.