

Exceptional Circumstances and Coursework Extensions: Guidance for the Exceptional Circumstances Team and Boards of Examiners

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Regulations

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

Coursework Extension Requests

Requests for a five 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 EC Team, or their nominee, shall consider the extension request in a timely manner, and usually within 48 hours. The EC Team 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 five 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, their circumstances have worsened

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

Extensions of more than five working days (other than for major projects, as above) should only be granted in exceptional circumstances, and with the approval of the Vice-Dean Education or nominee.

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

Where the EC team 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.

Exceptional Circumstances and EC Team

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

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

Where the EC Team determines that ECs should be accepted, the Team 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 Team should inform the BoE of the severity of the impact of the ECs. The EC Team 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).

The outcome of the EC Team's consideration (i.e. acceptance or rejection of a decision, with an explanation for this) should be communicated to a student within five working days of the Team's decision.

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 act as set out in SR4.40 in relation to each assessment for which ECs have been accepted by the EC Team. These are set out below, along with associate guidance for BoEs.

New attempt at assessment – Reassessment

SR4.37(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

SR4.37(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 the 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 a 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

SR4.37(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 SR4.38, by presenting its recommendations to the Chair of the University Education and Student Experience 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

SR4.37(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

SR4.37(e) Exceptionally, the Board may assign grades to elements of assessment where exceptional 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 and Student Experience 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 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 SR4.37(e) is to be used, colleagues should contact the Quality Assurance Office to discuss the various options and the guidance above.

Exceptional actions

SR4.38 states that, in exceptional cases where a BoE considers that, in the light of the ECs, the constraints set out in SR4.37 are not appropriate, the BoE should present its recommendations to the Chair of the University Education and Student Experience Committee for consideration and approval on behalf of the 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 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 considered, 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, to explore any assessment changes 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 has a cluster of migraines and requests an extension of five working days. This should be approved automatically.

Case 2

Scenario B: Student B has a live exam. They have been vomiting and cannot attend the exam, thus submit an ECs claim. ECs claim should be approved by the EC Team, and the accepted ECs will be indicated on the Board paperwork for consideration by the Board of Examiners.

Case 3

Scenario: Student C has a bereavement in the family, but decides to sit their exam anyway. Afterwards, they realise they were unable to focus due to their grief and submit an ECs claim. The EC team can consider this claim as retrospective ECs and approve. This will be noted on the Board paperwork, for consideration by the BoE.

Case 4

Scenario: Student D has a depressive episode. They submit their coursework essay, but 15 days after their submission deadline they realise their mental health had prevented them completing the essay to the best of their abilities and submits an ECs claim. The grades and feedback have been released. The ECs team would need to reject this as out of time, and communicate the reason for this outcome to the student. The student could pursue an academic appeal after the Board of Examiners decisions are released.