



# **Extenuating Circumstances: Guidance for Students**

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## Who is this guidance for?

This guidance on Extenuating Circumstances is for any student on a taught programme. Research students should contact their supervisors for guidance if they encounter any difficulties which affect their studies.

## Looking after yourself

This guidance tells you what to do when things go wrong in a way that affects one or more of your assessments. It is strongly advisable that you seek help as soon as you know that you have a problem, rather than let it get worse. We cannot help you, unless you let us know you are encountering difficulties. Looking after your health and emotional wellbeing is your responsibility, but there is lots of help available to you through your Department, and through the University's support services - <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/life/supporting-you>.

## What are Extenuating Circumstances (ECs)?

The University defines ECs as: "A significant event which negatively affects a student's ability to submit work, attend an assessment or perform to their usual standard in an assessment of any type. It should be unavoidable, unexpected and beyond the control of the student."

ECs are usually health-related or serious personal or family situations that affect you.

## What is considered to be an Extenuating Circumstance?

The following are generally considered to be acceptable ECs: -

- Acute illness or injury on the day of or during a 'live' assessment, such as an exam, performance or presentation
- Extended illness or injury which lasts for more than 5 days that is serious enough to stop you from studying, writing or revising
- Death or serious illness of a close relative or family friend
- Significant domestic and/or personal problems
- Court attendance
- Jury service, where deferral has been refused by the Court
- Unforeseen representation of County or Country at a sport or other prestigious/significant event<sup>1</sup>
- Unforeseen major transport difficulties
- Victim of, or witness to, criminal activity

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list; the acceptance of ECs is at the discretion of the Departmental Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

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<sup>1</sup> Students who are aware that they will be involved in a national or international event should follow the guidance set out in the following document: <https://www.brunel.ac.uk/about/quality-assurance/documents/pdf/periods-of-absence-for-students-who-participate-in-national-international-events-staff-uidance.pdf>

## **What is not considered to be an Extenuating Circumstance?**

The following are generally not considered to be acceptable ECs: -

- Minor illnesses, e.g. as coughs, colds and short lived viruses
- Mistaking the date/time of an examination or coursework deadline
- General pressure or stress of academic work, e.g. a number of assessments with similar deadlines – you are expected to plan your work schedule
- Employment commitments
- Alarm failure on the morning of an examination
- Holidays
- Family events
- Foreseeable, planned or minor travel difficulties
- Personal computer/other IT device failure – you should have taken adequate precautionary measures, e.g. backing up work
- Inadequate time to access IT equipment/printing facilities
- Non-compatibility of IT equipment with the University's IT equipment – you should have planned and checked the compatibility
- Lack of a laptop/device of the required specification where necessary for an assessment
- Religious observance – such issues are not unforeseen and should be discussed with your Department in advance
- Sports activities – please refer to footnote 1 ,above

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list; the acceptance of ECs is at the discretion of the Departmental Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

## **Longstanding and chronic health conditions**

If you have ongoing health conditions that you can foresee will affect your assessments, you should already be receiving support from the University, such as through Student Wellbeing.

By definition, longstanding and chronic health conditions fall outside of the scope of Extenuating Circumstances as any effects are not usually unexpected. Therefore, if you have a longstanding or chronic health condition, adjustments to your assessments can be agreed with your College in advance, which you can use as and when required. Making such arrangements is advised to avoid the need to submit repeated ECs, which are likely to be rejected as your condition would not fit the definition of such circumstances.

At the start of each academic year, and following the generation of your Support profile, or as soon as possible after any changes to your needs or diagnosis, you should contact your College and arrange a meeting to discuss any assessment changes that you may require. These will be explored and agreed in principle by a member of staff within your College. Prior to an assessment date or deadline, you need to confirm with the College if you would like to use some or all of these changes, such as an agreed extension, to ensure staff are aware. Where you do not plan on using the agreed changes for an assessment, you should submit or undertake the assessment in the usual manner.

## What academic assessments are Extenuating Circumstances for?

ECs may be submitted for all forms of summative assessment<sup>2</sup>, including: -

- Examinations
- Coursework, including in-class tests, performances and presentations
- Placements
- Fieldwork

### *Examinations or other 'live' assessments*

If you experience an extenuating circumstance which prevents you being able to attend an examination or other 'live' assessment, such as a presentation or performance, you must inform your Department as soon as possible. This could be your Personal Tutor, your Programme Leader, or your Taught Programmes Office. You should also submit a claim for ECs as soon as possible, and no later than 5 working days after the date of the assessment.

If you choose to take an examination, or continue with it whilst knowing that you have ECs, but elect not to submit a claim for ECs, you will normally only be offered the opportunity for reassessment if you fail it.

### *Coursework*

If you need an extension of up to 5 working days for your coursework, this should be made in advance and in accordance with the Coursework Submission Policy.

If you need an extension of longer than 5 working days for your coursework, or you do not meet the submission deadline due to your ECs, you should carry on with the work, but submit a claim for ECs as soon as possible, and no later than 5 working days after the date of the deadline/revised deadline. You should also discuss the situation with your Personal Tutor as soon as possible.

## Retrospective Extenuating Circumstances

Brunel applies the principle that if you attend an assessment or submit coursework on time, you are declaring yourself to be in a position to do so, and are not affected by any ECs. However, EC Panels may consider, and exceptionally accept, retrospective ECs, where you have a good reason for engaging with the assessment, rather than following the normal ECs procedure.

If you do experience an extenuating circumstance that you believe may affect your performance in an examination or other 'live' assessment, but take it anyway, or if you submit coursework on time, but feel that it has been affected by ECs, you should make a claim for ECs as soon as possible, and no later than 5 working days after the date of the assessment or deadline. However, when submitting your ECs, you will also need to provide a good reason for why you did not follow the normal ECs procedure but attempted the assessment in question and then submitted an EC form.

## How do I make my Extenuating Circumstances claim?

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<sup>2</sup> Summative assessments are those which count towards your final degree classification, as opposed to a mock or practice assessment

An EC Form is available on E-vision for electronic completion. The Form, explaining the nature of the circumstances and the impact they had on you, and accompanying evidence, must be uploaded onto E-vision for submission. If you are submitting retrospective ECs, you must also provide a reason for this.

EC claims should be submitted as soon as you become aware of the issue, but no later than 5 working days after the examination or affected assessment. Claims received after this time will be rejected unless you have a valid reason for why it could not be submitted on time.

Although EC claims cannot be submitted after your work has been marked and your grade confirmed, you may be able to submit an academic appeal. Please see the section of this guidance entitled '*Can I appeal a decision on Extenuating Circumstances?*' for further details.

### **What evidence should I provide with my claim?**

The nature of the evidence you will need to submit, depends on the nature of your EC claim. Annex A sets out some examples of appropriate evidence.

You should upload your evidence at the same time as your EC Form, but you should keep the original documents in case they are required at a later date. If your evidence is not available at the time of submitting your EC Form, you need to indicate when you will be able to upload it. If waiting for your evidence means you will miss the EC deadline, do not wait to submit your EC Form.

If you have been ill for 7 days or less and did not visit a doctor, you may self-certify, and sign your own certificate confirming that you were ill. If you submit ECs evidenced by self-certification more than once in the academic year, you will be asked to meet with your Personal Tutor, who may require you to obtain further evidence, and who will discuss with you the ways in which the University can support you. If there is reason to doubt what you have written in your self-certification, you may be asked to provide further medical evidence.

If you are submitting Retrospective ECs, you may wish to submit evidence to support your 'good reason'. Although this is not a requirement, an EC Panel may not be able to accept your reasons for the submission of retrospective ECs without evidence.

### **How will my claim be considered?**

Claims submitted by the deadline will be considered by your Department's EC Panel, which meets at least monthly. The Panel will assess your claim and make a decision on whether it is accepted or not. Accepted ECs will then be taken into consideration by the Board of Examiners considering your progression and award outcomes. You will be told whether your claim has been accepted or rejected within 5 working days of the Panel's meeting; however, this may take longer during periods when the University is closed. It is important that your profile is carefully considered by the Board of Examiners, and therefore you will be informed of the decision of the Board, taking into account any accepted ECs, after the Board meeting.

The University recognises that it can be difficult to disclose sensitive, personal information to others. As such, please note that all documentation submitted will be treated sensitively, will be securely held, and will not be shared with anyone beyond those directly involved in considering your claim.

## **What happens if my claim for Extenuating Circumstances is accepted?**

If your EC claim is successful, the Board of Examiners will carefully consider your academic profile, and make a decision about how to address the impact that your ECs may have had on your performance. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to Board decisions; each case is considered carefully on its individual merits, as each student profile affected by ECs is different. Boards treat each case carefully, ensuring that the decision reached is in your best interests. There are a number of options available to Boards, which are set out in Senate Regulation 4.40; these may include offering another assessment attempt (this may be capped or uncapped, depending on whether the ECs have affected a first or second attempt); taking the ECs into account when determining a degree classification; and waiving the affected assessment.

If the Board of Examiners does not offer you the opportunity to have another attempt at the affected assessment, but you have good reasons for wanting to do so, e.g. you are applying for an internship, placement or graduate scheme, you should contact your Personal Tutor to discuss this matter, who can then draw it to the attention of the Chair of the Board of Examiners.

## **What happens if my claim for Extenuating Circumstances is not accepted?**

### *Examination*

If you did not attend your examination, you will be assigned a grade of NS (non-submission). If you did attend the examination, your work will be marked as usual. If you fail, the usual reassessment regulations for your programme will apply.<sup>3</sup>

### *Coursework*

If you did not submit your coursework, or you submitted it late, the University's Policy for Coursework Submission will apply. Any work you submitted by the original or any revised deadline will be marked as usual and that mark will be awarded. If you fail, the usual reassessment regulations for your programme will apply.<sup>4</sup>

### *Placements and fieldwork*

If your performance or attendance was inadequate, you will fail the placement. The usual reassessment regulations for your programme will apply.<sup>5</sup> If you are registered on a professional programme, failure of a placement may be managed under the University's Professional Suitability procedure.

## **Can I appeal the decision on my Extenuating Circumstances claim?**

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Senate Regulation 2 for Undergraduate programmes, and Senate Regulation 3 for Postgraduate Taught programmes

<sup>4</sup> Please see Senate Regulation 2 for Undergraduate programmes, and Senate Regulation 3 for Postgraduate Taught programmes

<sup>5</sup> Please see Senate Regulation 2 for Undergraduate programmes, and Senate Regulation 3 for Postgraduate Taught programmes



There is no right to appeal the decision of an EC Panel in relation to whether your ECs were accepted or not. However, you do have the right to appeal the decision of the Board of Examiners who considered your academic profile and made a decision about your progression or award.

Senate Regulation 12 sets out the process of academic appeals, including timeframes and the applicable grounds that appeals must be made on.

### **Academic Misconduct**

Submitting an EC claim that contains false information or includes falsified evidence, will be regarded as an attempt to gain an unfair advantage in your studies. This is academic misconduct and the allegation will be investigated under Senate Regulation 6, which carries a range of penalties up to expulsion from the University. If you are registered on a professional programme, the allegation may also be investigated in accordance with the Professional Suitability process set out in Senate Regulation 14.

## **ANNEX A**

<b><u>Circumstance</u></b>	<b><u>What evidence is required?</u></b>
Acute illness or injury lasting 7 days or less	<p>Confirmation of the illness/injury, the impact it has had/would have had on the affected assessment(s), and the dates concerned. This should be provided on: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An original medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner whilst the illness or incident was affecting you; or</li> <li>• A hospital discharge letter; or</li> <li>• A letter from Brunel's support services, who have been actively supporting you; or</li> <li>• A letter from external supporting services, who have been actively supporting you; or</li> <li>• A self-certificate; and either</li> <li>• A report from an invigilator or staff member, if the illness happened before or during an examination or 'live' assessment; or</li> <li>• Evidence of contact with your Department (such as an email) if the illness prevented you from attending an examination or 'live' assessment.</li> </ul>
Acute illness or injury lasting 7 days or more	<p>Confirmation of the illness/injury, the impact it has had/would have had on the affected assessment(s), and the dates concerned. This should be provided on: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An original medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner whilst the illness or incident was affecting you; or</li> <li>• A hospital discharge letter; or</li> <li>• A letter from Brunel's support services, who have been actively supporting you; or</li> <li>• A letter from external supporting services, who have been actively supporting you; and, if applicable,</li> <li>• Evidence of contact with your Department (such as an email) if the illness prevented you from attending an examination or 'live' assessment.</li> </ul>
Longstanding and chronic conditions	These fall outside the scope of ECs; students should receive support from Student Services, and have a Support Profile generated.
Illness of another person	<p>Confirmation of the illness, and the dates concerned. This should be provided on: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An original medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner; or</li> <li>• A letter from Brunel's support services, who have been actively supporting you; or</li> <li>• A letter from external support services who have been actively supporting you.</li> </ul>
Bereavement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Death certificate; or</li> <li>• Funeral statement; or</li> <li>• Order of service; or</li> <li>• Letter confirming the death from an independent person (usually not a family member).</li> </ul>

	Where the closeness of the relationship is not obvious, you may be asked to provide a letter from an independent person (usually not a family member) confirming this.
Significant domestic and/or personal problems	Confirmation of the circumstances, and the dates concerned. This should be provided on: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An original medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner; or</li> <li>• A letter from an independent authority (e.g. a social worker); or</li> <li>• A police report, including a crime reference number; or</li> <li>• A letter from Brunel's support services who have been actively supporting you; or</li> <li>• A letter from external support services who have been actively supporting you.</li> </ul>
Court attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A solicitor's letter including the dates of the legal proceedings and the requirement for you to attend.</li> </ul>
Jury service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter from the Court or Tribunal including the dates of the legal proceedings, and confirming that you could not be excused.</li> </ul>
Unforeseen representation of County or Country at a sport or other prestigious/significant event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A letter of confirmation from the relevant organising body; and</li> <li>• A supporting statement from your and/or a member of staff explaining why the event should be considered as significant/prestigious.</li> </ul>
Unforeseen major transport difficulty	The nature of the difficulty, why it could not reasonably have been anticipated, and why alternative arrangements could not be made; this is in addition to: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Corroboration from police or another public authority; or</li> <li>• An insurance reference number (if you were involved in a road traffic accident).</li> </ul> <p>If the incident has resulted in your needing medical attention, then the requirements for illness should also be followed.</p>
Victim of, or witness to, criminal activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police report, including a crime reference number.</li> </ul> <p>If the incident has resulted in your needing medical attention, then the requirements for illness should also be followed.</p>