



Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Guidelines, The Open University

2025 - 26



Senior Leadership Responsibility	Adam Fahey
Policy Author	Matthew Twitchett
Roles Responsible for Reviewing	Executive Director Quality, Teaching and Learning.
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Significant changes following review of strategy

Page Number or Heading Name	Details of significant change	Changes made by
Throughout	Updated to be inline with UCSE Policies. Table of Contents added.	Dani Brookes, HE Examinations and Assessment Officer

Equality Impact Assessment

The aim of an equality impact assessment (EIA) is to consider the equality implications of any new or amended policy, procedure, practice, project, function on different groups of staff, students and visitors to The University Centre. This EIA tool provides a simple framework that helps evaluate whether the change may inadvertently disadvantage protected characteristics and identify ways to proactively advance and promote equality.

You will need to consider each of the equations and provide information as to consideration and any changes made in relation to Equality, diversity and inclusion.

Date EIA completed.	5-9-25
Name of person responsible for completing the EIA	Sharon Dunphy
Role of person responsible for completing the EIA	Deputy Executive Director of HE and Quality
Who is affected by the policy / decision / change	Students and Staff employed
What's the reason for the new policy / change in policy, practice, process etc.	This is a yearly review and update required by awarding organisations

You will need to consider whether it's possible that the proposed new policy / change in policy /procedure/practice etc could discriminate or unfairly discriminate or disadvantage people. You should consider:

Who gets to participate	Who does not, or who now does not due to the changes proposed / made.
Who is at an advantage	Who is at a disadvantage, and again has this changed?
Who will benefit	Who will not benefit (or who did and now doesn't due to the changes proposed in policy
Who can access the policy	Who cannot, or now cannot.

Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with one being lowest impact and 5 being the highest)	What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers?	What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified.	Date by when and whom will this action be taken.
Age	2	Neutral. Younger students may lack confidence in navigating the EC process.	Ensure EC guidance is clearly explained during induction and accessible online.	By Dec 2025 – HE Student Support Team
Disability	5	Potential negative impact. Students with disabilities may face challenges accessing or submitting EC forms.	Ensure forms are accessible, offer support via Disability Services, and allow alternative formats.	Ongoing – HE Disability Officer
Gender (Sex)	1	Neutral. No direct barriers identified.	Continue monitoring for any gender-based disparities in EC submissions or outcomes.	Annual Review – HE programme partnership managers and HE Examinations
Gender Reassignment	3	Potential negative impact. Students may face mental health challenges or privacy concerns.	Ensure confidentiality in EC submissions and offer support via Student Services.	Ongoing – HE Student Support
Marriage or Civil Partnership	1	Neutral. No direct barriers identified.	No action required unless specific cases arise.	Annual Review – HE Examinations
Pregnancy / Maternity	4	Potential negative impact. Students may need flexibility due to health or childcare responsibilities.	Promote awareness of EC support and ensure timely response to claims.	By Jan 2026 – HE Support & Programme Leads
Race	2	Neutral to potential negative. Language barriers may affect understanding of EC process or evidence requirements.	Provide translated guidance where needed.	By Feb 2026 – HE Support
Religion or Religious Belief	2	Neutral. Religious observances may occasionally conflict with deadlines.	Ensure ECs can be submitted for religious observance conflicts and raise awareness among staff.	By Dec 2025 – HE Examinations

Protected Characteristic	What degree of impact does the change have (score 1-5 with one being lowest impact and 5 being the highest)	What is a potential positive, neutral or negative impact? Include what you have considered. Are there any barriers?	What action will be taken to address any negative impact or remove any potential barriers identified? Note if we are not able to resolve anything identified.	Date by when and whom will this action be taken.
Sexual Orientation	1	Neutral. No direct barriers identified.	Maintain inclusive language and confidentiality in EC processes.	Ongoing – HE Student Support
Any other element (care leavers, carers)	4	Potential negative impact. These students may face unpredictable responsibilities or lack of support.	Include specific guidance for these groups in EC policy and offer tailored support.	By Jan 2026 – HE Support Services

Note:

1. The terms stated under protected characteristics are the terminology used in the Equality Act 2010.
2. As part of the policy approval process Executive Board will consider the EIA assessment and any potential barriers which we may not be able to overcome and whether the action proposed will mitigate sufficiently within legislation or whether we decide to not implement the new policy if the risk are significant. If the policy is approved the EIA is also approved.

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Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Guidelines (The Open University)

INTRODUCTION

At The University Centre South Essex (UCSE) we are committed to supporting students in achieving their academic potential. However, we recognise that, at times, unexpected and uncontrollable events may significantly disrupt a student's ability to meet assessment deadlines or perform to the best of their ability. This policy outlines The University Centre's approach to managing Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) — exceptional situations that may temporarily impact academic performance.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure a fair, consistent, and transparent process for students to report such circumstances and for The University Centre to consider their impact on assessments. It also provides clear guidance on how to submit a claim, the supporting evidence required, and how decisions are made. By setting out these procedures, the policy aims to uphold academic standards while offering appropriate support to students facing genuine difficulties.

Students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this policy to understand their responsibilities, the claims process, and the importance of submitting accurate and timely information.

The University Centre South Essex (UCSE), will be referred to as The University Centre throughout this document.

1. WHAT ARE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES?

- 1.1** Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) are defined as circumstances which are unexpected, significantly disruptive and beyond the student's control which may have affected academic performance.
- 1.2** Planning, time management and the meeting of deadlines are part of the personal and professional skills expected of all students.
- 1.3** However, there may on occasions be exceptional circumstances that might affect a student's ability to meet an assessment deadline or affect the level of performance at assessment where an Extenuating Circumstances claim could be considered.

2. EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES POLICY

- 2.1** There may, on occasion, be exceptional circumstances that might affect a student's ability to meet a formal assessment deadline. Students have an obligation to make known any special circumstances which have a bearing on the production or assessment of their work. Where appropriate these circumstances may be taken into account by the Assessment Board in making a decision.

3. EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES CLAIM PROCESS

- 3.1** Students have an obligation to make any special circumstances known by completing an Extenuating Circumstances application form and submitting it via e-mail to heextcircs@southessex.ac.uk. Supporting evidence, such as medical certificates must accompany the completed application form. Further details on this can be found on the below table in section 9.
- 3.2** A full explanation of the circumstances must be included as part of the application process, to confirm the application is acceptable. Fraudulent claims will be investigated under the Student Disciplinary Code.
- 3.3** Courses are designed to ensure the assessment workload is appropriate and manageable for students and therefore delayed and deferred submissions through an Extenuating Circumstance claim should only be considered in extreme circumstances.

4. CLAIM DEADLINES

- 4.1** Applications must be submitted as close as possible to the time the circumstance took place and within two weeks of it commencing and no later than two weeks after the final submission hand in. All final extenuating claims for the academic year must be submitted by the 9th July 2026. Those received after that date will be rejected.

5. TYPES OF EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

- 5.1 Delayed Submission:** Students should be advised to hand in work at a time where they are satisfied with their submission up to a maximum of 6 working days beyond that original deadline. Working days are defined as Monday – Friday, excluding bank holidays. A successful EC application in these circumstances would mean that a student's work would be considered to have been submitted as if on time. Students are advised to discuss with their tutors and/or Higher Education support when opting for a delayed submission.
- 5.2 Deferred Submission:** If the nature of the extenuating circumstances prevent a student from being able to complete an assignment to submit delayed, they may choose to defer their submission. This allows additional time to complete the work at a later date—typically during the Summer Retrieval Period. For event-based tasks such as presentations or observations, an alternative date will be arranged in consultation with the ITE Team. A successful Extenuating Circumstances (EC) application in these cases ensures that the deferred work is treated as if it were submitted on time. Students are strongly encouraged to discuss this option with their tutors or Higher Education support before proceeding.

6. CONFIDENTIALITY

- 6.1** The Extenuating Circumstance process allows matters which are confidential to be made known directly to the members of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP)

and if requested, to the Assessment Board. Students are advised, in these circumstances, to inform their tutor that they are submitting confidential Extenuating Circumstances and not to share any further information if requested.

7. CONSIDERATION OF CLAIMS

- 7.1** The EC process is separate to the assessment process. All work will be marked as presented with no account taken of Extenuating Circumstances.
- 7.2** Extenuating Circumstances applications are presented to an ECP to consider claims and make recommendations to Exam Boards. For an ECP to take place, the Chair and Clerk's attendance is required and at least 2 other members of the panel.
- 7.3** The ECP shall comprise of the following staff roles who are all employed at The University Centre South Essex:
- Deputy Executive Director - HE and Quality (Chair)
 - Higher Education Examinations and Assessments Officer (Clerk)
 - Undergraduate Assessments Administrator - To take notes and record actions
 - Partnership Managers for UEA and UAL
 - The Head of Teaching and Learning – ITE (The Open University)
 - A member of Student Support
 - Relevant Programme Lead (Pearson Qualifications)
 - Relevant Curriculum Manager (Pearson Qualifications)
- 7.4** The Clerk will confirm to the ECP if the application meets the criteria for consideration of approval. The outcome is voted on by all members of the panel. In cases where there is a tied vote, the Chair has the final decision.
- 7.5** The Board of Examiners and the External Examiner will receive the recommendations of the ECP.
- 7.6** ECP panel meets one a month to consider any Extenuating Circumstances and will call additional panels if required.

8. GUIDANCE FOR COMPLETING THE EC APPLICATION FORM

- 8.1** Complete an application for your Extenuating Circumstances to be considered. E-mail the completed form, with evidence, from your College Email to the HE EC inbox heextcircs@southessex.ac.uk.

The Extenuating Circumstances form is available to download under [The Open University](#) on our HE Policies and Procedures webpage.

- 8.2** You should submit your Extenuating Circumstances Request (ECR) as soon as your circumstances begin to affect your ability to study. Complete the form in full, clearly stating the facts of the circumstances that have affected your work for assessment. **Important:** All sections of the form must be completed. Incomplete forms will be rejected.

- 8.3 Be realistic** - short illnesses - such as a cold, stomach bug or routine IT or transport problems are not considered grounds for ECs. Consult the EC Categories table on below before completing the form.
- 8.4 Be specific** - State the dates your performance was affected and why. Indicate specific units or assignments or projects. Tell us what impact the EC has had on your performance at assessment.
- 8.5 Seek help** - If you are not sure whether or when to submit a claim you should consult your Programme Leader, or HE Student Support.
- 8.6** Submitting a form with a genuine case does not guarantee approval by the ECP, the evidence and timescale are considered when making decisions as well as the impact on the student.
- 8.7** An approved EC does not guarantee you a pass, but the additional time may help in some cases.

9. EVIDENCE

- 9.1** Make sure you attach relevant formal evidence and documents to support your case (please see below for further guidance). It is your responsibility to provide evidence to support your application.
- 9.2** Evidence must be in English and any translation must be carried out by an official, notarised translator. We will not accept translations from unofficial sources, including personal translations. If you have any difficulties obtaining a translation, please visit [Association of Translation Companies - Homepage \(atc.org.uk\)](http://atc.org.uk)
- 9.3** If you are providing evidence from the Mental Health and Well-being Services, the evidence must relate to the period of assessment for which you are claiming and it must clearly demonstrate that you attended more than one counselling session prior to the assessment deadline.
- 9.4** If you are providing evidence from a medical practitioner, the evidence must clearly relate to the period of assessment for which you are claiming.
- 9.5** We do not accept photos as evidence alone unless specified below, but you could provide a scan/photo of a doctor's note.

Extenuating Circumstance	Examples of the type of evidence that are likely to support an EC request
Bereavement	- An obituary; order of service; death certificate; legal or medical letters; letter from undertaker. - The EC application must also state the student's relationship to the deceased. It is unlikely that further

	professional evidence detailing the effects on the student will be required.
A serious short-term illness, accident or new mental health crisis	- Letter from a health professional such as a GP, psychiatrist or mental health counsellor confirming the diagnosis and stating an opinion as to the nature and duration of any impact on the student; medical certificate; prescription; hospital admissions record; photographs of injuries (ideally identifying the student with the photograph). - Since evidence such as a photograph, prescription or admissions record, does not necessarily specify the negative affect on the student's ability to complete their assessment(s), where possible and relevant, evidence from a suitable health professional detailing these effects should also be submitted. Photographic evidence must clearly show that the circumstance relates to the student and be accompanied by additional evidence. - Any evidence that only records the student's self-reporting of the health problems will be normally deemed insufficient.
Unforeseen recent illness of dependents or close family members	Medical certificate or GP's letter relating to the dependent/family member confirming the recent sudden or severe nature of the illness. If this evidence does not also confirm the impact on the student, then independent professional third party evidence should also be submitted.
A long-term physical or mental health condition worsening or a mental health crisis	- Medical certificate, GP's letter, statement from a registered mental health practitioner or a member of the institution's Student Support Services reporting the specific deterioration or sudden change and the time period it applies to. The evidence should refer to how the change in conditions has impacted on the student. This may be provided in advance of a student's examinations and could apply to all of them in any examination period. - Evidence simply confirming the long-term condition without mentioning the recent deterioration will be normally deemed insufficient.
Covid or other respiratory illness	- Evidence of a positive covid test with the date of test noted beside it (will accept photo). - Confirmation from GP or medical practitioner.
Long-term health condition where reasonable	Letter or e-mail from the HE Disability Officer confirming that the delay in support was beyond the student's control.

adjustments are not yet in place	
Victim of a serious crime	• Police crime number, legal letters, crime report from the police or other investigating authority; an insurance claim. • Since such evidence does not refer to the impact of the event on the student, further evidence may also be required for ECs claimed to have affected the student <i>for more than a week</i>. • Claims relating to injuries or trauma suffered as a result of a motor traffic accident would normally be considered as a medical circumstance and require suitable medical evidence as outlined above.
Legal proceedings requiring court attendance	• Letter from a solicitor/legal officer or official court communication.
Representative participation in a national or international cultural or sports event	• Formal notification from the relevant official body or bodies involved. Although independent professional third party evidence outlining the impact on the student's preparation and completion of the assessment may be supplied, it is likely that impact on the student may be reasonably inferred.
Delay in starting off or breakdown of placement	• Letter or e-mail from the Department Manager of placement, Placement Mentor or Human Resources confirming that the delay in starting was beyond the student's control e.g. External References have not been returned • In the event of a breakdown in placement evidence will be required to confirm this was due to the placement institution and not the student e.g. notification of termination of placement • A letter from the Programme Lead or Practice Placement Officer confirming a plan is in place to support the student in completing the required hours or observations is required for all EC's relating to placement.
Exceptional and unforeseeable transport difficulties	• Evidence of a major transportation incident from a relevant and appropriate source (including media reports). Evidence will also need to demonstrate that the student was both affected and that there was no reasonable means of foreseeing or overcoming the difficulties.

Significant adverse recent personal/family circumstances	• Independent professional third party evidence describing the circumstances, the time period affected and the impact on the student. • Support letter from HE Support or Wellbeing services if the student is under their care
Technical Circumstances – failure attributable to the institution’s systems at the point of submission of coursework or during an event assessment such as an Observation	• Screen shot of the submission in progress. • Screen shot of a formal message published by the institution’s IT Services website advising of a systems failure. • Email from IT Services responding to the problems encountered.
Employment – This option is only eligible if you are on an employment-based qualification funded by your employer	• A letter from your Manager, Principal or Head of School confirming that unexpected additional cover or duty, upon their direction, has prevented you completing your assessment on time

10. SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

10.1 All forms should be submitted by e-mail. Please ensure that the form and accompanying evidence are in an accessible format and within normal file size limits. We are unable to accept pages or formatted document submissions from Share Point, Drop box etc.

10.2 Your form and supporting evidence must be submitted as close as possible to the time the circumstance takes place. Prompt action will make it easier to gather appropriate evidence to support your application. Applications should be submitted as close as possible to the time the circumstance took place and within two weeks of it commencing. All claims must be by the 12th of June 2026. Those received after that point will be rejected.

10.3 If a student is unable to submit their work by the original deadline, they are advised to hand in work at a time where they are satisfied with their submission, up to a maximum of six working days beyond that original deadline. Six working days is defined as Monday – Friday, excluding bank holidays. Students are advised to discuss with their tutors when opting to submit late.

10.4 If you are unable to submit within the EC delayed submission period you may request that your application is changed to a deferred submission.

10.5 Keep a copy of your submitted form and evidence for your own records.

- 10.6** Please note that panels are held monthly so you will not receive an immediate outcome. If you have applied for a Delayed Submission, please note that if approved, the latest accepted submission is 6 working days, as dictated above, and you should submit within this period if you have not heard back from the Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

11. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- 11.1** If your claim is supported by appropriate evidence, it will be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP). The ECP will establish whether your claim meets the correct criteria and you will receive notification of whether the claim has been approved or rejected, usually within 20 working days.
- 11.2** We advise students to aim to have work completed and submitted before their deadlines. Having work outstanding after an assessment deadline has passed could impact on a student's ability to focus on their remaining units and assignments. Having additional time to submit work for one unit, as the result of a successful Extenuating Circumstances application, would not be acceptable grounds for a further EC submission for another Module or assignment.

End of Policy and Guidance