



## **Extenuating Circumstances Policy**

*This policy has been drawn up with reference to the Academic Registrars Council publication entitled “A Reference Document on Academic Appeals and Extenuating Circumstances for University Practitioners.” (April 2011)*

### **1. GENERAL INFORMATON**

- 1.1 This policy outlines what students need to do if their ability to prepare for or sit (take) an assessment is affected by extenuating circumstances (ECs). The School operates an evidence-based approach using objective criteria to ensure that all claims are treated fairly and equally. Students who demonstrate extenuating circumstances should not be unduly disadvantaged or advantaged over other students.
- 1.2 The principles adopted in this policy mirror those that an employer would adopt in relation to employees who were unable to work due to extenuating circumstances. This is designed to foster a professional approach by students to their academic studies.
- 1.3 The School operates a **“Fit to Sit” policy** which means that by submitting coursework for assessment or attending an examination students are declaring themselves fit enough to do so. This is based on the principle that only the student can decide if their circumstances have had a negative impact on their assessment.
- 1.4 Students who sit an assessment cannot later claim that their performance was affected by extenuating circumstances. **Therefore, if you are not well enough to take an assessment you should not do so and submit extenuating circumstances in accordance with this policy.**
- 1.5 Extenuating circumstances will not be used to raise marks. ECs can only be used to apply for an extension to a deadline or request permission to defer an assessment to the next available opportunity.
- 1.6 If students are unable to complete assessments during the September assessment period due to extenuating circumstances, they may be **required to defer their studies for up to a year whilst the outstanding assessments are completed.** It is not possible to progress to the next part of a programme without having completed and passed the previous part as detailed in the relevant programme specification.
- 1.7 Please note that submitting a false EC claim and/or false evidence is a serious matter and will be dealt with under the School’s Disciplinary and/or Fitness to Practise Procedures.
- 1.8 By submitting an EC claim you are agreeing to the School holding this personal data for the purposes of processing your claim. The School holds this data in accordance with its

notification under the 1998 Data Protection Act. Students can refer to the School's policy on Data Protection and Student Records which is available on the School website under Student Life/Student Information.

## 2. WHAT ARE EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES?

2.1 Extenuating circumstances are usually personal or health problems and are defined as:

***“Exceptional, short-term events which are outside of a student's control and have a negative impact upon their ability to prepare for or take (sit) an assessment.”***

Extenuating circumstances must meet the following criteria:

- **Non-academic** – Problems with the management of the degree programme or with academic staff should be dealt with via the Student Complaints Procedure.
- **Out of your control** – You had no knowledge that the events would occur and you could not have done anything to prevent them from happening.
- **Impact** – The circumstances had a negative impact on your ability to prepare for or sit an assessment.
- **Relevant** – Occurred at the time of the assessment or in the period immediately leading up to the assessment.

2.2 The following is a non-exhaustive list of circumstances which are **likely** to be accepted as extenuating circumstances:

- Bereavement - death of close relative/significant other (which in an employment context would have led to a period of compassionate leave).
- Serious short term illness/accident/hospitalisation (which in an employment context would have led to a period of sickness absence).
- Evidence of a long term health condition worsening.
- Significant adverse personal/family circumstances.
- Other significant exceptional factors for which there is evidence of stress caused, i.e. victim of crime.

2.3 The following is a list non-exhaustive list of circumstances which are **unlikely** to be accepted as extenuating circumstances:

- Medical circumstances without supporting medical documentation or retrospective medical evidence (i.e. a doctor's note stating that the student was seen after the illness occurred).
- Medical circumstances which do not relate to the assessment period in question.
- Minor illness or ailment, which in a work situation would be unlikely to lead to absence from work.
- If there is a reasonable case that the circumstances were foreseeable or preventable
- Financial issues.
- Religious Observance (i.e. fasting, leaving before sundown etc.)
- Holidays/family events.
- Transport difficulties such as strikes or traffic jams.

- Late disclosure of circumstances on the basis that the student did not feel comfortable bringing the circumstances to the attention of the EC Panel.
- Poor time management (pressure of work, conflicting assessment deadlines, unavailability of books etc).
- Missing exams due to misreading of examination timetable or oversleeping
- Loss of computer data/printer problems (all work should be backed up).
- Submitting the wrong assignment or draft version of an assignment.

2.4 Assessment deadlines are given in advance to students. Students who are observing religious festivals around the time of the deadline will need to plan their work so that it is completed and submitted before the deadline. Further information on religious observance and students can be found at the following link: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/part-5/religion-belief-equality>

2.5 There may be many things which happen to you during your programme of studies such as a minor illness, a sleepless night, a minor injury, financial worries etc. However, it is not expected that these would have a significant impact on your assessment unless this can be documented by independent documentary evidence.

### **3. ONGOING MEDICAL/PERSONAL PROBLEMS**

3.1 Students with long term or recurrent medical or other problems should contact the Registry at the start of their studies. The School may be able to make reasonable adjustments to support students in this situation. If your problems are so severe that this significantly disrupts your ability to study it may be better to request an interruption of studies until your situation can be stabilised.

3.2 It is expected that long term or recurrent circumstances would normally be managed by medication or other treatment and/or support and would not fall under the scope of the extenuating circumstances policy.

3.3 Long term or recurrent circumstances may come under the scope of the extenuating circumstances policy if there is an unforeseeable and unavoidable increase in the circumstances leading up to or during the assessment. Evidence of the exacerbation of the condition and its impact upon the assessment would be required and not just evidence of the condition/problem itself.

3.4 Where special assessment arrangements have been made (e.g. sheltered examination accommodation, extra time) the same cannot be claimed as extenuating circumstances.

### **4. HOW DOES THE PROCEDURE WORK?**

4.1 All extenuating circumstances claims are considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) and reported to the appropriate Board of Examiners. This means that you may not know whether your EC claim has been accepted until after the assessment has taken place.

- 4.3 The ECP will consider the claim in relation to the information provided on the EC form and in relation to the criteria outlined in the EC policy and will decide to **accept** or **reject** the EC claim.
- 4.4 The decisions of the ECP will be forwarded to the Board of Examiners. The Board of Examiners cannot overturn a decision of the ECP nor will it have access to the details of the extenuating circumstances which remain confidential to the ECP.
- 4.5 Students will be informed of the outcome of their EC claim in writing. The decisions of the ECP and Board of Examiners are final and any challenge to these decisions must be submitted in accordance with the School's Appeal Procedures.

### **Coursework/Project**

- 4.6 If students fail to submit a coursework/project by the published deadline then they will be awarded either a reduced mark in line with the late submission of coursework policy or a mark of zero depending on how late after the deadline the work was submitted.
- 4.7 However, if your ability to complete a coursework/project is affected by extenuating circumstances you can submit an EC claim to either request an extension to the deadline or defer the assignment to the next assessment opportunity:
- a) **Requesting an extension.** You must submit your extension request before the coursework/project deadline and provide sufficient evidence to justify the length of the extension requested. Extensions can only be granted for a reasonable period of time and the maximum extension that can be agreed is 4 weeks. If you do not think you will be able to complete the assignment within 4 weeks, you would be required to defer the assessment to the next available assessment opportunity.
  - b) **Defer the coursework/project.** If you cannot complete the assignment even with an extension you should submit your extenuating circumstances request to defer the assignment to the next available assessment opportunity. You will be given a new assignment to complete with a new deadline.
- 4.8 If the claim **is accepted** you will be granted the extension or given a further opportunity to submit the coursework/project at the next available assessment opportunity.
- 4.9 If the claim is **not accepted** you will either get a mark of zero or a mark with a penalty mark deducted in line with the late submission of coursework policy and this will count as one of your attempts at the assessment.

### **Examinations/Tests**

- 4.10 If you fail to attend an examination/test on the set date then you will be awarded a mark of zero.
- 4.11 However, if your ability to take examinations/tests is affected by extenuating circumstances you can submit an EC claim to request a deferral of the examinations/tests to the next assessment period. You will be required to defer all of the examinations in the affected period.

You cannot choose between which examinations to sit and which not to sit (except under 4.12).

- 4.12 If you become unwell during an examination this will be accepted under the fit to sit policy and you should submit an EC claim along with documentary evidence.
- 4.13 If the claim **is accepted** you will be granted a deferral of the examination/test to the next available assessment opportunity. If it is not possible to repeat the examinations/tests then an alternative form of assessment may be provided.
- 4.14 If the claim is **not accepted** you will receive a mark of zero and this will count as one of your attempts at that assessment.

## **5. SUBMISSION PROCEDURE**

- 5.1 Discussing extenuating circumstances with a member of staff does not constitute a submission of an EC claim. Individual members of staff cannot alter examination deadlines, grant extensions or exempt students from taking an assessment.
- 5.2 EC claims must be submitted to the Registry on the EC Form. The claim should be concise and provide full details of the nature and timing of the circumstances and how these have impacted upon your assessment.
- 5.3 If the circumstances are highly personal then you should submit the EC claim to the Registry in a sealed envelope marked 'confidential'. All EC claims will be considered in confidence by the EC Panel but advice may be sought on their validity with external agencies such as a doctor, if appropriate. In such situations the EC claim would be anonymised.
- 5.5 If extenuating circumstances occur **before** an assessment has taken place then the EC claim must be submitted at that time.
- 5.6 If the extenuating circumstances occur **at the time of** the assessment then they should be submitted within **7 working days** as follows:
- Coursework/Project within **7 working days** after the coursework/project deadline
  - Tests/Presentations within **7 working days** after the date of the test/presentation
  - Examinations within **7 working days** after the date of the last affected exam
- 5.7 If, for a good reason, a student is unable to submit their EC claim by the published deadlines then the claim may be considered if it is submitted prior to the Board of Examiners' meeting.
- 5.8 EC claims which are not submitted by the published deadlines can only be considered under the School's Appeal procedures. Students must demonstrate on appeal that the EC claim could not have been made known to the School for a valid and overriding reason. As mentioned previously, being embarrassed about your circumstances will not constitute a valid reason for not submitting them.

## **6. SUPPORTING EVIDENCE**

- 6.1 EC claims must be supported by independent documentary evidence otherwise they will be rejected. Adequate evidence must be submitted by the student as the School cannot obtain evidence on a student's behalf. The evidence must give details of the duration and the impact of the circumstances upon the student and the assessment.
- 6.2 All evidence submitted must be
- Provided by an independent professional (i.e. counsellor, doctor, solicitor etc.) Evidence will not be accepted from a family member, personal friend, friend of the family, academic member of staff or fellow student.
  - Printed on headed paper and signed and dated by the appropriate professional.
  - Obtained at the time the extenuating circumstances occurred. Post-dated evidence will not be accepted unless it can be demonstrated that the evidence could not have been obtained at that time.
  - Original. Photocopies will not be accepted except for officially certified copies of death certificates. Electronic evidence such as faxes and emails will not be accepted. The Registry will photocopy and return original documents if required.
  - Provided in English. If the documentary evidence is not in English this must be accompanied by an official certified translation.
- 6.3 If you are finding it difficult to obtain evidence for certain circumstances then you should arrange an appointment with the MPharm Student Support Manager or the Postgraduate Programmes Manager who may be able to provide a supporting statement for you.
- 6.4 If the documentary evidence is unavailable at the time of submitting the EC claim, students must state on the EC Form when the evidence will be available. The EC claim will be considered once the documentary evidence has been received.

## 7. EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES / DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

### **ILLNESS/INJURY/HOSPITALISATION**

The medical certificate must be a confirmed diagnosis by a registered medical practitioner and be specific about the nature of the illness and the likely impact it has had upon the assessment. The date of the certificate must demonstrate that the student visited the medical practitioner during the period of illness and not afterwards (post-dated medical evidence). Self-certification of illness is not acceptable.

#### Evidence *(one of the following)*

- A medical certificate signed by a registered medical practitioner verifying that the illness affected the student during the period claimed.
- A signed statement from a registered medical practitioner confirming the requirement to attend hospital.

### **ILLNESS OF A DEPENDENT/RELATIVE**

The student will need to explain in their EC form why they were required to provide this support instead of another member of the family.

#### Evidence *(one of the following)*

- A medical certificate signed by a registered medical practitioner verifying the illness.
- A signed statement from a registered medical practitioner confirming the requirement to attend hospital.

### **BEREAVEMENT**

The School appreciates that death certificates are often difficult to obtain however the requirement to see this documentation is in order to prevent fraudulent claims. Students who are unable to provide a death certificate can provide one of the other forms of documentary evidence listed.

#### Evidence *(one of the following)*

- A death certificate/official copy of a death certificate
- A coroner's report
- A letter from a family doctor confirming the bereavement
- A letter from a doctor/counsellor confirming the impact the bereavement has had upon the student.

### **VICTIM OF CRIME**

The School acknowledges that in certain circumstances victims of crime will not have contacted the Police. In such circumstances evidence from a counsellor, victim support agency or medical practitioner will be accepted.

#### Evidence *(one of the following)*

- Police/crime report. (A crime number on its own is not acceptable.)
- Signed statement from a registered medical practitioner.

### **PERSONAL PROBLEMS / TRAUMA**

This can include a range of issues such as separation from spouse/partner, conflict with others, etc. The statement must verify what impact this has had upon assessment.

Examination stress is a common experience and not considered an extenuating circumstance (unless in an acute form documented by a registered medical practitioner). Students who suffer from examination stress should seek support prior to sitting examinations.

#### Evidence

- Signed statement from a registered medical practitioner verifying the impact the events have had on the student and their assessment.

### **EXCEPTIONAL WORK COMMITMENT (Part-time students only)**

The School appreciates that many students work to finance their studies however full-time students will not be eligible to claim for work-related extenuating circumstances. Part-time students may submit a claim for extenuating circumstances based on work commitments if the work requirement is unexpected and/or non-negotiable.

#### Evidence

- Signed letter from employer confirming the work requirement and its duration.

### **COURT ATTENDANCE**

This can include attendance at tribunals, jury service and the requirement to attend court as a witness, defendant or plaintiff.

#### Evidence *(one of the following)*

- Official correspondence from the court/tribunal confirming attendance.
- Solicitor's letter detailing the nature and dates of the legal proceedings and the requirement for the student to attend.

## **TRAVEL DELAYS**

Travel delays will not normally be considered as valid extenuating circumstances. Students should allow for transport difficulties and arrange to leave home in plenty of time for examinations or coursework deadlines. However, if there is a major and unexpected disruption to a travel service, this may be considered under the extenuating circumstances policy.

### Evidence

- Written confirmation from a transport official.
- Information from the travel providers' website confirming the disruption.

## **SCHOOL COMPUTER PROBLEMS**

Computer problems experienced due to the failure of School network systems will only be considered if the network failure exceeds 24 hours and occurs immediately prior to the assessment deadline. Students should plan to finish and submit coursework well in advance of the deadline in order to limit the impact of such a problem.

Routine computer problems such as viruses, disk corruption, printer problems, and short term network problems are not acceptable as extenuating circumstances. Students are expected to take proper precautions to avoid such problems and make backup copies of work.

### Evidence

- Written confirmation from a member of School IT services.

## **OTHER SERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES**

This list of extenuating circumstances is not exhaustive and the School appreciates that other serious circumstances may have an impact on assessment performance. If you are unsure, please contact the Registry for advice.

### **Document Version**

<b><i>Version</i></b>	<b><i>Author</i></b>	<b><i>Changes</i></b>	<b><i>Date</i></b>
1.0	John Peck, Head of Registry	Policy Produced.	Sep 2010
1.1	John Peck, Head of Registry	Policy updated to "Fit to Sit".	Sep 2011