Technical Failures Policy 2020-21

Introduction

The shorter duration of online exams means that IT and internet failures can have a material impact on a student even if they have carefully managed their time.

This policy is separate from UCL's Extenuating Circumstances Procedures.

If this policy does not cover a particular situation, the Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel should contact [Academic Services](#) to discuss alternative solutions.

Overarching Principles

UCL will build the possibility of technical difficulties into the design of the examination process from the start. We will do this by giving all students extra time in all exams, either by running 24-hour online open-book exams or by adding an additional one-hour Upload Window to time-limited online exams.

Nevertheless, there may be times when technical issues are so severe that a student still cannot submit within the extended window. Within defined parameters, students can apply for a Deferral without Tuition to the next normal occasion using a simple [Exam Query Form](#).

Because UCL has already built extra time into the assessment process, technical failure claims will need to be supported by evidence and are not eligible for self-certification.

Examinations

'Examination' refers to written assessments taken under controlled conditions with a fixed start and end time. In the past these would have taken place in examination rooms; in the current circumstances, examinations are being delivered remotely.

The following arrangements apply to centrally-managed exams on the AssessmentUCL platform; where departments manage their own exams, they should aim to follow the same principles as closely as they can.

Additional time for all students in all exams

In 2021, all centrally-managed exams will be online, open-book assessments:

- **24-hour online, open-book exams:** Most exams will be 24 hours and the potential for technical difficulties will be 'built in' to the 24-hour format, giving students plenty of time to deal with any issues that they might encounter.

- **Time-limited exams:** Some departments are running exams with a shorter duration within the 24-hour window: in these exams, the clock will start when the student logs in and selects START. The potential for technical difficulties will be built in via an additional, one hour 'Upload Window' for students to submit their work e.g. if the examination timetable indicates a three-hour exam, students will have a total of four hours to upload their work.

All candidates should read the guidance on how to prepare for an online exam to ensure that they make the best use of the 24-hour period/ Upload Window and do not run out of time.

The AssessmentUCL platform will prevent students from uploading their work after the 24-hour period/ Upload Window has ended. To allow for long upload times, the submission will be time-stamped when the student selects SUBMIT and begins the upload, not when the upload completes.

If students do experience technical issues

If a student experiences technical issues they must report the incident to the Examinations Team as soon as possible using the Exam Query Form.

The Examinations Team will pass on the report and submission data to the relevant Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

EC Panel considerations

In order to encourage fairness and consistency across UCL, the EC Panel should be guided by the following principles:

Mitigation

Mitigation is limited to a Deferral without Tuition to the next normal occasion (usually the Late Summer Assessment Period).

Evidence

Because UCL has already built a range of mitigations into the assessment process, requests for deferrals on the grounds of technical failure must be supported by evidence and are not eligible for self-certification; however, the type of evidence required should be easy to access in the majority of cases.

Acceptable evidence might include:

- Submission data from the UCL Examinations Team or the department running the exam

- Screenshots or photos of error messages, network failures etc.

- Emails or text messages from internet service providers

However, in line with the Extenuating Circumstances regulations, the Faculty EC Panel can suspend the requirement for evidence in exceptional circumstances (see Chapter 4, Section 6.7, paragraph 4).

Criteria for Considering Claims

Claims should only be approved if the circumstances are substantial, material and unforeseeable, and if the student can demonstrate that they made a concerted effort to report the issue at the time of the event or as soon as their access was restored. For example:

- Internet failure for 10 minutes should not prevent a student from submitting on time if they have managed their time appropriately, but internet failure for 24 hours could have a material impact on a student

- Students should expect that it will take time to upload a document and allow themselves enough time to do so

- Students are expected to know the timing of an exam (including timezone differences)

- Students are expected to upload the correct documents

- Students should manage their time sensibly, and start the exam with enough time to finish by the deadline

- Students should be able to demonstrate that they have attempted to submit before the deadline

- Students should be able to demonstrate that they reported the technical failure at the time that it happened or as soon as possible thereafter.

Other Assessment Methods

Please refer to the further guidance on Technical Issues and Extenuating Circumstances for details.

Appealing a Technical Failure Decision

1) If a student is unhappy with a Technical Failure Decision, they may appeal the outcome using the following procedure.

2) Appeals must be submitted within two weeks of the Technical Failure Decision being communicated to the student*.

3) Appeals will only be considered on one or more of the following grounds:

- There was a significant irregularity in the conduct of the decision-making process, or the process was not conducted in accordance with the Technical Failures in Online Exams policy

- New evidence has come to light which could affect the outcome of the decision, and there are compelling reasons why the student could not have reasonably submitted this at the time of the original request

4) Student handbooks/ Moodle should include clear details of where to submit Extenuating Circumstances; Technical Failure Decision Appeals should be submitted to the same office.

5) Appeals will be considered by the Chair of the Faculty Extenuating Circumstances Panel, who will determine whether to uphold the original decision or make a new decision.

6) The FECP Chair should communicate their decision to the student in writing within one week of receiving the request.

7) If, after the appeal, a student is still unhappy with the decision, they should refer to Chapter 6, Section 10: UCL Student Complaints Procedure.

*This appeals procedure was published on 7 May 2021. Any students who reported Technical Failures before this date and wish to appeal the decision, must submit their appeal by Monday 24 May 2021.

Technical Issues and Coursework

When submitting coursework, students should give themselves plenty of time to upload their submissions by the published deadline and technical failures will not normally be considered valid grounds for Extenuating Circumstances unless there are very exceptional reasons for doing so.

If there are exceptional circumstances which have had a significant impact on the student, EC Panels can use their discretion to change a 'Category C' circumstance into a 'Category B' circumstance.

Students must provide evidence (e.g., screenshots or photos of error messages, network failures etc., emails or text messages from internet service providers) to support their claim.

Technical issues must have had a material impact on the student; minor or reasonably-foreseeable technical issues will not be considered as valid grounds. If the deadline is missed, UCL's normal late submission penalties will apply (Chapter 4, Section 3.12 Coursework Deadlines & Late Submissions).

Technical Issues and Take-Home Papers

'Take-Home Paper' refers to a written examination with a fixed start and end time but with a duration of more than 24 hours e.g., 48 or 72 hours. These are managed by departments rather than the central Examinations Team. For the purposes of this policy, we are recommending that these are viewed as being closer to 'coursework' than to examinations i.e., the normal EC and Late Submission rules apply. However, due to the relatively short nature of these assessments, it is recognised that substantive technical failures could have a disproportionate impact on a student. EC Panels should consider whether it would be reasonable to relax the 'normal' Grounds for ECs and allow severe technical difficulties to be considered.

Technical Issues and Practical Examinations

'Practical Examinations' include presentations, laboratory work, practicals, orals, OSCEs etc. where the student has a set number of minutes or hours in which to perform a task. These may

take place under controlled conditions, but would not usually fall under the regulations in Chapter 4, Section 4: Examinations.

At the time of the assessment, the internal examiners should use their discretion to allow for any technical or internet failures which the student could not have reasonably foreseen. For example, a student might reasonably foresee that a PowerPoint file is faulty, but might not reasonably foresee that their internet connection would drop in the middle of their presentation. As these types of assessments are often highly discipline-specific, departments might find it helpful to give students guidance on how best to prepare for the assessment and minimise the chances of technical failures.

The internal examiners should use their discretion to decide whether the assessment can go ahead, or if the student will need to undertake the assessment at a later date – for example, if there are other students waiting to be assessed, it may not be possible to continue with the assessment. If this is the case, the student may submit an Exam Query Form. Departments should make sure that a local Exam Query Form is created and clearly communicated to students.