



UNIVERSITY OF  
WINCHESTER

## EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES & SELF-CERTIFICATION POLICY

2024/5

<b>Document Title:</b>	Exceptional Circumstances and Self-Certification Policy
<b>Responsible Role and Department:</b>	Academic Registrar
<b>Approving Body:</b>	Senate
<b>Date of Approval:</b>	25 June 2024
<b>Date Effective From:</b>	1 September 2024
<b>Review Date:</b>	Annually
<b>Indicate whether the document is for public access or internal access only</b>  <b>Indicate whether the document applies to collaborative provision?</b> <i>(Strikethrough text, as appropriate)</i> <b>Document store link</b>	Public Access <del>Internal Access Only</del>  Applies to Collaborative Provision  <a href="https://winchester.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-and-governance/policies-and-procedures/">https://winchester.ac.uk/about-us/leadership-and-governance/policies-and-procedures/</a>
<b>Summary/Description:</b>  This policy sets out the regulatory frameworks for students to notify the University and access support where exceptional impacts beyond their control either delay or prevent them from attending and/or submitting assessed work on time.  These regulations make reference to other policies, procedures and regulations which can be found here: <a href="#">Policies and Regulations - University of Winchester</a>	

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## Introduction

1. The University of Winchester provides a holistic learning experience for students that is integrated, proactive and aspirational. We empower students to aim to 'get it right first time and on time'.
2. All students have a responsibility to manage their learning during their registration at the University and are required to complete and submit, or sit, a wide range of assessments. This requires students to balance their workload and ensure assessments are submitted, or sat, to stated deadlines.
3. However, the University recognises that there may be times when exceptional circumstances, beyond their direct control, prevent students from completing work to deadlines. This policy details the University's approach to supporting students in these circumstances.
4. There are different routes students can engage with to access support, namely their Personal Academic Tutor, Module and Programme Leaders, Faculty Offices and [Student Support and Success \(SSaS\)](#) via their Faculty Student Support & Success Advisor.
5. Advice on these Procedures can be sought from the Faculty Student Support and Success Advisor (SSSA) or the Student Union.
6. At all times students are encouraged to seek support so they may be guided on the best course of action including submission of an Exceptional Circumstances claim, assessment for a Learning Support Agreement or Self-Certification. This includes those students who may live with long-term health conditions or disabilities and who would benefit from additional support.
7. Where students have experienced an impact on their ability to meet assessment deadlines then they can apply to have their evidenced Exceptional Circumstances considered for an extension (Section 1 below) or can Self-Certify without the need for evidence (Section 2 below).

## SECTION 1 Exceptional Circumstances

### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Exceptional circumstances are circumstances outside the control of the student which prevent them from sitting or submitting an assessment on the specified deadline or to the customary standard of achievement'.
- 1.2 Students may apply for either a 10 working day extension or to defer their assessment(s) to the next assessment opportunity once per year for each assessment through the Exceptional Circumstances (ECs) procedures.
- 1.3 All assessment attempts must be completed within each year of study and any incomplete module assessments will either require Trail Credit or Repeat Study processes as defined in the *Academic Regulations*
- 1.4 The student's programme will clearly communicate when students' assessment deadlines are and these will align to defined assessment periods within the Academic Calendar.
- 1.5 All Exceptional Circumstances applications must be accompanied by supporting evidence, which is the student's responsibility to source. The University can consider both external evidence and internal evidence to support a claim.
- 1.6 Faculties shall maintain accurate records of all applications and, if appropriate, make notes on the student record.

### 2 What is and is not an 'Exceptional Circumstance'

- 2.1 Exceptional Circumstances are either

- a. unforeseeable, in that the student could have no reasonable prior knowledge of the event concerned and/or
- b. unavoidable, in that the student could have done nothing reasonably in their power to prevent or avoid such an event

2.2 Listed below are examples that the University would normally regard as exceptional circumstances:

- a. Bereavement
- b. Accident \*
- c. Acute, unforeseen illness that would normally lead to missing work
- d. Representation in a national/international event which could not be foreseen
- e. Victim of crime or non-criminal event being investigated under internal university conduct and disciplinary procedures
- f. The worsening or aggravation of a diagnosed physical or mental health condition, complications relating to a diagnosed disability or other recognised health condition
- g. Serious adverse personal or family circumstances, such as unexpected caring responsibilities
- h. Transport difficulties beyond the control of the student preventing them from attending a scheduled assessment, e.g. examination or viva voce.
- i. Problems affecting specialised hardware or software supplied via a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) or equivalent to support the student's learning as documented in the student's Learning Support Agreement

2.3 Listed below are examples that the University would not normally regard as exceptional circumstances:

- a. Circumstances that fall outside of the relevant assessment or learning period
- b. Physical or mental health condition supported by medical evidence which is not within a reasonable time frame of the assessment submission date or scheduled assessment date\*
- c. Long term health condition for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments
- d. Minor illness or ailment that would not normally lead to missing work
- e. Routine medical appointments that can be rescheduled
- f. Transport problems which could have been avoided by the student or where alternative travel arrangements would be reasonably available (e.g. missed bus or train)
- g. Holidays
- h. Attendance at weddings or other celebration events
- i. Moving house
- j. Change of employment where this is within a student's control
- k. Financial issues
- l. Information Technology issues [for exceptions, see 2.4 below]
- m. Claims that students were unaware of the published dates, times, format of submission for assessment and venues for exams or practical assessments where these were clearly publicised
- n. Complaints against staff or in relation to delivery of the module/programme.
- o. Students in receipt of support for learning difference including dyslexia would not be eligible

for exceptional circumstances on the grounds of the diagnosis alone

- p. Religious Observances, for which the University makes separate provisions

*\*Short-term illnesses would normally be covered by the Self-Certification process*

- 2.4 It is acknowledged that unexpected circumstances may prevent access to the campus and University equipment or resources on health and safety grounds or other reasonable restrictions. Where these situations occur, the University will advise and guide students on mitigations put in place to reduce the impact such as rescheduling of assessments or the granting of de facto extensions for all impacted students.
- 2.5 Students enrolled on an approved Distance Learning route are eligible to apply for Exceptional Circumstances Applications on IT grounds that specifically impact their assessment submissions where the impact is evidentially out of their control.
- 2.6 Should students encounter information technology problems when sitting an online exam whilst off-campus, then students should try to obtain proof of the issue (e.g. screenshot of error) where reasonable to do so, and students must report the problem including the exact time of the incident to their programme administrator or online proctor (invigilator) immediately. Students should follow this up by submitting an Exceptional Circumstances application in the usual way.

### **3 Process for Exceptional Circumstances Applications**

- 3.1 There are two stages for Exceptional Circumstances applications:
  - a. Stage 1 (EC1) : This is an initial application at the first instance and is for students who have corroborating evidence or wish to notify the Faculty that they are experiencing an impact but are awaiting evidence (see 4.11). Students are encouraged to seek advice and support from Student Support & Success where the impact is of a nature that they may not wish to disclose to their Faculty. In these circumstances Student Support & Success may corroborate as the supporting evidence (see 4.5)
  - b. Stage 2 (EC2): This is where either the initial exceptional circumstance has been exacerbated or is ongoing and the student may need additional support. Where Exceptional Circumstances opportunities are exhausted then the Support to Study processes would normally be instigated.
- 3.2 It is the student's responsibility to ensure an Exceptional Circumstances Application is completed if needed and relevant evidence submitted.
- 3.3 Evidence should normally be independent third-party evidence (e.g. a medical professional, counsellor, the police, lawyers) and the student should upload an official pdf document with the EC application.
- 3.4 Supporting evidence from relatives or other students is invalid.
- 3.5 Students apply to their Faculty for exceptional circumstances and Internal supporting evidence can be provided by Student Support & Success for Stage 1 and Stage 2 applications where
  - a. external evidence is either unavailable or would be considerably delayed
  - b. the nature of the Exceptional Circumstance is of a significantly sensitive nature that the student reasonably does not want it widely disclosed.
  - c. Student Support and Success have provided support in regard to issues highlighted and where they are the only reasonable source of evidence available
- 3.6 Evidence must be in English except where the provision is not delivered in English. Where the original document is not in English the student must provide the original evidence and a translation. The University may check the accuracy of the translation.

3.7 The table below details examples of acceptable evidence to support an Exceptional Circumstances Application. The examples of valid Exceptional Circumstances and acceptable evidence are not exhaustive and an Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review may require authorisation for additional evidence examples or evidence to be considered by the Academic Registrar:

Examples of valid exceptional circumstances	Examples of acceptable evidence
Bereavement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Order of service</li> <li>• Death certificate</li> <li>• Obituary/Notification of death (website / newspaper)</li> <li>• Letter from a veterinary practitioner</li> </ul>
Accident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police report</li> <li>• Insurance claim documents</li> <li>• Doctor's note/Medical certificate</li> <li>• Hospital admission record</li> </ul>
Acute, unforeseen illness *  <i>* This would also include cases where a student's relative or person of significance is affected</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctor's note/Medical certificate</li> <li>• Letter or email from medical professional or other relevant independent professional (e.g. therapist or counsellor)</li> <li>• Hospital admission record</li> <li>• Photo of a prescription or medication prescribed</li> </ul>
Representation in a national/international event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official letter of participation in for event or equivalent, with detail of how it participation was unforeseen</li> </ul>
Victim of crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crime reference number</li> <li>• Insurance claim documents</li> <li>• In case of sexual assault or similar, Student Support and Success support would be an acceptable alternative</li> </ul>
Non-criminal investigation where claimant is the Reporting Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence from Head of Casework of ongoing investigation</li> </ul>

<p>The worsening or aggravation of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A diagnosed physical or mental health<sup>1</sup> condition*</li> <li>▪ A diagnosed disability*</li> <li>▪ Pregnancy*</li> </ul> <p>* All of the above would also include cases where a student's relative or person of significance is affected</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctor's note/Medical certificate</li> <li>• Hospital admission record</li> <li>• Letter (or similar) from medical professional or other relevant independent professional (e.g. therapist or counsellor), or evidence of pending appointment</li> <li>• For more information about support for pregnancy related circumstances, please refer to the <a href="#">Pregnancy, Adoption and Becoming a Parent While Studying - Guidelines</a></li> <li>• Learning Support Agreement with specific support for ECs<sup>2</sup></li> </ul>
<p>Serious adverse personal, domestic or family circumstances, *</p> <p><i>* This would also include cases where a student's relative or person of significance is affected</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter (or similar) from an independent professional or organisation (e.g. solicitor, faith leader, Social Worker, Citizens Advice Bureau);</li> <li>• Doctor's note/Medical certificate<sup>3</sup></li> <li>• Hospital admission record</li> <li>• Letter (or similar) from medical professional or other relevant independent professional (e.g. therapist or counsellor)</li> <li>• Insurance claim documents</li> <li>• Photographic evidence of property damage</li> <li>• Letter from registered childcare or other caring provider confirming why care cannot be Provided</li> </ul>
<p>Transport difficulties beyond the control of the student</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traffic report (website or newspaper)</li> <li>• Official report of traffic accident</li> </ul>
<p>Problems affecting specialised hardware or software supplied via a Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) or equivalent to support the student's learning as documented in the student's Learning Support Agreement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmation from a University Department, such as Student Support and Success or IT Services</li> </ul>

3.8 EC applications are submitted through Faculties online, who shall ensure clear information is provided to students on the process of applying.

3.9 Exceptional Circumstances Applications must be submitted within a 10 working day window, namely 5 working days before and 5 working days after the scheduled assessment deadline for which a

<sup>1</sup> This is for students who have difficulties associated with their impairment that are likely to fluctuate in severity throughout the year. This may cause them difficulty meeting some deadlines and so exceptional circumstances are supported by Student Support and Success. This support is subject to review on an annual basis.

<sup>2</sup> Students may be eligible to apply to the Student Support Fund to help with the costs of this.



student wishes to have their Exceptional Circumstances claim considered.

- 3.10 Students who submit an Exceptional Circumstances claim without evidence will be advised that the application will be logged and considered but any approved outcomes, will not be applied before evidence is submitted and considered. Evidence needs to be submitted within 6 working weeks of the original EC deadline after which, the EC claim will be dismissed if no evidence is received. (See section xxx)
- 3.11 Where an Exceptional Circumstances claim is submitted without evidence, any submitted work or subsequent resit opportunity would only be uncapped once evidence is received and the claim is approved.
- 3.12 Any late evidence should be sent via email to the Faculty EC email address
- 3.13 Exceptional Circumstances claims are considered within the Faculties whereby evidence to support an application will be assessed .
- 3.14 At the start of each semester the Faculty will agree the weeks in which Exceptional Circumstances Evidence reviews will take place and advertise them to students. They will agree the number of Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review dates based on their individual needs.
- 3.15 Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review decisions do not have to be unanimous, but the majority of members must be in agreement. Where a decision cannot be reached then the Associate Dean or Dean can, if not reviewer, make a decision.
- 3.16 The Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review will communicate outcomes to students by University email address within 3 working days after the Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review. Relevant members of staff will also be informed, as appropriate.
- 3.17 Outcomes in terms of deadline extensions are as 2.5 below.
- 3.18 If the Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review determines that the claim does not meet the conditions of this Policy, the student will be advised that their Application is unsuccessful and their assessment submission will fall under the Late Submission Rule, as outlined in the [Assessment Regulations](#).
- 3.19 Each Faculty will hold a final Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review before the Semester 1 and Semester 2 mark deadline and a further Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review in the summer. This Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review will have the same membership plus a member of designated staff from Student Support and Success and Student Casework or Registry. The purpose of these reviews is to consider late submissions which have been subsequently evidenced.

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*1 Faculty staff should speak with the Faculty Student Support and Success Advisor (or, in their absence, the Faculty Support Coordinator) if there are concerns around the student's welfare.*

*2 For Postgraduate Research Policy, see this [document](#).*

- 3.20 Due to the frequency of Exceptional Circumstances Evidence reviews within the Faculty, students may not hear the outcome of their Exceptional Circumstances claim before their assessment deadline. In these circumstances students should continue to work on their assessment(s) while they await the outcome of the Exceptional Circumstances Evidence review.

#### **4. Extension periods available under Exceptional Circumstances Applications**

- 4.1 Approved extension periods subsequent to an approved Exceptional Circumstances claim are as follows:
  - a. **Written Assessments** – 10 additional working days, defined as Monday to Friday and not weekends, public holidays or University closure days, from the original deadline. The 15 days feedback limit is from any new submission date.

- b. **Exams or other Time Constrained Assessments (scheduled)** – deferred to the next scheduled exam/assessment period. An alternative assessment may be permitted, or arrangements made between Registry and the Programme to facilitate individual assessments outside of the usual assessment periods. Alternatively, the student may be advised to interrupt study until the next formal assessment period.
  - c. **Group Assessments** – where one person in a group makes an Exceptional Circumstances Application, the rest of the group should complete the assessment by the original deadline and the student with the extension should complete an alternative assignment within the 10 day extension period.
  - d. **Practical assessment/viva** – May be either deferred to the next scheduled assessment period or to be rescheduled within 10 working days, from the original deadline as determined by the Module Leader dependent on practical requirements.
  - e. For **Postgraduate Independent Study** modules, where an extension request would result in missing the deadline for marks to be considered at the Progression and Award Board, the extension shall normally be extended to the next scheduled assessment period or the first working day of January or the last working day of August whichever is sooner.
  - f. **Placements** the Faculty will make local decisions based on the requirements of the programme and in line with any Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) restrictions or requirements
- 4.2 All extensions must be completed within the same academic year as the original assessment opportunity. Where it is either not practicable for a student to complete the assessment within the prescribed 10 day extension period, or due to the continuing impact of the Exceptional Circumstances then a student may be required to either undertake Trail Credit, Repeat Study or interrupt study.
- 4.3 Where a student has been granted an approved extension under Stage 1 (EC1) but then is unable to submit by the extension deadline and is required to utilise a stage 2 (EC2) application whereby the extension would, subsequent to approval, be for the next assessment opportunity rather than a further 10 working day extension.

## 5. Appeal Against Exceptional Circumstances Outcomes

- 5.1 Students have the right to appeal a rejected claim on the following grounds:
- a. Procedural Irregularity: The University has failed to follow the requirements of this Policy in such a way that the legitimacy of the decision reached is called into question;
  - b. Perversity of Judgement: the decision does not, in the student’s opinion, appropriately reflect
  - c. the weight of evidence presented.
- 5.2 Students may not appeal:
- a. On the grounds that they did not understand, or were not aware of, this policy.
  - b. In relation to the same assessment more than once by means of this process.
  - c. Where there is no evidence that they accessed University support, either via Student Support & Success and/or their Faculty, e.g. Personal Academic Tutor, Programme Leader, Module Leader or member of the Programme Administration team where it would have been reasonable for them to do so at the time of the assessment opportunity in question.
- 5.3 Further information can be found in the *Appeals Regulations*

## 6. Late Submission of Exceptional Circumstances Claims

- 6.1 There may be certain exceptional reasons why a student may not be able to submit either an Exceptional Circumstances Claim within the prescribed deadlines. Examples of such

exceptional reasons might include:

- a. A serious accident, incident, assault or critical onset of a mental or physical condition or illness where the student required acute medical care, hospitalisation or other professional intervention
- b. Detention or incarceration by police or other statutory services

6.2 In such cases, if the deadline for submitting an Exceptional Circumstances Application has been missed, a student is advised to submit an Exceptional Circumstances Claim at the earliest opportunity, stating the reasons for the late submission of their claim and providing corroborating evidence for both the exceptional circumstance and the reason for the late application. Late claims, with supporting evidence, may be submitted no more than 6 weeks after the original Exceptional Circumstances deadline. Claims submitted after this time will be automatically dismissed.

## **7. Quality Assurance and Monitoring of Exceptional Circumstances Procedures**

- 7.1 The Academic Registrar will be responsible for the governance of Exceptional Circumstances procedures and ensure that Faculty reviewers have access to training and guidance information in order to deliver parity and consistency across the University.
- 7.2 An annual report on Exceptional Circumstances claims will be submitted to the Student Experience Committee by the Academic Registrar.

## **8. Exceptional Circumstances and Support to Study**

8.1 Support to Study may be initiated when a student does not submit after two assessment attempt opportunities, subsequent to an Exceptional Circumstances claim being approved for the same assignment. All avenues of support for students should be exhausted before Support to Study is initiated. (See *Supporting Students to Succeed Policy*).

## **9. Exceptional Circumstances Evidence - Additional Faculty Powers**

- 9.1 Exceptional Circumstances Evidence reviews are empowered, utilizing the same supporting evidence provided by a student and subsequent approval decision to uncap a late submission grade, if the evidence supports a claim that impacted the student from submitting work by the deadline.
- 9.2 Exceptional Circumstances Evidence reviews are empowered, utilizing the same supporting evidence provided by a student and subsequent approval decision, to offer a second attempt that is uncapped. This process should be granted where an imminent assessment opportunity is available and could be taken by the student before the next scheduled assessment period in order for a student to be considered by a Progression and Award Board that would determine continuation (progression) to the next level of study or completion and confirmation of an award.

## **SECTION 2 Self-Certification**

### **10 Aim of Self-Certification**

- 10.1 The aim of self-certification is to ensure students are not disadvantaged by the impact of short-term unexpected circumstances-
- 10.2 Self-certification enables students in these circumstances to apply for an extension of 5 working days for a single piece of assessment (see Section 13 below), twice an academic year.
- 10.3 This Policy applies to all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students. Postgraduate Research Students should refer to Appendix 1 of the [Supporting Students to Succeed Procedure for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- 10.4 Programmes with PSRBs restrictions on Self-Certification will include such details in their Module Descriptors.

10.5 Students can obtain independent and confidential advice about Self-Certification for Exceptional Circumstances from the [Winchester Student Union](#) Advice Centre.

## 11 Definition of Self-Certification for Exceptional Circumstances

11.1 Where students are experiencing Exceptional Circumstances, as defined in this policy, and are able to provide corroborating evidence, they should follow the procedures laid out in Part 2. Students without corroborating evidence, who seek to self-certify should follow the procedures set out below.

## 12 Limits of Self-Certification

12.1 Students may only self-certify twice in an academic year (limited to one per semester), and the requests must be for two different assignments. Attempts to self-certify beyond twice per academic year will result in the student being signposted to Exceptional Circumstance procedures and the need for corroborating evidence.

12.2 If applying for a Self-Certification extension, a student must do so before the original deadline on Canvas. Late requests will not be accepted.

12.3 Once an application is made a student cannot retract the extension, even if the assignment is submitted by the original deadline.

12.4 Students wishing to self-certify will automatically receive an extension of 5 working days for the piece or pieces of assessment named on the application.

12.5 Students experiencing longer term adverse circumstances, requiring more than a 5-day extension should refer to the [Exceptional Circumstances processes](#).

12.6 Students may **not** self-certify for the following:

- a. Extended Independent Studies or Postgraduate Independent Studies
- b. Group work assignments.
- c. Practical assessments, including exams, presentations, performances or *viva voces*.
- d. In year exceptional 3<sup>rd</sup> attempts.

12.7 If a student has submitted a Self-Certification then they can subsequently apply for evidenced an Exceptional Circumstances to be considered. A student may not Self-Certify subsequent to an approved Exceptional Circumstances application granting an extension.

## 13 Evidence Requirements

13.1 Applications for Self-Certification for Exceptional Circumstances do not need to be accompanied by corroborating evidence.

13.2 Applications for Self-Certification invite students to indicate the reason for Self-Certification similar to the reasons required for short term absence from or for not being able to attend work. These will be available, via the application form, from a prescribed list that would not normally warrant or could be evidenced to support an exceptional circumstances claim.

13.3 The online form will then be able to provide additional signposting to other support mechanisms and protocols for extensions (*see Academic Regulations*) for which students may not be aware.

13.4 In some circumstances a student may not wish to disclose a particular reason for a variety of reasons. In these circumstances, students will be required to indicate that 'my reason for Self-Certification' is not listed above. Where a student indicates this then they will receive an automated email providing an opportunity to discuss issues they are experiencing in order to offer additional targeted support.

13.5 Where a reason for self-certification may become prolonged and a student unable to meet the

extension deadline then an Exceptional Circumstance claim with corroborating evidence will be required for a second or further attempt opportunity to be granted with an additional 10 working day extension.

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