

# Guidance for faculties on classifying extenuating circumstances



Summary			
The document provides guidance to Extenuating Circumstances Committee on how it should classify extenuating circumstances submitted by students.			
Scope - This document applies to:			
Staff on ECCs; although may be of interest to taught students.			
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## Guidance for Faculties on Classifying Extenuating Circumstances

All circumstances should be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Committee (ECC).

In determining the classification of an extenuating circumstance, ECCs should consider whether the circumstance is:

- **Timely:** to what extent the circumstance has directly affected the assessment event, if at all;
- **Sufficiently severe:** so as to have a significant impact upon performance;
- **Unexpected:** whether the circumstance could not have been foreseen.

An extenuating circumstance may relate to a student's physical health, mental wellbeing and/or be of a circumstantial/ personal nature.

Consideration of students who develop mental health issues may be made with reference to the University's Fitness to Study Policy.

Students should not use the extenuating circumstances (ECs) process as a mechanism for notifying or disclosing to the University, for the first time, any inherent difficulties or circumstances that are affecting them. Where students still use the ECs process to disclose a particular issue (e.g. a disability), a designated person in the school, (e.g. the relevant Senior Tutor), should follow the issue up with the student, providing advice and sign-posting them to support as necessary (e.g. to Disability Services).

### Types of extenuating circumstance

A student may have or develop either a **chronic** circumstance or an **acute** impairment/episode. A student may also have a chronic condition, from which an acute episode is experienced.

**Chronic:** where the student develops or enrolls with a particular ongoing circumstance that is experienced over a significant duration such that their learning as well as their performance in assessment is affected. In relevant cases, the University will accommodate the student by establishing and implementing a Disability Support Summary (e.g. extra time in examinations) in order to help them with their studies until they complete their programme. Where this is the case, the circumstance should **not** be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Committee, unless there are further adverse developments, an additional new condition develops, or the condition is such that it could be expected to impact the student's performance notwithstanding support and any reasonable adjustments that have been made.

Chronic cases may lead to a suspension of studies where the level of severity causes a sustained disruption on the programme.

**Acute:** where the student unexpectedly experiences a circumstance or event of a short duration and for a defined period of time, such that they are unable to attend or their performance in assessment is substantially affected by circumstances beyond their control.

Such cases may be able to be accommodated within the assessment process, for example, allowing the student more time to complete coursework and examinations. Retaking of the unit as a first attempt may also be considered appropriate.

### **Classifying an extenuating circumstance**

As well as indicating the type of circumstance, an ECC should operate within four bands of classification: mild, moderate, serious and severe.

#### **Mild**

Circumstances that are perceived as having had a minimal effect on the assessment process. This classification would normally be reached if the circumstance:

- was mild in its severity such that it did not have a substantive impact on performance in assessment, and/or;
- could have been foreseen, and/or;
- was experienced at a time that did not directly affect the assessment or significantly affect the student's learning.

Extenuating circumstances classified in this category normally relate to physical health and circumstantial events.

This classification would normally result in no change being made.

A typical example may include:

- Common (or 'day-to-day') illnesses such as a common cold

#### **Moderate**

Circumstances that are perceived as having had a moderate effect on the assessment process. This classification would normally be reached if the circumstance:

- was sufficient in its severity as to have a moderate impact on performance in assessment, and/or;
- could not have been foreseen (with the exception of known, managed chronic medical or mental health conditions), and/or;
- was experienced within the assessment period or immediately preceding it.

This classification acknowledges that the student's performance in assessment was affected by the ECs and that appropriate action should be taken in mitigation.

Typical examples may include:

- Sustained common illness, such as a lower respiratory tract infection, during the assessment period, including on the day of the assessment
- Acute medical episode, such as gastroenteritis, experienced immediately preceding the assessment period
- Chronic medical condition, such as glandular fever, which is managed but still acutely affects performance in assessment
- Mental health difficulty, such as generalised anxiety disorder, which is being managed, but still acutely affects performance in assessment
- Being involved in a road traffic incident that, whilst does not cause any injury, prevents the student from attending an examination

## **Serious**

Circumstances that are perceived as having a serious effect on the assessment process. This classification would normally be reached if the circumstance:

- was sufficient in its severity as to have a substantial impact on performance in assessment, and/or;
- could not have been foreseen (with the exception of known, managed chronic medical or mental health conditions), and/or;
- occurs during or immediately preceding the assessment period, or during the teaching period such that the student's learning has been significantly affected.

This classification acknowledges that the student's performance in assessment was affected by the ECs and that appropriate action should be taken in mitigation.

Typical examples may include:

- Acute medical condition, such as gastroenteritis, experienced during the assessment period / on the day of the assessment that prevents attendance
- A medical condition that prevents the student from reasonably undertaking a specific form of assessment (e.g. broken wrist for a musical recital)
- Complex mental health difficulties that are not being positively controlled/managed or are difficult to manage, which may also be manifesting in a physical way
- Being the victim of a distressful non-violent crime during or immediately preceding the assessment period

## **Severe**

Circumstances that are perceived as having a severe effect on the assessment process. This classification would normally be reached if the circumstance:

- was extreme in its severity as to have a significant impact on performance in assessment, and/or;
- could not have been foreseen, and/or;
- occurs during or immediately preceding the assessment period, or during the teaching period such that the student's learning has been severely compromised, normally due to significant absence or non-engagement.

This classification acknowledges that the student's performance in assessment was affected by the ECs and that appropriate action should be taken in mitigation.

Typical examples may include:

- Severe physical trauma during or preceding the assessment period where a student has been admitted to hospital
- Emerging complex mental health difficulties, which are yet to be controlled by professional support
- Severe mental trauma
- Death of a close friend or immediate family member

*Note: the examples here are provided purely as a guide, since, by their nature, any one circumstance may range in its complexity and in its effects on an individual student. Each case should therefore be judged on its own merits.*