

Exceptional Circumstances Policy

1. Policy Statement

This policy applies to students who are:

- undertaking a module or programme accredited by The Open University,
- undertaking a Spirometry module accredited by the ARTP,
- undertaking an Allergy Professional Development module,
- attending a workshop, including those accredited by the RCGP.

Students undertaking a module or programme accredited by The University of Hertfordshire (UH) should refer to the relevant guidelines on the UH website (www.herts.ac.uk).

This policy covers what are normally considered to be exceptional circumstances, how you can apply to use exceptional circumstances as mitigation, including the evidence required, and the process that we use for reviewing applications. If you are unclear about the process then do please contact Student Support.

Please ensure that you **read this document carefully** before completing and submitting an application to avoid any possible delays to the process.

2. Definition of Exceptional Circumstances

During a period of study, we know that students may encounter significant and unexpected personal difficulties that impact on their ability to study or complete their academic assessments. These are referred to as 'Exceptional Circumstances'.

'Exceptional Circumstances' are circumstances that are unforeseen and/or unpreventable and have had a detrimental effect on your ability to study, take part in an assessment and/or submit coursework. These events are over and above the course of everyday life and normally outside of your control.

It is your responsibility to let us know as soon as possible if you think you have exceptional circumstances. In certain cases, evidence of exceptional circumstances may be used to enable you to repeat or extend the deadline of your assessment, or defer to another instance of the module.

Please note that your application can only be granted where you can demonstrate that the event significantly affected your ability to study or complete your assignment. To help you consider whether your situation is likely to be categorised in this way, the following may be helpful.

Exceptional Circumstances must be:

- **Significant** - the event or circumstances must have had a serious impact on your studies
- **Unexpected** - you must normally have had no prior knowledge that a particular event or circumstance would occur
- **Unpreventable** - there must have been no reasonable steps you could have taken to prevent the event or circumstances from happening
- **Relevant** - you must be able to link the event or circumstances and its impact on the period for which the application is being made
- **Corroborated** - a request for Exceptional Circumstances must meet the normal requirements for independent documentary evidence.

Please note that not all difficult or distressing events will constitute exceptional circumstances for purposes of mitigation; there must be a demonstrable adverse effect on an individual's academic performance, which may take a number of forms.

These are the circumstances for which you may wish to submit an application for exceptional circumstances:

- non-attendance at a practical assessment,
- non-submission of coursework,
- impaired academic performance,
- request for an extension to a coursework submission or practical assessment date,
- request to defer a module to a later date,
- request for an extension to a programme registration period.

3. Associated Documentation

Section 9.7: Application for Exceptional Circumstances Form

Located on the Education for Health Policies and Procedures page:

<https://www.educationforhealth.org/education/student-support/regulations-policies/>

4. Roles and Responsibilities

As an organisation, we:

- are fully supportive of our students and will want to assist if we can,
- will treat any discussions about students' circumstances with sensitivity and confidentiality,
- only use the information provided to support students in their studies.

We expect students to:

- let us know as soon as possible if they think they have exceptional circumstances,
- read this document carefully before completing and submitting an application,
- provide the evidence required to support an application.

5. The Policy

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5.1 What are normally considered to be Exceptional Circumstances

Exceptional circumstances are those which are **unforeseen and/or unpreventable**. These may include, but are not limited to:

- severe personal illness or injury or significant change or deterioration in a long term condition,
- a significant accident,
- the severe illness or death of a close family member or dependent,
- a shocking or traumatic personal experience affecting the student,
- sudden and unexpected changes in personal or family circumstances,
- complications resulting from pregnancy,
- absence caused by Jury Service.

Exceptional Circumstances do **not** include issues which you could reasonably have foreseen or that you could have taken reasonable steps to avoid.

Examples of circumstances **not** normally considered are:

- death of a member of extended family,
- pressures of work, including vacancies in your team,
- stress or panic attacks that are not diagnosed or documented,
- computer problems preventing submission or causing loss of work,
- holidays,
- weddings,
- pregnancy,
- house move,
- embarking upon additional study at the same time,
- minor illness,
- minor illness of a close family member,
- planned medical operations or hospital tests,
- poor time management,
- unexpected issues with childcare provision,
- ignorance of regulations or assessment arrangements.

Please note that prolonged chronic or long term conditions are not normally considered a basis for exceptional circumstances. Students with a chronic illness or disability are encouraged to contact Student Support to enable us to put in place reasonable adjustments as appropriate for specific learning requirements.

Disabilities, medical conditions or other circumstances that were known to you when you booked on a module are not normally considered. However, exceptional considerations may be made for a sudden and unexpected worsening of a pre-existing condition if it is registered.

The timing of the diagnosis of such a condition may be considered a basis of exceptional circumstances if it means that adequate reasonable adjustments cannot be made.

5.2 How we maintain student confidentiality, particularly around sensitive issues

We are fully supportive of our students and will want to assist you if we can. We understand that it may be difficult to disclose difficult circumstances. However, in order for your circumstances to be considered they must be formally conveyed to us. We will treat any discussions about your circumstances with sensitivity and confidentiality, and any information you provide will only be used to support you in your studies.

If you believe your evidence contains sensitive and/or confidential personal information, you may submit your evidence in a sealed envelope marked 'Private and Confidential' for the attention of the 'Chair of the Academic Review Panel'. Once received a receipt will be issued (please ensure you include a return address).

5.3 When to apply for exceptional circumstances

Please complete the 'Application for Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances' form **as soon as possible** and return to us **along with supporting evidence**. Please note the timescales detailed below.

Please be aware that applications submitted without supporting evidence **will be rejected**. You are able to submit another application at a later date, however it is your responsibility to provide the evidence required.

It is possible to submit your supporting evidence after we have received your application form. In this case, you will need to provide an indication of when this will be received, which must be **within 7 days** of our receipt of your application form.

You need to notify us **as early as possible about your circumstances**, especially if your assessment deadline is approaching. You **must not** wait until you receive your marks to inform us.

Retrospective applications will not normally be accepted. We strongly advise that you submit your completed application **including all supporting evidence as soon as possible after the event occurs** and at least **four weeks before your assessment date**. This is so that there is sufficient time for your application to be considered.

If you do not declare exceptional circumstances as soon as you become aware of them **they cannot be taken into account later on**, unless there are compelling reasons for not declaring at the time.

If your completed application, including evidence, is received less than four weeks before your assessment date, you may not receive a decision on your application before your assessment deadline.

If you do submit your coursework:

You may choose to submit your coursework by the deadline, or attend your practical assessment, before you receive a decision.

If your application is then **accepted**, you will not receive a mark or feedback for your submitted coursework, or practical assessment.

You will instead receive a mark and feedback for the coursework or practical assessment that has been organised as a result of your application being granted.

If your application is **not accepted**, our normal assessment process will continue and you will receive a mark and feedback for the piece(s) of work that you submitted.

*If you **do not** submit your coursework:*

If you do not submit your coursework and your application is then **accepted**, you will receive a mark and feedback for the coursework or practical assessment that has been organised as a result of your application being granted.

If you do not submit your coursework by the deadline, or attend your practical assessment, **and** your application is **not accepted**, the outcome will be one of the following three possibilities:

- If a first attempt: you submit your work after the deadline and a penalty of 10% loss of marks for each day late will be applied (down to minimum pass mark of 40%); if the coursework is more than six days late it **will not be accepted** and a score of 0 will be given,
- If a first attempt: failure by non-submission or non-attendance, (you will have an opportunity to resubmit / re-attend but your mark on that element of assessment will be capped at 40%),
- If a re-assessment: failure of the module.

An application will be dated by the date on which it was received, by either email or post. Please note that exceptional circumstances that were resolved more than four weeks before the application is received will not usually be accepted.

Please be aware that we **cannot** apply exceptional circumstances retrospectively, i.e. after an assessment deadline has passed, unless you can show an exceptional, valid reason for not having declared your circumstances and provided evidence for them earlier, such as that you had an emergency admission to hospital.

5.4 How to apply for exceptional circumstances

The application form is available on the Student Support section of our website (www.educationforhealth.org/education/student-support/regulations-policies/). There is no charge to apply and, if your application is accepted, there is no charge for any changes to your studies.

Before you complete the form, **please read the policy document carefully**. Your application must relate to something that is unforeseen/unpreventable and has a significant impact on you as discussed above. The evidence you submit **must** demonstrate the impact those circumstances have had upon you and your ability to study, rather than only confirming that the circumstances exist – please see section 5.6 for further details.

5.5 Options available when applying

On your application, please indicate your preferred option from the following:

- Extension – this would give you additional time to complete your studies (up to 13 weeks).
- Deferral – this would allow you to re-enrol on another cohort of the module.
 - Please note that if you defer, the later cohort must start within 12 months of the start date of your current cohort, course materials and assessments may change, and any assessments already completed cannot be carried over.
 - In addition, the possibility of a cohort being set up in your preferred location is not guaranteed.
 - In exceptional cases, it is possible that another cohort will not run before the deferral period elapses. If this is the case, you will be offered the opportunity to enrol onto the next available cohort.
- Exceptional resubmission attempt – **only** if you were unable to meet your resubmission deadline and you can show an exceptional, valid reason for this (please see Section 5.1).
- Practical assessment postponement (Spirometry modules **only**) – this would allow you the opportunity to undertake your practical assessment on an alternative date, as if for the first time, with the full marks available to you.

The 12 month deferral period may be extended **only** in exceptional circumstances following agreement by The Open University.

Please note that only one extension and/or deferral can be granted per cohort. If you have already been given an extension and your circumstances persist or worsen, you can apply for a deferral to a later cohort, which must start within 12 months of the start date of your current cohort.

However, a second extension cannot be awarded on top of a previous extension; similarly, the deferral period cannot be extended. If you have deferred and re-enrolled on a new cohort, you would be able to make a new application for extension/deferral if circumstances require.

Please note that we are only able to communicate the Academic Review Panel's decision directly to a student. If you would like us to inform a third party of the outcome, you will need to provide us with written confirmation of this.

Options available for students on a BSc (Hons) or DipHE programme only:

Students whose programme studies have been affected by exceptional circumstances may apply for:

- Extension – this would extend your programme registration period (up to 6 months).
- Study Break – this would allow you take a study break for a period of up to 12 months
 - If necessary, your programme registration period would also be extended to account for the time taken off from your studies.

5.6 Supporting evidence that must be submitted

Applications for exceptional circumstances will not be considered unless they are supported by independent documentary evidence.

Evidence **must** give details of:

- the circumstances and the date and duration of the period affected,
- the impact upon you and your ability to study.

Independent evidence would normally be an original document on headed paper and signed by an appropriate third party (see below). Examples include:

- a signed letter from your GP/consultant or solicitor (as relevant), on headed paper, explaining how you have been affected by your circumstances,
- a sick note confirming that you are unfit for work within four weeks of the submission date,
- a death certificate.

An appropriate third party is someone who knows you in a professional capacity or one who can verify circumstances and who is in a position to provide objective and impartial evidence.

Evidence from a third party who is providing funding for your course would not normally be considered to be impartial, for example an employer or manager.

Evidence will not be accepted if there are reasonable grounds to believe that:

- the circumstances could have been avoided,
- you could reasonably have taken steps to limit the impact of the circumstances,
- the circumstances described would not have prevented you from submitting coursework on time or taking an examination on the scheduled date,
- the application does not relate, in terms of timing, to the assessment date(s) affected.

Please keep a copy of all documents you submit for your own records.

Please note that any application supported by false evidence will be considered invalid and will lead us to take action under our disciplinary procedures.

Electronic evidence will only be accepted when it is sent from a verifiable address.

All evidence must be provided in English.

The following is a list of other types of evidence normally expected to be provided. Reasonable consideration will be given to other forms of documentation, where appropriate.

Circumstance	Appropriate evidence
Student illness or accident	Medical certificate signed by appropriately qualified medical practitioner obtained whilst the illness or incident was affecting the student Doctor's letter giving dates affected and containing medical opinion on how the student would have been affected
Long term student illness	For conditions which predate module enrolment date, students will need to provide relevant medical evidence to demonstrate how and when the symptoms became acute or changed and explain how this affected their ability to study or impaired their performance in assessments
Bereavement	Evidence including a letter from funeral director or death certificate
Victim of crime	Police report

Please note it is **your responsibility** to obtain evidence you wish to submit in support of your application.

5.7 How to submit an application

You must complete and submit your application directly, unless you have stated in a **written confirmation** that you would like a third party to do this on your behalf, i.e. a signed confirmation or an email from your registered email address.

If an application is received from a third party without this written confirmation, it will be rejected.

If you submit your application to the exceptionalcircumstance@educationforhealth.org inbox, you will automatically receive acknowledgement that it has been delivered. If you do not receive this, please contact Student Support.

If you do submit your application in this way, please exercise the same amount of caution that you would when saving and/or sending any sensitive information electronically. Once we receive your application we will store this information securely, however we cannot guarantee the security of your own system.

If you submit your application via post, please ensure that you request proof of postage. The postal address is listed in the flowchart included with this policy.

Please securely keep a copy of all documents you submit for your own records.

If you know that you are going to be out of office and therefore unable to receive emails sent to your work email address, please ensure that you provide a personal email address or current postal address on your application form.

Please note that we are unable to discuss the outcome of an application by phone.

If you are unable to formally apply for exceptional circumstances, for example due to hospitalisation, you should ask someone to contact Student Support on your behalf, advising them to log an enquiry in your name and follow up as soon as possible with a formal request, including evidence of your circumstances.

5.8 What happens after an exceptional circumstances application is submitted

Applications are reviewed by Education for Health's Academic Review Panel. Once you have submitted your application, you will receive an email regarding the Panel's decision within 28 days.

Please note that decisions on applications can **only** be taken by our Panel, and the Panel's decision is final. While a third party can support an application, they are not able to influence or make a decision about the outcome.

We will use the contact details provided on your application form to advise you of the outcome of your application, so please ensure that these details are up-to-date so that you can receive a timely response. Please remember to check your email 'junk' folder for communications from us. Please note that we are unable to discuss the outcome of an application by phone.

5.9 The outcome of an application

Please see section 5.5 for the possible outcomes if your application is successful.

If an extension or exceptional resubmission attempt is granted, you will be advised of your new (re)submission date(s).

If a deferral is granted, you will be advised of the date that you must re-enrol by and details of how to arrange your re-enrolment.

If a practical assessment postponement is granted, you will be advised of the new attendance date.

If your application is rejected you will receive brief information and feedback as to why your application was rejected.

If you submitted your application **less than four weeks before your submission deadline**, please see section 5.3 for further information.

5.10 Process if you are not happy with the decision made by the panel

A student has the right to appeal against the panel's decision, on the grounds that procedures have not been correctly followed.

Students should submit a written appeal explaining why they believe the decision is incorrect.

In order to be considered, the appeal should be submitted within **28 days of receiving the letter confirming the panel's decision**. The appeal should be submitted to Student Support at studentsupport@educationforhealth.org.

On receipt of the appeal, the Director of Education (or nominee) will review the decision, including determining if there are clear grounds for an appeal. The Director of Education (or nominee) will respond to the appeal in writing within 28 days.

If the student's appeal is not successful, then right to further appeal falls under the Education for Health Appeals process. If a student wishes to pursue this route, they need to contact us within **28 days of receiving the letter confirming the outcome of the initial appeal**.

Information about the Education for Health Appeals process and how to apply can be found at the 'Informal Queries and Appeals Policy', available as Section 12.1 at:

<https://www.educationforhealth.org/education/student-support/regulations-policies/>

Below is a flowchart that outlines the Exceptional Circumstances process.

6. Policy History

Last updated: March 2019

7. Review Date

March 2020

Education for Health Flowchart of Exceptional Circumstances Process

You submit a completed Application for Consideration of Exceptional Circumstances form, including evidence, to the Academic Review Panel (addresses below) – we strongly advise as soon as possible after the event and **at least four weeks** before your assessment deadline.

You must do this directly, unless you have stated in a written confirmation that you would like a third party to do this on your behalf.

Application form and policy are available at:

<https://www.educationforhealth.org/education/student-support/regulations-policies/>

Please note: forms submitted without supporting evidence **cannot** be considered

Via email:

exceptionalcircumstance@educationforhealth.org

Via post:

Academic Review Panel
Education for Health
10 Church Street
Warwick
CV34 4AB

The Academic Review Panel review the application and make a decision regarding whether an extension or deferral can be granted

You receive a response regarding the outcome, normally within 28 days of your application being submitted

If an extension or exceptional submission attempt is granted, you will receive details of your new submission date

If a deferral is granted, you will be advised regarding the deadline for re-enrolment and whom to contact in order to arrange this

If your application is not accepted, you will be informed of this and your assessment date will remain the same

Please see the 'Options available when applying' section of the policy regarding what to do if your circumstances persist or worsen following the Academic Review Panel's decision