

**Higher Education Extenuating Circumstances Policy**

**1. Purpose and General Information**

1.1 The objective of this policy is to ensure students are never disadvantaged in their studies by serious, significant circumstances beyond their control.

1.2 The Policy is:

1. Applicable to those Level 4+ programmes regulated by the Office for Students (OfS) that under current circumstances continue to receive funding to assist delivery. Other courses delivered at the College, which come under the OfS remit, are catered for by other policies in force within the institution.
2. Aligned to the University of Plymouth’s 2022/23 Regulations and revised in accordance with Pearson’s BTEC Higher Nationals Centre Guide to Quality Assurance and Assessment (October 2022)

1.3 The College encourages students to become resilient individuals and expects them to deal with the ups and downs of life, such as minor illnesses or personal matters, so as not to affect their studies, including attendance and completion of assignments. On occasions, however, students will face a serious issues, which can have a significantly negative impact. Such situations are referred to as ‘extenuating circumstances’ (ECs) and this policy describes how the College seeks to support students by recognising their effect.

1.4 ‘Extenuating circumstances’ are defined as situations that:

* have a significant impact on a student’s ability to attend or complete assessment(s), and
* are exceptional, and
* are outside a student’s control, and
* occurred during or shortly before the assessment in question

1.5 If any student feels that they are experiencing ‘extenuating circumstances’, the College can take these into account by allowing the student concerned to:

* submit an assessment later than the published deadline, or
* not submit an assessment, but have the chance for re-assessment at a later date without penalty, or
* not attend a time specific assessment, such as an examination, test, or presentation, but have the chance for re-assessment at a later date, without penalty

1.6 The exact outcome of a valid extenuating circumstances claim depends on the nature of the assessment to which the claim applies and whether it is self-certified or supported by evidence. In some cases, the decision of the Award Assessment Board (AAB), which takes account of a student’s entire academic profile, may also be relevant. It is not possible, therefore, for this document to be definitive about specific situations.

1.7 Contexts for extenuating circumstances differ according to the nature of Higher Education programme studied:

**University of Plymouth courses:**

* Re-assessment usually occurs in the summer referral period following the AAB or as an opportunity to undertake modules in the following academic year. There is, however, a limit to the amount of re-assessment allowed in the student’s own interests with modules not achieved due to extenuating circumstances counting towards this total.

**Pearson courses:**

* If a student has not achieved the minimum Pass criteria during the extended period, a reassessment opportunity may be offered by the Interim or Summer Award Assessment Boards.

1.8 The College also operates a ‘fit-to-sit’ policy for time-specific assessments, such as examinations or presentations. If a student attempts such an assessment, this is taken as a declaration that they are fit to do so; therefore, if any learner feels that their ability to attend or complete the assessment is being affected by extenuating circumstances, it is important:

* not to sit or complete the time-specific assessment and
* to submit an Extenuating Circumstances form

**2. Scope of extenuating circumstances**

People are affected differently by different circumstances, so it is difficult to provide an exact list of reasons of what might or might not be approved. The key issue is whether the circumstances has an impact upon your assessment and you neither could have controlled nor predicted them. There may also be times that, due to unforeseen circumstances affecting the entire college community, other reasons may be approved by the college. The lists below are not intended to be definitive, if in doubt please speak to your Programme Manager. We do expect you to plan your studies to allow for the usual ups-and-downs of life, including minor illnesses or minor personal issues, so claims for extenuating circumstances relating to these might not be approved.

**How are temporary, acute conditions considered?**

If you have a temporary, acute condition, we will try to support you to complete your assessment without extenuating circumstances if possible. You should contact your Programme Manager as soon as possible. They can arrange for temporary additional support for study for you and put in place arrangements for assessments so you can still attend or submit your assessment on time. You should not need to use the extenuating circumstance procedures, unless the support in place does not address the problem sufficiently, or other issues arise.

**What reasons might be considered as a valid claim?**

Your own health problems:

* mental health issues
* major accident or injury,
* acute conditions,
* hospitalisation (including for operations), or those affecting a significant period of study
* personal or psychological problems for which you are receiving counselling, or have been referred to

a counsellor or similarly qualified practitioner

* cough/cold/sore throats or other minor illness, such as minor viral infection, only if it is

incapacitating and at its peak at the time of a time-specific assessment, such as an exam, test,

performance or presentation

following NHS advice to self-isolate or otherwise restrict mixing with others, even when asymptomatic or with mild symptoms

Significant life events:

* Pregnancy-related conditions, childbirth (including a partner or surrogate in labour) or adoption
* Bereavement causing significant impact
* Separation or divorce of yourself or your parents
* Weddings or civil partnership ceremonies of close family members
* Representing the College at national level, or your country at international level, or participation

in an event that is of benefit to the College’s national or international reputation.

Unexpected disruption or events:

* Recent burglary, theft or serious car accident
* Jury service that cannot be deferred
* For part-time students in full-time employment, exceptional pressure of work or permanent change
* of employment circumstances
* Global/national events that impact you, such as terror attacks in your home city, or affecting

family/friends

* Emergency or temporary measures enacted by the government such as lockdowns, limitations on

movement or travel

* Serious accidents or illness affecting family/friends
* Assessment issues
* Unavailability of Moodle where the module lead confirms that this would have a significant impact

on your preparation for an assessment or exam

* Late diagnosis of, for example, dyslexia, meaning you have not had the appropriate support for

assessment, including provision in exams

* Disruption in an exam or assessment, such as a fire alarm going off, or excessive noise from building works

**Reasons that are unlikely to be considered valid:**

Your own time management

* You slept in or your alarm clock did not go off
* Your car broke down, or your train or bus (or equivalent) was delayed or cancelled, unless you can

show that you’d made reasonable allowance for such disruption

* Misreading timetables of any kind, or time management problems, such as assessment deadlines

close to each other

Life events

* Family celebrations, pre-booked holidays, house moves, or similar events, in which you either have

input to or control over the date, or may choose not to participate without significant negative

effects

* Appointments of any kind, including legal or medical appointments, which could be rearranged
* Minor accidents or illness affecting relatives or friends, unless you are a sole carer
* Childcare problems, or problems with similar caring responsibilities which could have been

Anticipated

* Financial problems, including debt sanctions imposed by the College. However, cases of

exceptional hardship or significant sudden changes in financial circumstances since enrolment may

be considered.

* Sporting, recreational or voluntary commitments, unless you are representing the College at

national level or your country at international level, or participating in an event that is of benefit to

the College’s national or international reputation

* For full-time students, normal pressures of employment, because, by enrolling as a student, you

have made a commitment to make time available to study.

Computer problems

* Corrupt data or media
* Poor internet connectivity
* Printer failure
* E-Submission of an assessment file in an incorrect format or of the wrong file by accident
* Re-submission of an assessment accidentally after the deadline
* Lack of access to IT facilities due to debt sanctions imposed by the College

Other

* Unspecified short-term anxiety from all sources, mild depression or examination stress

Problems with postal or other third party delivery of work

2.3 Disability

Students with a disability, who have not yet applied for Disabled Student’s Allowances should contact the Additional Learning Support Manager, who will offer advice about the DSA process and also look at any reasonable adjustments that can be made to support study and assessments. However, should exceptional issues arise, related to a student’s condition that go beyond adjustments made, a claim for extenuating circumstances may be admissible. For extenuating circumstances unrelated to the disability, this Extenuating Circumstance policy will apply in its entirety.

2.4 Long-term health conditions

A long-term health condition is a mental or physical condition that:

* is persistent, typically lasting for more than three months and is often life-long
* cannot be resolved in a short time, or which will recur regardless of action, or which needs to be managed on a long-term basis
* may require you to seek help with some activities, but is not otherwise disabling
* can be managed, but can ‘flare-up’ (If a student suffers a significant ‘flare-up’ of a condition that affects their ability to attend or complete an assessment, an extenuating circumstances claim should be submitted)

Rather than providing evidence, if required, for every claim, students may inform the College of a long-term health condition once a year, on a form available from the Senior HE Administrator. The completed form must be accompanied by a statement from a GP, hospital consultant or appropriate specialist responsible for treatment, which provides clear confirmation of the nature, severity, duration and effect of the condition. Once the Long-Term Health Condition is form is authorised by the College, the student concerned should submit an extenuating circumstances claim for any assessment they cannot attend or complete because of a significant flare-up of the condition; however, it will not be necessary to resubmit evidence. Students must inform the Senior HE Administrator of any change in their condition, whether improvement or deterioration, so that their claim can be reassessed. The College will review each case at the start of the academic year and may require further evidence. Students with a long-term health condition should also consider contacting Student Services, who may be able to provide further support.

2.5 Temporary, acute conditions

If a student has a temporary, acute condition, such as a broken wrist, they should contact the Programme Manager and the Additional Learning Support Manager as soon as possible, so that additional support can be discussed and specific arrangements for assessments put in place. An extenuating circumstances claim should not be necessary, unless the support provided does not address the problem sufficiently, or other issues arise.

2.6 Extenuating circumstances and group work

Students may on occasions be required to prepare assessments in a group with students whose ability to fulfil their role is affected by their own extenuating circumstances. Groups are generally expected to have contingency plans to manage members’ absence, but sometimes the impact means it is impossible for the group to attend or complete its group assessment task. In this case the member of the group affected by extenuating circumstances should submit an extenuating circumstances claim, as described in this document. Other members of the group should also each submit a claim, citing their group member’s absence, through extenuating circumstances. To avoid unnecessary re-assessment, students may discuss, with the module/unit leader or tutor, whether the group work should carry on in this situation.

**3. How to make a claim for extenuating circumstances**

To make a claim for extenuating circumstances, students should discuss their situation with the Programme Manager/Module or Unit Leader, before downloading a claim form from Moodle.

3.1 Timing

* Assessments/tests/presentations: extenuating circumstances claims should be submitted as soon as possible and preferably 72 hours before the formal assessment deadline. In exceptional circumstances, submission may be made up to 10 days after the formal deadline\*.
* Exams: Extenuating circumstances claims for formal examinations should be submitted within 72 hours of the exam date and no later than the Monday after the date of the exam.

\*Late or retrospective claims of extenuating circumstances will only be considered, if there are most exceptional reasons for not submitting a claim such as impaired judgment through mental health issues. In this situation, students will be required to evidence their inability to engage with the Extenuating Circumstances process on time.

It is important that the form is completed accurately and fully – extenuating circumstances can only be taken into account, if the right information is provided, including the dates that the circumstances occurred and of the assessments. With this in mind, please note that unless there are exceptional circumstances, late or retrospective EC claims will be deemed to be invalid. Appeals against Award Assessment Board decisions based on retrospective extenuating circumstances will not normally be accepted.

3.2 Corroborating evidence

Examples of corroborating evidence likely to be acceptable include:

* A medical note confirming a mental or physical health condition, provided at the time when suffering from that condition by a GP, registered doctor or other suitable health professional
* A letter from a counsellor, such as a member of the College’s Counselling Service or a qualified counsellor outside the College, confirming a personal, psychological or emotional problem for which counselling is being received
* An official document such as a police report with a reference number, court summons or other legal document
* A letter from a solicitor, social worker or other official agency
* An insurance claim document supported by a letter from the insurance company

For part-time students in full-time employment, wishing to make a claim based on exceptional pressures in their employment, a letter from the employer that confirms the particular circumstances, explains why they are exceptional and outside your control and formally supports the claim.

Self-employed students must provide independent evidence to support the claim that the pressures are exceptional and outside of their control.

For an EC claim to be considered valid, both the nature of the circumstances and the standard of evidence supplied must meet the definition and standards described in this document. Medical certification that verifies a minor illness, or simply reports a claim that a student felt unwell, for example, will not normally be deemed valid.

The outcome of a valid extenuating circumstances claim, with corroborating evidence as required, is likely to be:

* an extension of no more than 10 working days for coursework assessment in a taught module/unit
* for any other type of assessment, an opportunity for re-assessment (UoP) or resubmission (Pearson) at a later date, without penalty, depending on the decision of the Award Assessment Board

3.3 Self-certification

Self-certification applies to circumstances that affect a claimant for 5 working days or fewer – i.e. the student is fit to complete or attend assessments within 5 working days of the start of the circumstances. The extenuating circumstances should be clarified fully, but further evidence does not need to be provided. Claimants are asked to explain how the extenuating circumstances have impacted on their ability to attend or complete assessments. Self-certified claims that do not meet the definition of appropriate reasons above will be considered invalid.

If a student is unable to complete assessment in a taught module/unit within the extended deadline of 5 working days and wishes the College to continue considering extenuating circumstances, a normal claim with corroborating evidence will be required.

3.4 Extenuating circumstances lasting more than 5 working days

Unless a Long-Term Ill Health form has been validated, all claims for extenuating circumstances that affect a student for more than 5 working days must be supported by independent, reliable documentary evidence that confirms the nature and timing of the circumstances. Claimants will be asked to outline how the circumstances have impacted their ability to attend or complete assessments. The College reserves the right to take any steps it considers necessary to verify any evidence submitted, without notifying the claimant beforehand. If the College is unable to authenticate the material to its satisfaction, the claim may not be accepted. Independent evidence should meet the following standards:

* written by appropriately qualified professionals who are independent to the student; evidence from family and/or friends will not normally be accepted
* on headed paper and signed and dated by the author - evidence presented by email is acceptable, if the email has been sent by the author from the official domain name of the author's organisation
* confirm specifically that the circumstances were witnessed on the relevant date, not reported retrospectively
* unaltered by the student - documentation that has been amended for any reason will be deemed inadmissible by the College and may be considered under the Academic Offences regulations

Supporting evidence should also be in their original form – copies will be accepted only in exceptional circumstances. Where EC claims are emailed to the College, documents should be scanned and attached to the email. The College reserves the right to see the original documents before validating a claim.

Exceptionally, the College may accept evidence provided by College staff, such as a student’s personal tutor, academic staff closely involved in pastoral care, a member of Student Services Counselling Team or the Programme Manager.

Strode College will only consider upholding a student's claim of extenuating circumstances of 5 or more days, when all of the above conditions are fully satisfied. A college working day is defined as a day when the college is open and therefore includes student vacation periods (with the exception of Christmas/New Year close down and bank holidays)

**4. Considering Extenuating Circumstance Claims**

4.1 Each extenuating circumstance claim will be considered individually and all students will be treated fairly and equitably. The decision will take into consideration the nature, timing and severity of the problem and the impact it has had on assessment. Forms are dealt with as a matter of priority, as soon after submission as possible. Once forms have been assessed, students are informed of the outcome via email to their Strode College student email address.

4.2 If the claim is deemed invalid, an explanation for this decision will be provided. Students have the right to appeal against any such decision, although appeals will not normally be accepted during the main summer or referral appeal periods. Appeals must be submitted in writing to the Deputy Principal, Curriculum and Quality within 10 working days of the outcome of the extenuating circumstances claim being communicated and should state the reasons clearly.

Appeals may be made only on the following grounds:

* material and demonstrable procedural irregularity in the extenuating circumstances process
* evidence that the College did not consider all of the information available
* new material evidence is available which it was not possible, for good reason, to provide earlier in the process

Appeals will not be considered on the following grounds:

* dissatisfaction with the reasonable judgment of the College in its consideration of the extenuating circumstances
* late submission of an application for extenuating circumstances or late submission of evidence to support an application where there are no compelling grounds why the application was late

The outcome of any appeal against the College’s decision in relation to extenuating circumstances is final and will not be considered subsequently as an appeal against the decision of the Award Assessment Board.

**5. Outcome of valid extenuating circumstances**

5.1 Valid extenuating circumstances do not normally change a grade/mark (unless, for example, a claim submitted after the deadline was exceptionally approved and resulted in a penalty for a late submission being removed), but will allow you to complete or attend your assessment(s) at a time when you are not affected by the extenuating circumstances. Approved extenuating circumstances most often allow you to:

* Submit your assessment slightly later than the published deadlines, or
* Not submit your assessment at the usual time, but have an opportunity to be assessed at a later date, or
* Not attend a time-specific assessment (for example, and examination, a test, a presentation), but have an opportunity to be assessed at a later date.

5.2 Exactly what opportunities for re-assessment are available, following a claim for extenuating circumstances, depends on the extent of their impact on a student’s academic profile, and their performance in other modules/units. Outcomes are decided by the Award Assessment Board (AAB) with opportunities for re-assessment (UoP) or resubmission (Pearson) usually occurring in the summer referral period or as an opportunity to undertake modules in the following academic year. There is a limit to the amount of reassessment allowed in the summer referral period; a module/unit that is not achieved because of extenuating circumstances, will count towards this limit.

5.3 If students wish to make an EC claim in relation to coursework, they should not wait for a decision before submitting their work. The final version of work should be submitted within 5 working days of the original deadline (for self-certified extenuating circumstances) or 10 working days of the original deadline (for all other extenuating circumstances). The Senior HE Administrator can facilitate this by temporarily opening the drop box after the deadline.

5.4 In the summer referral period deadlines will be extended by no more than 5 days. Students will be advised of the extension by email to their Strode College student email. In all cases, the deadline will be adjusted on Moodle in line with the extension, but work can be submitted earlier than the date indicated. If work had previously been submitted, prior to the EC claim, a penalty for late submission may be waived, or the claimant may submit another version. If a student is unable to meet the extended deadline, they must submit a further extenuating circumstances claim and provide corroborating evidence as required.

5.5 If an extension is not possible, or if a student is unable to submit work within the extended deadline, for valid extenuating circumstances, a claim may be made valid for re-assessment of work. In this case, a zero mark/grade will be included in the student’s profile and their extenuating circumstances will be forwarded to the AAB, which will decide what action to take. Normally, the Board will allow re-assessment at the next opportunity, as the same attempt as the submission for which your extenuating circumstances are valid. This may be after the Interim Award Board (this is applicable to Pearson courses only), during the summer referral period or as a repeat of the whole module/unit in the following academic year (fees will be applicable).

5.6 If your claim for extenuating circumstances is not approved, you will receive an email giving reasons why. If you had submitted work pending the outcome of your claim, the mark you receive will be capped at the pass mark if you submitted within 24 hours of the original published deadline (assuming the standard of your work is sufficient to warrant a pass mark). If you submitted more than 24 hours after the original published deadline, your work will not be marked, you will receive a mark of zero and reassessment will be at the next attempt (subject to attempts remaining). If you submitted by the published deadline, the mark you receive will be the actual mark awarded and will not be capped.

**UoP courses only:**

* where a student is given a re-assessment opportunity as a result of valid extenuating circumstances, this will include all components of an element of assessment and any previous component marks will be overwritten
* for re-assessment of a time-specific assessment such as an examination, test, or performance, the procedure will be as described in the paragraph immediately above

**6. Referral to Fitness to Study policy**

Students will be referred to the Fitness to Study policy, if they submit three extenuating circumstances claims in a six-month period, or if the number or pattern of extenuating circumstances claims causes concern at any time. The Fitness to Study procedure will consider support needs or recommend alternative forms of assessment and may include a Student Support meeting. If extenuating circumstances or health problems prevent a student from making academic progress, the Award Assessment Board may require them to interrupt or withdraw from the course of study. If an extenuating circumstances claim is thought to be fraudulent, the academic offences procedure will be invoked.

**7. Relationship to other policies and sources of support.**

The College has a range of other policies and procedures that may be relevant in a specific situation. Most are available from the College website:

<https://www.strode-college.ac.uk/college-docs/higher-education-documents/>

For further advice or to request an Extenuating Circumstances form (also available on Moodle) or Long Term Health form, please contact the Senior HE Administrator: wcavill@strode-college.ac.uk 01458 844404

The Additional Learning Support Manager can be contacted via apope@strode-college.ac.uk 01458 844615

**Flowchart of Extenuating Circumstances Process**

Circumstances occur that affect assessment. Alert and/or discuss with Programme Manager/Module/Unit Leader (where possible)

\*evidence can be submitted in sealed envelope, if confidential

Email student’s Strode account requesting further information

Claim logged, checked and decision made. Referred to Fitness to Study after 3 claims (or earlier if significant concern)

Confirmation email to Module Leader/ Programme Manager

Confirmation email to Module Leader/ Programme Manager

Transcript published and posted to home address after

Summer Board and Referred Board (where applicable)

Mark/grade profile considered at Award Boards

No reassessment opportunity. If coursework submitted, mark/grade will be assigned in line with regulations on late submission of coursework

If coursework is submitted, actual mark/grade will be recorded and/or opportunity for reassessment offered in line with regulations

Unhappy with outcome, can appeal if meet criteria

Submit claim form to Senior Higher Education Administrator

(initial discussion with student about process and additional support, as applicable)

Complete claim form. Self Certify or attach independent corroborative evidence\*

Contact Senior HE Administrator for appropriate form or download from Moodle

Confirmation email to student Strode account

Confirmation email to student Strode account

Decision that circumstances are valid

Decision that circumstances are invalid

Submission incomplete