

6J - Exceptional Circumstances: Policy and Procedure

1. SCOPE AND PURPOSE

- 1.1 This policy and procedure is for all Bournemouth University (BU) students and staff. It outlines the steps a student should take if they do not feel fit enough to sit an exam or submit coursework on time due to illness or another personal event beyond their control, including exceptional circumstances affecting a postgraduate research students' progress or ability to meet the requirements of their research degree.

2. KEY RESPONSIBILITIES

- 2.1 **Students:** are responsible for seeking advice and support when encountering individual circumstances, and for submitting an exceptional circumstances request within published deadlines.
- 2.2 **Programme Leaders/Level Leads/Supervisory teams:** to consider exceptional circumstances requests in line with BU's policy and procedure.
- 2.3 **Exceptional Circumstance Board/Faculty Research Degrees Committee:** to consider applications made by individual students for the consideration of exceptional circumstances requests to inform the decisions made at Programme Boards/ by Research Assessment or Examination Teams.
- 2.4 **Programme Boards/Research Assessment or Examination Teams:** to receive recommendations from the Exceptional Circumstance Board/Faculty Research Degrees Committee and to consider the outcomes in light of students' individual profiles.
- 2.5 **Unit Boards:** To confirm unit marks, level aggregate and/or classification.

3. ACCESSING OTHER RELEVANT BU DOCUMENTS

- 3.1 All documents can be accessed [here](#)
- *3U - Interruption of Study: Procedure*
 - *6A - Standard Assessment Regulations*
 - *6K - Assessment Boards: Policy*
 - *8A - Code of Practice for Research Degrees*
 - *11A - Academic Appeals: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards*
 - *11C - Academic Appeals: Policy and Procedure for Research Awards*
 - *11F - Student Complaints: Policy and Procedure*
 - *11J - Support to Study: Policy and Procedure*
 - *Student Welfare Policy*

4. DEFINITIONS AND PRINCIPLES

4.1 As outlined in the student welfare policy we expect you to look after your own health, wellbeing and for raising any welfare and support needs in a timely manner. It is also reasonable to expect you to manage workloads and to expect a level of pressure around assessments. However, we know that there will be times when illness or other personal matters, such as family issues and bereavement may put you at a disadvantage and have a negative impact on your study. In such situations, you will have the opportunity to ask for your circumstances to be considered and it may be that these are considered exceptional.

4.2 It is important that you understand what Exceptional Circumstances are. We define these as:

- A short-term illness which significantly impacts your ability to study or complete an assessment;
- A longer-term illness with unpredictable symptoms or side effects, or worsening of an existing medical condition which significantly impacts your ability to study or complete an assessment. It should not be something that you have already declared to us through your formal registration with our Additional Learning Support (ALS) service and for which you already have reasonable adjustments in place;
- An unexpected, unforeseen and/or sudden event, situation or personal circumstance which significantly impacts your ability to study or complete an assessment in the short-term.

There is a list of examples of what we would normally consider as Exceptional Circumstances in Appendix 1.

4.3 The university operates a “fit to sit” policy which applies to all assessments. This means that if you complete an assessment (ie sit an exam or submit coursework), it will be assumed that you were feeling well enough and your performance not significantly affected by circumstances. In such cases, the mark you achieve will stand. We will not normally accept a claim that you had Exceptional Circumstances relating to that assessment at a later point.

4.4 If you experience Exceptional Circumstances which significantly affect your ability to complete an assessment, you should submit a request for consideration of Exceptional Circumstances using the relevant University form before an assessment deadline. This may mean that you are offered:

- a) **an extension** to your coursework submission date;
- b) **a postponement** to your examination:

4.5 The form you have to complete asks you to describe your circumstances and the impact of these on your studies. You will also need to give us some evidence to confirm what has happened. The sorts of evidence you need to give us are outlined in appendix 1 of this policy. Please note that requests for extensions or exam postponements are not guaranteed. If you submit a request close to an assessment deadline, you may not receive a decision until after the assessment is due.

4.6 For short term illnesses or circumstances, we will accept self-certification as evidence:

- Self-certification can be used to request either a short extension of 7 calendar days or postponement of an exam.
- It can only be applied once to any given assessment and can only be submitted within 7 calendar days before an assessment deadline.
- You may only submit three approved self-certification requests in any academic year. This is the period in which you are expected to complete a level of study.
- Faculties monitor the number of times you self-certify. If you reach the self-certification limit above (three self-certifications), you will need to attend a meeting to discuss your circumstances. The purpose of this meeting is to enable you to access any support you need due to your circumstances. This discussion may result in agreed actions for you and/or University staff, and these may include referral to other University processes or

sources of support as appropriate. This meeting may be combined with or may lead to a further meeting under another relevant University process such as the process under Support to Study: Policy and Procedure [11J] or the engagement process under the Academic Engagement and Attendance: Policy and Procedure [3K], where there are concerns that your circumstances are significantly affecting your ability to participate fully and effectively in your academic studies.

- 4.7 It can be easy to fall behind with work and deadlines. Before submitting a request for Exceptional Circumstances, you are recommended to talk to your personal tutor, unit leader or programme leader as soon as you are experiencing difficulties or become aware of circumstances that are or may affect your studies so that you can find out about all relevant support options. If you are a PGR student, you should contact your supervisory team or Postgraduate Research Administrator. You may also wish to seek advice from the Students' Union (SUBU), who can provide independent advice.
- 4.8 We recognise that each student will be impacted by their personal exceptional circumstances in a different way. Therefore, all considerations will be made on a case-by-case basis.
- 4.9 When your request has been considered you will be informed of the outcome(s) and sign-posted to any relevant support we feel may be appropriate. You will receive guidance on what will happen next. If your request is rejected, we will explain why that decision was made.
- 4.10 All outcomes will be based on your individual circumstances and the details and evidence you have submitted. It is important for all students to understand that even if the request is accepted the outcome(s) will not result in a change to your mark(s) and you will need to complete the assessment.
- 4.11 All exceptional circumstances requests and associated evidence will be treated as confidential and the details will only be shared with those staff members involved in the decision-making processes. It is important that you provide us with as full an account of the situation and its impact on you as possible.
- 4.12 There may be circumstances where it would be reasonable to withdraw a fit to sit declaration after you have completed an assessment, for instance where you are taken ill partway through an exam, or where you feel your judgement was significantly impacted and you were unable to make a rational decision about whether you were fit enough to complete an assessment. If you should find yourself in this situation, you should request that your circumstances are considered retrospectively by the Exceptional Circumstances Board, referred to as Board Consideration. As part of this request, you will need to provide evidence for the circumstances and a good reason for not raising them at the time, supported by evidence. If your request is approved, your circumstances will be taken into account by the Programme Board/Research Assessment or Examination Team in line with BU's Assessment Regulations. If your request is rejected, we will explain why that decision was made. There are specific deadlines for requesting Board Consideration of exceptional circumstances which you will be informed about through various communications.
- 4.13 It is important to let us know as soon as things go wrong in order for us to offer you support. If you should find yourself in the situation which, for a valid reason means that you were unable to inform the university of your circumstances before receiving your assessment results you are required to provide us with evidence as part of the Academic Appeals procedure. The evidence you provide should support your circumstances and the reason for not raising them earlier. Students who are in this unusual situation are advised to discuss this with their personal tutor, unit leader or programme leader (or supervisory team or Postgraduate Research Administrator for PGRs) as soon as possible and may wish to refer to the relevant academic appeals procedure. If there is no valid reason why you were unable to follow the procedures outlined in this policy any Appeal will not be upheld and your Exceptional Circumstances will not be accepted.

Links to other support policies and services

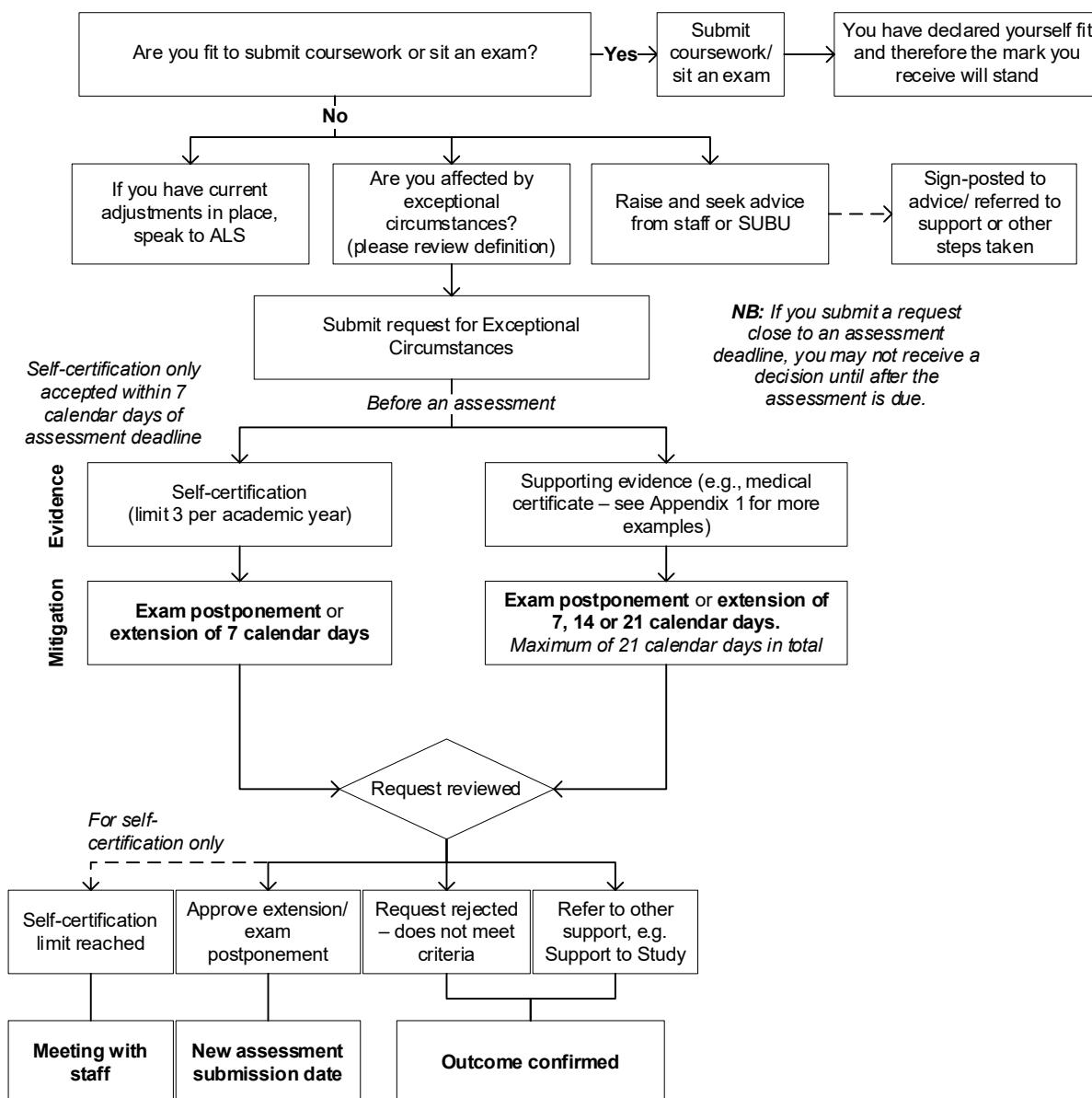
- 5.1 While the aim of this policy is to support students facing short-term and unexpected conditions, it may not be appropriate if a student's circumstances have had or are likely to have a longer-

term impact. In these circumstances, it may be necessary to consider additional actions to support learning.

- 5.2 Faculties monitor exceptional circumstances requests. If any individual request indicates a need for further support, you may be referred to other processes or services, such as Support to Study, Interruption to Studies or the ALS team. In addition, as set out above, if you submit three self-certifications within an academic year, your Faculty will ask you to attend a meeting so that they can understand your circumstances. The aim is to ensure you are provided with the support you need to complete your studies to the best of your ability.
- 5.3 BU will make reasonable adjustments to learning and assessment so that students with additional learning needs are not significantly disadvantaged compared with other students, this may include, for example, extra time and/or rest breaks in exams and timed assessments. If you are likely to need support, you should contact the ALS team as soon as possible so that appropriate adjustments can be discussed and agreed.

Procedure

6.1 The diagram below gives an overview of the Exceptional Circumstances process:



6.2 Where a request is rejected as it does not meet the criteria, this may be for the following reasons:

- The request does not meet the policy definition of exceptional circumstances.
- Self-certification does not meet the criteria in the policy, e.g., being used as evidence more than 7 calendar days before an assessment deadline.
- Incomplete form/missing information.
- Evidence has not been provided or the evidence does not support the request.

General

7. DATA PROTECTION ACT

7.1 As required by Data Protection Legislation, BU will not normally disclose personal information to a third party other than with the data subject's explicit permission; except where there is a legal obligation to do so. Likewise, it is not possible for BU to obtain information about a student from a third party (such as a doctor) without the student's prior written explicit consent.

8. REFERENCES AND FURTHER INFORMATION

- 8.1 If a student is not satisfied with a decision concerning an exceptional circumstances request, they may address this through the University's complaints process as outlined in *11F - Student Complaints: Policy and Procedure*.
- 8.2 If a student wishes to lodge an appeal against the decision of the Programme Board/Research Assessment or Examination Team, they may do so in accordance with *11A - Academic Appeals: Policy and Procedure for Taught Awards/11C - Academic Policy and Procedure for Research Awards*. All appeals must be submitted within 10 working days of the date of publication of results.
- 8.3 Further guidance, advice and information can be obtained from AskBU Student Services (telephone 01202 969696 / AskBU service online [AskBU: contact us | Bournemouth University](#) or SUBU Advice (telephone 01202 965779 / e-mail subuadvice@bournemouth.ac.uk).
- 8.4 This policy was reviewed according to the University's *Equality Analysis Procedure*

9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1: A guide to identifying exceptional circumstances for students and staff

Appendix 1: A guide to identifying Exceptional Circumstances

What are Exceptional Circumstances?

BU defines **Exceptional Circumstances** as:

- A short-term illness which significantly impacts your ability to study or complete an assessment;
- A longer-term illness with unpredictable symptoms or side effects, or worsening of an existing medical condition which significantly impacts your ability to study or complete an assessment. It should not be something that you have already declared to us through your formal registration with our Additional Learning Support (ALS) service and for which you already have reasonable adjustments in place;
- An unexpected, unforeseen and/or sudden event, situation or personal circumstance which significantly impacts your ability to study or complete an assessment in the short-term.

What type of evidence do I need to provide?

Some extension requests or exam postponements may not require supporting evidence. For short-term illnesses or circumstances, we will accept **self-certification** as evidence:

- Self-certification can be used to request either a short extension of 7 calendar days or postponement of an exam. You do need to provide evidence to self-certify.
- A self-certification request can be submitted no earlier than 7 calendar days before an assessment deadline.
- You cannot use self-certification to extend a coursework deadline that has already been extended through self-certification. If you need a further extension, you will need to provide other supporting evidence. An extension cannot exceed 21 calendar days in total.
- You can claim for multiple assessment points within a single request as long as the dates for those assessments cover the same 7 calendar day period.
- You may only have three approved self-certification requests in any academic year. If you have reached this limit you will need to provide supporting evidence for all further exceptional circumstances requests.
- Self-certification cannot be used as evidence if you have already completed an assessment.

Where supporting evidence is required, this should help confirm the reasons for your exceptional circumstances request. The table below lists some *examples* of supporting evidence. You should be aware that this is not an exhaustive list, and each request will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Examples of Exceptional Circumstances	Examples of Supporting Evidence
A serious short-term illness or injury <i>This example typically excluded minor illnesses, unless the symptoms are particularly severe.</i>	• A letter from GP* who has been actively supporting you; • Medical certificate; • Hospital appointment letter; • Copy of a prescription; • A letter from a BU staff member or external support services who have been actively supporting you (this may include a letter from a member of your programme team).
A longer-term health condition which has worsened, or an ongoing condition with side effects beyond your control, such as flare-ups (physical) or episodes (for mental health)	• Confirmation that the details of your condition have been registered with the ALS team; • A letter from GP* who has been actively supporting you; • Medical certificate; • Hospital appointment letter; • Copy of a prescription.

Significant illness or bereavement of close family member or friend (staff may exercise discretion as to whether evidence detailing the impact of serious circumstances, such as bereavement, is required)	• A letter from GP* who has been actively supporting your family; • Medical certificate; • Hospital appointment letter; • A letter from a BU staff member or external support services who have been actively supporting you this may include a letter from a member of your programme team); • For bereavement, the university will consider evidence from other sources such as an Order of Service, an obituary or news report, or supporting letter from your family member. We would not normally expect to see a death certificate.
Pregnancy-related illness	• Medical certificate or GP* note explaining illness or requirement for hospitalisation in case of unforeseen complications in pregnancy.
Unforeseen travel disruption normally causing delays of over an hour, for example industrial action or road traffic accident	• Letter from travel company; • Saved screenshot of a webpage, email exchange or other form of communication with a travel company.
Acute personal difficulties / unforeseen events / domestic disruption/ traumatic incidents / emergency crises. <i>The examples in this category are typically beyond a student's control.</i>	• A letter from GP* who has been actively supporting your family; • A letter from a BU staff member or external support services who have been actively supporting you (this may include a letter from a member of your programme team); • A letter from independent authority supporting you (e.g. social worker, counsellor); • Police report and crime reference number; • If none of the above are appropriate, a letter from a family member explaining and confirming your personal situation may be considered.
Jury Service	• A letter from the Court.

**Please be aware that there may be a cost associated with such letters.*

Examples of circumstances likely to be excluded

The following are examples of things which are **not** normally considered as valid Exceptional Circumstances:

Computer IT/failure	It is your responsibility to ensure that all work is electronically stored and/or submitted and the correct piece of work is submitted. Enough time should be allowed to submit the work to meet the deadline. If you are affected by technical issues, you should contact university staff as soon as possible.
Minor transport problems	Routine delays to buses and trains will not be accepted.
Misreading assessment dates and times	It is your responsibility to ensure you understand when and how your assessment will be taking place.

Holidays, house moves or other events that were planned or could have been reasonably expected	All holidays, holidays or other events should take place at a time that does not impact your availability to study or prepare for or undertake an assessment.
Inadequate planning, organisation or time management	You are expected to plan your time to manage assessments schedules and the study time required to support your own learning.
Timetabling of coursework/examinations	Assessments being too close together will not be accepted as valid Exceptional Circumstances claim. Additionally, misreading an exam timetable will not be accepted as a valid reason.
Paid employment or voluntary work	You are responsible for managing your other commitments so that they do not adversely interfere with your studies. If you are experiencing acute personal difficulties that require you to undertake unexpected levels of paid work this might be considered under the definition of Exceptional Circumstances.
Restricted access to University IT systems such as Brightspace	Your access to University IT systems or facilities has been restricted or removed as a result of non-payment of fees or other reason.
Not disclosing circumstances	The University can only consider Exceptional Circumstances claims if they are disclosed in accordance with the policy. If you feel that you have a valid reason for not disclosing circumstances by the published deadlines you should speak to your Personal Tutor, Unit Leader or Programme Leader as soon as possible. For PGRs, you should speak to your supervisory team or Postgraduate Research Administrator.

