

Exceptional Circumstances Policy

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Applicable to	All participants whilst registered as students of Lancaster University

Table of Contents

Section 1: Overview 2

1.1 Purpose and Scope..... 2

1.2 Definitions..... 2

1.3 Responsibilities..... 3

Section 2: Policy and procedures 4

2.1 General principles 4

2.2 Application Criteria and Details..... 6

2.3 Exceptional Circumstances consideration 8

2.4 Next Steps..... 11

Section 3: Relevant references12

3.1 Policies and documents 12



Section 1: Overview

1.1 Purpose and Scope

- 1.1.1 Frontline acknowledges that some external or significant events can have an adverse effect on a participant's ability to study and/or to undertake examinations or assessment. Frontline is committed to maintain fair, consistent, and objective procedures for matters relating to exceptional circumstances. This policy explains what a participant should do if they are experiencing these circumstances in relation to academic assessments, and how Frontline will deal with these requests.
- 1.1.2 The policy sets out Frontline's procedure for the reporting, documenting, and consideration of exceptional circumstance applications.
- 1.1.3 This policy is applicable when participants are completing academic assessments, which they are normally required to do only whilst they are registered as students of Lancaster University.

1.2 Definitions

- 1.2.1 For the purposes of this policy **exceptional circumstances** are actions or events outside the control of the participant which can reasonably be thought to have caused an individual participant:
 - to fail to complete a required assessment for a programme or contributing module by the stipulated deadline; or
 - to complete assessed work to a lesser standard of academic performance than might reasonably have been expected had the same circumstances not applied.

Exceptional circumstances are those where a remedy is needed in order to arrive at a fair and correct judgement of the participant's academic performance.

- 1.2.1 The circumstances must be:
 - **significant:** the event or circumstances must have had a demonstrable impact on a participant's studies;



- **unexpected:** the participant must normally have had no prior knowledge that a particular event or circumstances would occur;
- **relevant:** the participant must be able to demonstrate how this event or circumstances impacted their ability to complete the assessment or exam on time;
- **(unless an extension of seven days or fewer is being requested) corroborated:** a request for extension must meet the normal requirements for independent documentary evidence.

Requests for exceptional circumstances to be taken into account should demonstrate how these criteria have been met.

1.2.2 **Extension:** means a participant's prescribed time to complete an assessment is lengthened. Normally, an extension may only be agreed if it is requested before the assessment attempt is submitted.

1.2.4 **Mitigation:** means that the potential negative impact of the exceptional circumstances on performance is taken into account. This will be evident after the assignment submission deadline, when a participant knows whether the 'exceptional circumstances' which they experienced either prevented them from submitting the assignment by the deadline, or significantly affected the standard of the work they submitted.

1.3 Responsibilities

1.3.1 The head of programme management is responsible for implementation of this policy.

1.3.2 The academic registrar (or their nominee) is responsible for chairing the exceptional circumstances panel and for reporting outcomes to the Lancaster University exam board.

1.3.3 The academic registry team are responsible for:

- convening the exceptional circumstances panel
- collating all applications and evidence
- communicating outcomes to participants
- advising participants on the policy



- 1.3.4 The participant is responsible for following this procedure and requesting extensions and/or mitigations as they believe to be necessary, in good time and with supporting evidence as necessary.

Section 2: Policy and procedures

2.1 General principles

2.1.1 Timeliness

It is the responsibility of participants to submit exceptional circumstances in good time.

Participants should note that:

- Extension requests must always be made before the submission deadline and with as much notice as the participant is able to provide, given the timing of the events described. If the exceptional circumstances panel is unable to consider a request between its submission and the submission deadline, it will nevertheless take into account in its determination of an outcome whether the request was made in a reasonably timely way.
- Mitigation requests should normally be submitted no later than 15 working days after the submission deadline. Participants are expected to consider, where possible, whether the circumstances have affected their ability to complete the assessment before provisional marks are published.

A late request will not normally be considered. The academic registrar may consider a mitigation request outside of the expected times where it includes a reasonable explanation as to why the application was not made within the required timescales.

- 2.1.2 This policy is intended to cover circumstances that are transient, short term, and do not stop a participant from continuing with the programme. For example, a chronic medical condition, for which due allowance has already been made, will not itself be considered a good cause, although a short-term exacerbation of such a condition might be judged so.

- 2.1.3 Applications are treated confidentially and seen only by members of staff required to decide the outcome, including the practice tutor/dissertation supervisor. There are circumstances in which information disclosed in an application would be shared further: (a) if information is disclosed



which raises a concern for the safety of the participant or of another person, this will be shared at the earliest opportunity with those who can assess the risk and take any necessary mitigating action (for instance under the Supported Study & Fitness to Study policy); (b) where information is shared which suggests that a participant has a previously undisclosed disability or change to a disability, this will be shared by the Frontline staff receiving it with the Lancaster University Disability and Inclusive Practice Service as appropriate, so that reasonable adjustments and support can be offered or reviewed. If a participant would like to restrict sight of their application, they should indicate this on the exceptional circumstances request form and may then password protect the documents and email them to academic.support@thefrontline.org.uk indicating that they wish them to be viewed only by the Chair, who will brief the rest of the panel on whether the information shared meets the conditions in 1.2.2 above. As with information received via the exceptional circumstances form, information received by email can be shared by the Chair if in their judgement it either raises concerns for the safety of the participant or indicates a previously unrecorded disability.

- 2.1.4 Applications for extensions which go beyond seven days past the original deadline, and for mitigation, must be accompanied by independent, relevant, and authoritative evidence. Frontline reserves the right to make enquires as it sees fit on the submitted evidence.
- 2.1.5 Evidence should clearly describe the circumstances which are provided by the participant for consideration and how these impacted on the participant's ability to complete the assessments in question.
- 2.1.6 Participants are at all times expected to be mindful of the Participant Charter and the professional standards set out by Social Work England and the British Association of Social Workers. Participants whose requests for exceptional circumstances fail to meet the expectations of honesty and accountability set out in these documents are likely to have their requests declined and may be referred to the Fitness to Practise procedure.
- 2.1.7 External examiners are entitled to attend the Exceptional Circumstances Panel or may be briefed on the decisions if they are unable to attend prior to any Examination Board.



2.2 Application Criteria and Details

- 2.2.1 Participants should submit an [exceptional circumstances form](#). This form requires the participant to input their 8-digit Lancaster University student ID, and first and last name, and to select the assessment to which the request applies.
- 2.2.2 All applications for exceptional circumstances must include a clear statement of the grounds for the request.
- Applications for an extension of seven days or less to the original deadline do not require evidence beyond the participant's explanation of the impact of the exceptional circumstances on their assessment.
 - Applications for an extension of more than seven days to the original deadline, or for mitigation, should be accompanied by relevant and independent evidence. Examples of evidence which can be accepted include (this list is not exhaustive):
 - A statement from a medical professional confirming a period of ill health and its impact on the participant, or on a relative or other significant person;
 - A 'Statement of Fitness for Work' showing a period of sick leave preceding or including the assessment deadline;
 - Appointment letters or prescriptions which name the participant, or (with the permission of the person named) their relative or another significant person, and enable the panel to see clearly that serious illness or medical treatment has occurred in the assessment period;
 - A statement from a person with professional responsibility for events around a death, such as a health care provider, funeral director or religious leader;
 - A detailed statement from the practice tutor corroborating the participant's account of their circumstances and their impact on the participant's assessed work. The panel will also find helpful the PT's comment on plans in place to support the participant with, and beyond, this assessment.
- 2.2.3 If a participant requires more time to collect supporting evidence, they must submit the form within the expected timescales (see [clause 2.1.1](#)) and liaise with the academic registry team to establish and confirm an appropriate deadline to submit the evidence required for the application.
- 2.2.4 Participants are advised to keep a copy of all documentary evidence they submit.



2.2.5 Participants who believe they are unable to complete an assessment in the specified time period due to limited practice opportunities should contact their practice tutor as soon as possible to raise their concerns. Practice tutors will explore alternative options, if available, and will make the necessary arrangements with the consultant social worker to support the participant. If, after all other options have been exhausted, the participant is still unable to complete the assessment an application for an extension based upon limited practice opportunities may be submitted. Where an extension of more than seven days from the original submission deadline is being sought this must be supported by a statement from the practice tutor.

2.2.6 Exceptional circumstances might include (this list is not exhaustive):

- Serious short-term illness, medical treatment or accident;
- Bereavement caused by the death of a close relative or other significant person;
- Caring responsibilities which could not reasonably have been anticipated: for instance, because they arise as a result of ill-health in a family member or other significant person during the assessment period;
- Serious domestic events which could not reasonably have been anticipated and which have had a severe impact, for instance, because they have required the participant to change their place of residence;
- short-term exacerbation of a long-term health condition;
- The impact of a long-term health condition, specific learning difference or neurodivergence where an Individual Learning Support Plan [ILSP] has recorded the recommendation that extensions should be considered;
- The impact of a long-term health condition, specific learning difference or neurodivergence which has been identified since beginning the programme, and for which the participant is in the process of securing an ILSP;
- **Limited Practice Opportunities** – meaning that the participant has been unable to complete practice-related assessments due to repeated cancellations and/or postponements of scheduled visits by families, and there is insufficient time to complete them within the submission period.
- Other exceptional factors which meet the definition in 1.2.1.

2.2.7 The following are examples (the list is not exhaustive) of reasons commonly refused:



- Medical circumstances which were outside the relevant assessment period;
- Minor illness or ailment, which in an employment context would be unlikely to lead to absence from work;
- A long-term health condition or specific learning difference for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments as defined in an ILSP (as opposed to the short-term exacerbation of such a condition, which would be considered);
- The fact that multiple deadlines fall concurrently (for instance, because more than one assessment is due to be resubmitted);
- A workload in the participant's placement which is appropriate for the stage of placement;
- Routine caring responsibilities which could reasonably have been foreseen and accommodated;
- Personal travel, unless for an emergency;
- Computer or printer problems;
- Submission of files which have been corrupted or are in the wrong format;
- Poor time management.

2.3 Exceptional Circumstances consideration

2.3.1 Applications for exceptional circumstances will be considered by members of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel, chaired by the academic registrar (or their nominee). The remaining panel members will be drawn from representatives of the curriculum team. Decisions will be taken as follows:

- Applications for first extensions of less than seven days from the original deadline: considered by the academic registrar (or nominee) in their role as Chair of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel.
- Applications for extensions of more than seven days: normally considered by a two-member Exceptional Circumstances Panel,
- Applications for mitigation: normally considered by a minimum of a three-member Exceptional Circumstances Panel.

2.3.2 The remit of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel (ECP) is:

- to review reported circumstances, and determine whether these circumstances have been detrimental to a participant's academic performance;



- where circumstances are agreed to have been detrimental, to propose a remedy;
- where the application is in reference to exceptional circumstances which have previously been addressed in the conduct of assessment, e.g. by extra time for examination or an extended coursework deadline, to consider whether circumstances were sufficiently compensated by the earlier response;
- to ensure that decisions are equitable and consistent across cohorts and regions;
- to ensure that decisions are recorded consistently and in a way which enables outcomes to be reported to the Examination Board.

2.3.3 The panel will consider whether the application meets the criteria, taking into account:

- the evidence provided by the participant;
- fairness to the individual participant, which must be balanced with fairness to the other participants and integrity of the assessment as a whole.

2.3.4 If the participant has failed to attend an examination, or has failed to submit an assessment by the deadline, and is seeking mitigation, the panel will consider whether such failure could reasonably be considered to have been caused by the exceptional circumstances presented.

2.3.5 If the participant has submitted work for assessment or attended an examination and is seeking mitigation, the panel will consider whether the academic standard of this work could reasonably be expected to have been significantly greater if the exceptional circumstances presented had not applied.

2.3.6 The Exceptional Circumstances Panel may propose a number of actions including (but not limited to):

- declining the application;
- granting an extension;
- recommending the removal of the penalty that has been applied because an assessment was submitted after the deadline;
- granting an opportunity to take a further examination or submit new coursework as a first sitting if the affected opportunity had that status, or as a capped reassessment if the affected opportunity had that status;



- granting an opportunity to submit work after the agreed deadline (and after the three-day window for permitted late submissions) where evidence has been provided that the file to be submitted has not been amended in the intervening period.
- recommending an opportunity to retake modules with attendance (either capped or uncapped depending on individual circumstances) after all other reassessment opportunities have been exhausted. This recommendation should be endorsed by the participant's Head of Delivery before being ratified by the examination board.
- for a graduating participant, recommending a class of award higher than that obtained by applying the rules in the normal way.

However, the ECP may **not** propose changing the marks for any assessment, nor may it propose an additional opportunity with a different status from that held by the opportunity affected by exceptional circumstances. If a further resit opportunity is proposed for a capped reassessment submission, a capped mark will also be applied to the new work. If a further resit opportunity is proposed for a first sitting (including an uncapped reassessment), there will be no cap on the mark achieved.

2.3.7 If the panel concludes that the request for exceptional circumstances should be declined, the status of the participant's assessment attempt is unchanged. Submissions will in that case be marked as usual, and penalised for lateness if appropriate, or given a mark of zero where no submission was made.

2.3.8 If the panel approves mitigation of an assessment attempt, and grants an opportunity to take a further examination or submit new coursework as a repeat of the assessment opportunity affected by exceptional circumstances, the desirability of the participant's assessment being conducted in full should be balanced with the practical considerations. Consideration should also be given to the participant's other assessment components. In order to permit completion:

- a special sitting of an examination may be arranged, or the participant may be required to attend for examination at a scheduled session; and/or
- a date of completion of non-examination assessment will be set, as appropriate in the circumstances. In any such event, that sitting or submission will be regarded as the



participant's first attempt if the examination or assessment missed would itself have been the first attempt.

- 2.3.9 Where it is deemed that the evidence presented supports the participant's claim that they were prevented by good cause from completing work for the assessment on or by the deadline, and there are no/limited means of substituting an alternative assessment then only in cases where the participant has passed (including provisionally) the assignment the panel can recommend to the Examination Board that the affected marks be set aside in calculating the overall degree classification.
- 2.3.10 Once the panel has been convened, Registry will notify the participant of the outcome by email, normally within five working days.
- 2.3.11 In considering marks, Examination Boards will take due cognisance of the recommendations of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. Only in rare circumstances, should an Examination Board overturn or disregard a decision of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel and all such decisions must be reported explicitly to the officer with delegated authority from Lancaster University's Senate.

2.4 Next Steps

- 2.4.1 If a participant receives notification that their application for extension has been declined, they may wish to submit an application for mitigation. Their application would need to be supported with evidence which goes beyond what was originally submitted, as per the above procedure and time periods (see [clause 2.1.1](#)).
- 2.4.2 The Examination Board will receive notification of all recommendations of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. Once the Board has met, if the outcome of an Exceptional Circumstances application has contributed to the failure of a module or of the programme overall, a participant may lodge an appeal application if they satisfy and meet the grounds as sent out in the Academic Appeals chapter of Lancaster University's Manual of Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP).



2.4.3 Outcomes of Exceptional Circumstances which do not contribute to the failure of a module or of the programme overall cannot be challenged through the Academic Appeals procedures.

Participants who wish to raise a complaint about the handling of an Exceptional Circumstances application should refer to the Frontline Complaints Policy and Procedure.

Section 3: Relevant references

3.1 Policies and documents

3.1.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following policies and guidance:

- Attendance and engagement
- Fitness to study
- Fitness to practise
- Complaints policy and procedure
- [Lancaster University Academic Appeals](#)