



**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE BIRMINGHAM  
CODE OF PRACTICE ON EXTENUATING  
CIRCUMSTANCES**

**Approved by Academic Regulations Committee**

**16<sup>th</sup> October 2020**

## **Index**

1. Introduction
2. Specific Guidance Related to Covid-19
3. Grounds for Extenuating Circumstances
4. Evidence
5. Deadlines for notification of Extenuating Circumstances
6. Procedure
7. Extenuating Circumstances – Possible Outcomes
8. Deferral of Studies
9. Organisation of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP)
10. Appeals
11. False Claims

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1** During a period of study, students may encounter significant personal difficulties that adversely affect their ability to study or complete assessments and examinations. These personal difficulties are referred to as 'Extenuating Circumstances'.
- 1.2** Extenuating Circumstances may occur at any point in the academic year and may affect any form of assessment including coursework and examinations and may result in absence from teaching.
- 1.3** It is the responsibility of the student to report Extenuating Circumstances at the earliest possible opportunity, within appropriate timeframe (see 1.4 for further explanation) but no later than 10 working days after the original due date.
- 1.4** Extenuating Circumstances claims should be submitted as close as possible to date of the affected assessment (around 2 -3 weeks before the due date or closer). Applications should not be submitted so far in advance that the impact of the extenuating circumstances cannot be assessed.

## **2. Specific Guidance Related to Covid-19**

- 2.1** Where a student experiences any symptoms of Coronavirus (high temperature, new continuous cough, loss or change in sense of taste or smell), they must stay at home (or in his/her room if living in halls). Students must contact [covid19@ucb.ac.uk](mailto:covid19@ucb.ac.uk) .
- 2.2** Students should submit an application for extenuating circumstances if they feel they are experiencing significant or serious illness as a result of Covid-19, or caring for a member of their immediate household, where significant caring support is required which impacts on their study.
- 2.3** Students asked to self-isolate following NHS guidelines who are not experiencing significant or serious illness are expected to continue to engage with their studies and continue to work on assignments. Students are reminded not to attend campus while self-isolating. Additional online support and services are available from UCB remotely to assist students who are isolating.
- 2.4** Students asked to self-isolate following NHS guidelines may find they are not able to attend UCB campus during periods in which they are due to undertake practical assessments. In these circumstances, students should submit an application for extenuating circumstances.
- 2.5** Students may find they are unable to obtain evidence in support of their Extenuating Circumstances application due to difficulties accessing appointments and information from GPs, hospitals and other public bodies. In such circumstances students should submit their self-certified application and these

will be considered by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) on a case-by-case basis.

**2.6** If a student has been contacted by UCB's Covid-19 reporting and tracking service or has reported a suspected case or close contact to [covid19@ucb.ac.uk](mailto:covid19@ucb.ac.uk) any subsequent application for Extenuating Circumstances can be cross referenced against UCB's central database and can be used as evidence of a student self-isolating or Covid-19 related illness

### **3. Grounds for Extenuating Circumstances**

**3.1** Extenuating Circumstances are circumstances that are exceptional, unforeseen and that significantly disrupt a student's academic performance. They may include (but are not limited to):

- Significant or serious instances physical or mental illness, accident or injury. You must demonstrate that you have consulted a medical practitioner in a timely manner regarding your issue(s);
- Undergoing a period of self-isolation following NHS guidelines which impacts the ability to undertake practical sessions contributing to final module assessment;
- Worsening of a long-term existing condition, formally diagnosed by a medical practitioner;
- The recent death or serious illness of a close family member or dependant where significant caring support is required. Across the sector this is typically considered as six weeks prior to the date of application; however, we will consider all applications on a case-by-case basis. After that time, formal evidence of the impact of the bereavement will have to be provided;
- Family crisis or emergency directly affecting the student;
- Absence covered by Paternity and Maternity Leave and Jury Service (deferral of which has been denied by the Court);
- Exceptional and unforeseen financial hardship.

**3.2** Circumstances that will not usually be considered as Extenuating Circumstances include:

- Coughs, cold and minor ailments, even if supported by medical evidence (please refer to section for specific advice concerning Covid-19);
- Routine medical appointments;
- Undergoing a period of self-isolation following NHS guidelines, unless impacting the ability to undertake practical sessions contributing to final module assessment or for reasons listed above, including:
  - a. significant or serious illness;
  - b. significant or serious illness of a member of the immediate household or dependant where significant caring support is required;
- Computer or IT problems such as not following submission instructions, leading to incorrect, incomplete or non-submissions;

- Time management or personal organisation, failing to allow enough time to prepare for submission or complete the assessment
- Long-term health condition, either physical or psychological, where treatment or additional support/arrangements are in place to mitigate
- Mis-reading the assessment/exam, remit/timetable or locating the correct details
- Assessments or examinations with similar deadlines and due at the same time;
- Repeated applications based on the same circumstances
- Planned personal or domestic events such as moving house or attending a wedding;
- Holidays or travel arrangements;
- Routine work commitments and consequences of employment;
- Sports activities.

**3.3** University College Birmingham has put in place arrangements to make reasonable adjustments for students with additional needs. As a result, if a student has a disability they may apply for Extenuating Circumstances based on factors not connected with the disability, or based on unforeseen effects of the disability or if adjustments were made after your assessment.

**3.4** The submission of a claim for Extenuating Circumstances included in the list shown in 2.1 (above) does not imply that the claim will be accepted as other factors will be taken into account including the time of the relevant assessment and the likely impact of the event on the assessment.

**3.5** Students are expected to plan their workload and allow sufficient time to cope with the demands of both employment and study workloads.

#### **4. Evidence**

**4.1** UCB recognises that due to the COVID 19 pandemic, third party evidence may not be available. Where possible, submissions for Extenuating Circumstances must be accompanied by independent third party evidence which must confirm the existence of the Extenuating Circumstances and state how this has affected the student concerned at the time of the assessment.

**4.2** Examples of acceptable third party evidence include (but are not limited to):

- GP/Consultant/Hospital letter on headed paper;
- Letter from a Solicitor;
- Letter from a Counsellor or other authority;
- Copy of the funeral booklet/order of service or Death Certificate;
- Bank Statement or letter from the Student Loans Company, Court letters etc.;
- Police Case Reference number and report. Crime reference number on its own will not be sufficient to support claim and medical letter or police report explaining the effect would be more appropriate.

**4.3** Evidence must be legible and in English. Evidence that is written in another language must be accompanied by a certified translation. UCB reserve the right not to accept any evidence that is unable to be translated.

**4.4** Evidence provided does not have to be an original document. We accept photocopied/scanned documents but we may request to see an original document for authentication purposes. All photographs/screenshots have to be a good quality, not faded or cropped and all information should be clearly displayed. Photographs of injuries or illnesses are not appropriate and won't be considered.

**4.5** Medical evidence must contain information including:

- a) Confirmation that the ongoing treatment/ medication is affecting the student;
- b) Dates of any consultations with a GP/Consultant and outcomes of the meetings;
- c) Dates of the affected period of time (this must cover the date of the assessment);
- d) Information on how the illness or medication has affected the student's performance, ability to attend University, concentration or completion of assessments.

**4.6** The dates of the evidence must be relevant with the date of the affected assessment.

**4.7** A letter from a GP stating that the student was seen and the student told him/her that they had been ill will not normally be accepted as evidence.

**4.8** Self-certification of your own circumstances may be accepted in circumstances where evidence is not available or accessible.

**4.9** The Chair of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) will use the guidelines to decide whether the evidence submitted is acceptable. The Student is responsible for providing sufficient evidence; Registry will not make enquiries or obtain evidence on a student's behalf.

## **5. Deadlines for notification of Extenuating Circumstances**

**5.1** Deadlines relating to the Extenuating Circumstances procedure must be clearly publicised in handbooks and induction materials. All students are responsible for making themselves aware of and complying with deadlines.

**5.2** It is the student's responsibility to provide Registry with the appropriate form and accompanying evidence within the specified deadline. Lecturers or Year Managers cannot make submissions on a student's behalf, apart from in exceptional circumstances.

**5.3** Extenuating Circumstances not submitted within 10 working days of the assignment deadline or examination cannot be considered by Registry. The exception to this is where it is impossible for the Student to submit their application due to medical reasons, locality reasons and other factors that will be determined by Registry.

**5.4** Evidence for an Extenuating Circumstances claim should be submitted within 10 working days after submission of the application. The exception to this is where it is impossible for the Student to submit their evidence due to medical reasons, locality reasons and other factors that will be determined by Registry.

**5.5** A working day is deemed to be Monday-Friday, excluding Public Holidays and days on which UCB is closed.

**5.6** Extenuating Circumstances forms cannot be submitted once the Board of Examiners has met.

**5.7** If a student can provide further evidence after the deadline then an appeal can be made to the Assessment Appeals Committee.

## **6. Procedure**

**6.1** Decisions on whether a claim for Extenuating Circumstances is valid will be based on the following factors:

- The severity of the problem and length of time affected;
- Supporting documentary evidence;
- Relevance on how close is the affected period to the point of assessment

**6.2** The Extenuating Circumstances application form is available for completion on the UCB Portal. The form must be presented to Registry alongside appropriate evidence.

**6.3** Upon receipt of the relevant Extenuating Circumstances form and appropriate evidence, Registry will then process the application. The application will not be considered without appropriate evidence and correctly completed application. The acceptability of the application will be assessed by Registry. The appropriate Year Manager will be consulted in regards to the extenuating circumstances and if the evidence is deemed to be **sufficient** and supported by the Year Manager then the application can be accepted by Registry. Once a decision has been made, the status of the application will be updated on the UCB Portal and it is the student's responsibility to check the progress of their application. If the evidence is deemed to be **insufficient** or the Year Manager does not support the application then the application will be heard by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP) at the end of semester Extenuating Circumstances Board. Once a decision has been made, the status of the application will be

updated on the UCB Portal and it is the student's responsibility to check the progress of their application.

The result of the claim of Extenuating Circumstances will then be raised in the Board of Examiners meeting and be taken into account. Details of the Extenuating Circumstances claim are treated confidentially and the nature of the claim is not discussed at the Board of Examiners meeting.

#### 6.4 FE Programmes

In regard to FE programmes the Lead External Verifier must authorise any resubmission, grant authority for any extension or further extension and together with the FE delivery team will ensure that an assessment activity /assignment will be issued which does not prejudice any other learners or the integrity of the assessment process. This may involve the use of an alternative assignment, where necessary, from the bank held by the University, which complies with the requirements of the awarding body, in the event of extended absence on the part of the learner or serious on-going disruption to the learner caused by external extenuating circumstances.

#### 6.5 Apprenticeships

When applying for Extenuating Circumstances for Apprenticeships, if the assessment is a UCB module then the UCB Extenuating Circumstances procedure must be followed. If the assessment is part of the Apprenticeship Framework then the Student must follow the Apprenticeship Framework guidelines.

### 7. Extenuating Circumstances – Possible Outcomes

7.1 Taking into account the type of assessment that the Extenuating Circumstances applies to and the student's overall profile, there may be several different outcomes **if accepted**:

- The student is permitted to submit the assignment late, within 10 working days after the original due date. If the student cannot meet that deadline, then the student sits the assignment as a first attempt at the next available opportunity,
- The late assignment is marked without late penalty if handed in before the final hand-in date. The final hand-in date for all work is exactly 10 working days after the original assignment deadline.
- Dissertation/Research Projects applications will be treated differently and a new submission date will be granted. The new submission date will typically be between 4-6 weeks after the original due date and will be decided based on a student's individual circumstances. A longer extension may be provided in extreme circumstances such as hospitalisation or a serious medical issue. This new hand-in date will be provided to the student by Registry.
- The student sits the examination as a first attempt at the next available opportunity;
- An additional resit may be granted if the Extenuating Circumstances apply to the reassessment period;



**7.2** Depending on the type of assessment that the Extenuating Circumstances applies to, there may be several different outcomes **if not accepted**:

- The student re-sits the examination at the next available opportunity and the late penalty is applied by the Board of Examiners;
- The student re-sits the assignment at the next available opportunity and the late penalty is applied by the Board of Examiners;
- The late assignment is marked and the late penalty is applied by the Board of Examiners;
- If the Extenuating Circumstances application was for a resubmission this may result in a failed module.

**7.3** The Extenuating Circumstances Panel cannot change individual assessment or module marks. For reference see Academic Regulations: Part 2: Assessment, Progression and Award.

## **8. Deferral of Studies**

**8.1** An application to defer studies can be made if a student's ability to attend and participate in the programme of study on which they are enrolled is or will be adversely affected by Extenuating Circumstances over an extended period of time. For further information see the Code of Practice on Leave of Absence Procedures.

## **9. Organisation of the Extenuating Circumstances Panel (ECP)**

**9.1** The Extenuating Circumstances Panel consists of:

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Quality and Estates)
- Registry Administrator (Extenuating Circumstances);
- Relevant Lecturer/Year Manager.

**9.2** The Panel should be scheduled to convene after the deadline for submission of Extenuating Circumstances forms has passed at the end of the Semester, but before the Board of Examiners has met.

**9.3** All cases will be discussed with utmost confidentiality and members of the ECP must not discuss cases outside the meeting. However, External Examiners may request, and are entitled to know, the outcomes from the ECP meeting.

**9.4** The ECP will report recommendations relating to progress decisions to the relevant Board of Examiners. For reference see Academic Regulations: Part 2: Assessment, Progression and Award.

**9.5** A student is entitled to know the outcome of their submission; however, details on the discussions held at the Panel meeting will not be disclosed.

## **10 Appeals**

**10.1** A student can appeal against an assessment decision by making a case to the Assessment Appeals Committee of the Academic Board. Information regarding the procedure for making an appeal may be found on the UCB website.

**10.2** A student cannot appeal against the decision of the ECP. If further evidence becomes available, not at the time of the original application, the student can present this by making a case to the Assessment Appeals Committee of the Academic Board.

## **9 False Claims**

**11.1** Submitting a false claim could be regarded as an attempt to gain an unfair advantage and could constitute a breach of discipline under the University's disciplinary procedure. For reference see Code of Practice on Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct.