

Exceptional Circumstances Policy

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Overview.....	2
1.1 Purpose and Scope	2
1.2 Definitions.....	2
1.3 Responsibilities	4
Section 2: Policy and procedures.....	4
2.1 General principles	4
2.2 Application Criteria and Details	6
2.3 Exceptional Circumstances Panel	6
2.4 Next Steps.....	9
Section 3: Relevant references	10
3.1 Frontline policies and documents	10

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 and how Frontline will deal with these requests.

1.1.2 The policy sets out Frontline's procedure for reporting, documenting and evaluating applications.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 Exceptional Circumstances: Can be considered as such actions or events outside the control of the participant which result in any circumstances which are thought reasonable to have caused an individual participant:

- To fail to complete all required assessment for a programme or contributing module by a stipulated deadline; or
- To complete assessed work to a lesser standard of academic performance than might reasonable have been expected on the basis of performance elsewhere during their study and where the same circumstances have not applied.

These circumstances might need an application for extension and/or mitigation in order to arrive at a fair and correct judgement of the participant's academic performance.

1.2.2 Exceptional Circumstances: must be evidenced and demonstrate good cause as to why the participant's performance and achievement have been adversely affected by means which have not been fully addressed through extension and other available assessment procedures.

1.2.3 Good Cause: means an illness or other relevant personal circumstances affecting a participant and resulting in either the participant's failure to attend an examination or submit an assignment at or by the due time, or otherwise satisfy the requirements of the scheme of assessment; or, the participant's performance in examination or other instrument of assessment being manifestly prejudiced.

1.2.4 Extension: means a participant's prescribed time to complete an assessment is lengthened. Normally, an extension may be agreed only after the assessment sitting begins and before the assessment attempt is submitted. A request can be made in either of the following circumstances:

- **Limited Practice Opportunities-** That the participant has been unable to complete practice related assessments due to repeated cancellations and/or postponements of scheduled visits by the families and there is insufficient time to complete them within the submission period.
- **Exceptional Circumstances-** That the participant has experienced unforeseen and/or unpreventable circumstances or events outside of their control which have the potential to significantly impair their ability to complete the assessment(s) by a stipulated deadline date.

1.2.5 Mitigation: means that the potential negative impact of the exceptional circumstances on performance is taken into account and can be applied for after the assignment submission (post hoc) period and when a participant has experienced 'exceptional circumstances'.

1.2.6 These are examples (not meant to form a complete list) of reasons commonly accepted:

- Bereavement- death of a close relative or significant other;
- Evidence of a short-term exacerbation of a long-term health condition;
- Serious short-term illness or accident of a nature that, in an employment context which would lead to absence or sick leave;
- Other exceptional factors for which there is evidence of the impact.

1.2.7 These examples (not meant to form a complete list) of reasons commonly refused:

- Statement of a medical condition without reasonable evidence (medical or otherwise) to support it or a condition supported by retrospective medical evidence;
- Medical circumstances outside the relevant assessment period or learning period of which the extension is being applied for;
- Minor illness or ailment, which in an employment context would be unlikely to lead to absence from work;
- Long-term health condition for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments;
- Computer or printer problems;

- Poor time management.

1.3 Responsibilities

1.3.1 Head of Programme Management is responsible for implementation of this policy.

1.3.2 The Academic Registrar is responsible for chairing the exceptional circumstances panel.

1.3.3 The Academic Registry Team are responsible for:

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

Section 2: Policy and procedures

2.1 General principles

2.1.1 It will be the responsibility of the participant to submit the application, alongside the necessary supporting evidence as per the following deadline periods;

- Extension request on the basis of limited practice opportunities to be submitted at least 5 working days before the submission deadline; or
- Extension request on the basis of exceptional circumstances to be submitted at least 3 working days before the submission deadline; or
- Mitigation request to be submitted in no later than 5 working days post the submission deadline.

A late request made after the submission deadline will not normally be considered.

However, the Academic Registrar retains the right to consider a request at their discretion where they deem there to be a credible 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 confidentiality and seen only by members of staff required to decide the outcome. If a participant would like to restrict sight of their application, they

may password protect their full application and email the documents to exceptional.circumstances@thefrontline.org.uk indicating that they wish the document to be viewed only by the Chair.

- 2.1.4** Where possible, all applications must contain independent, relevant and authoritative evidence and signed by an appropriate third party. Frontline reserves the right to take evidence and make enquires as it sees fit on the submitted evidence.
- 2.1.5** Evidence will mean a report descriptive of the medical condition or other adverse personal circumstances which are provided by the participant for consideration as amounting to good cause. Where the report refers to a medical condition or more than five days duration the report must be completed by an appropriate medical practitioner who would be requested to comment on how the medical condition concerned would be likely (if this were the case) to have affected the participant's ability to prepare for or carry out the assessments in question.
- 2.1.6** In considering the applications, Frontline aims to evaluate the effect of the circumstances on the participant's study or performance, and to decide how they should treat this to ensure any actions assist the participant where possible but do not give them an unfair advantage.
- 2.1.7** A participant who is affected by serious ongoing circumstances (medical, personal or financial) that seem unlikely to be resolved within a reasonable time may be advised or required to:
- Take a break from their studies (intercalation); or
 - Get and maintain an active inclusion learning support plan.
- 2.1.8** 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 based upon limited practice opportunities may be submitted.

2.1.9 The External Examiner(s) is (are) entitled to attend the Exceptional Circumstances Panel or may be briefed on the decisions of they are unable to attend prior to any Examination Board.

2.2 Application Criteria and Details

2.2.1 The application must normally include the following:

- A clear statement of the grounds for the request;
- All relevant and independent evidence, i.e. doctor's note;
- A statement from the Practice Tutor, only if the application for extension is based on limited practice opportunities.

2.2.2 If a participant requires more time to collect supporting evidence, they must submit the form on time and liaise with the Academic Registry team to establish and confirm an appropriate deadline to submit the evidence required for the application.

2.2.3 Participants are required to keep a copy of all forms and documentary evidence they submit.

2.2.4 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;
- **unpreventable:** there must have been no reasonable steps that the participant could have taken to prevent the event or circumstances from occurring;
- **appropriate:** the participant must be able to demonstrate how this event or circumstances impacted their ability to complete the assessment or exam on time;
- **corroborated:** a request for extension must meet the normal requirements for independent documentary evidence.

2.3 Exceptional Circumstances Panel

2.3.1 Applications will be considered by the Exceptional Circumstances Panel, convened at least once per month. The Panels are chaired by the Academic Registrar (or their

nominee) and the remaining panel members will be drawn from representatives of the curriculum team.

2.3.2 The panel will consist of three members, in order to be quorate and the outcome will be made upon majority decision.

2.3.3 Extension applications will normally initially be considered by 2 members of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. If they are in agreement that the application and evidence is in line with the policy, then the application will be accepted, and the participant will be informed of the outcome. All other claims will be considered by the full Exceptional Circumstances Panel.

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

- review reported circumstances, for which due written evidence has been provided in order to reach a judgement on whether these circumstances have been detrimental to a participant’s academic performance. Where circumstances are agreed to have applied, the ECP will propose a remedy for consideration by the Examination Board.
- where exceptional circumstances have previously been addressed in the conduct of assessment- e.g. extra time for examination, the ECP must consider whether circumstances were sufficiently compensated by the earlier response.
- determine whether the circumstances cited are acceptable grounds to grant an application.
- ensure decisions are equitable and consistent across cohorts and regions.
- preparation of information on decision which will be brought forward to the Examination Board to inform final academic judgement. Formal minutes will record cases discussed, the ECP’s judgement on applicability of exceptional circumstances; and proposed remedy per each case. Minutes will contain such details of particular circumstances as is appropriate, but detailed discussion of circumstances will not be undertaken at the Examination Board or other meetings of examiners.

2.3.5 The Panel will consider:

- whether the application meets the criteria;
- the evidence provided by the participant claiming good cause, and any relevant and available material submitted by him or her for assessment will be scrutinised;

- fairness to the individual participant claiming good cause must be balanced with fairness to the other participants and integrity of the assessment as a whole;
- the duration of the impact of the circumstances;
- the proximity of the event or circumstances to the participant's studies;
- in the event of the participant having failed to attend an examination or having failed to submit course material or other work or assessment at or by the due time, it will be determined whether the failure to attend or submit has been justified by good cause; and
- whether there is verifiable, current and independent evidence to support the request.

2.3.6 Where it is determined that the evidence presented does not support the participant's claim that s/he was prevented by good cause from attending an examination or from submitting work for assessment, the participant will be awarded a percentage score of zero for the assessment(s) in question. Where work is submitted but the participant makes a claim that it has been affected by good cause (or a late penalty is applied), and the evidence presented does not support the participant's claim then his or her work will be assessed (or penalised) as though no claim of good cause had been received and the participant's grade for the module will be calculated accordingly.

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

- Grant the application for extension. If an extension is granted it will normally be for a period between 7 to 14 calendar days (including weekends and holidays) and this will normally commence from the day of the submission deadline.
- Decline the application.
- In the event of an incomplete or provisionally failed assessment arising from good cause the participant will normally be expected to complete his or her assessment by attending the examination at a subsequent session, or submitting outstanding work for assessment, if an opportunity to do so occurs within his or her period of study. In considering whether this requirement should apply, 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 as:
 - A special sitting of an examination may be arranged, or the participant will 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 his or her first attempt.
- (For a Graduating participant) Recommending a class of award higher than that obtained by applying the rules in the normal way.
- Where it is determined that the evidence presented supports the participant's claim that s/he was prevented by good cause from completing work for assessment on or by the due time, and where the participant has passed (including provisionally) the assignment and there are no/limited means of substituting an alternative assessment then the following recommendations can be made to the Examination Board:
 - To recommend to set the marks aside in calculating the overall degree result; or
 - To recommend to remove the late cap/penalty that has been applied.

However, it may **not** propose changing the marks for any assessment, nor may it propose an uncapped resit.

2.3.8 There are circumstances where the Panel may grant participants a longer-term extension. This will be determined through relevant supporting evidence. In all cases, the actual length of extension awarded by the Panel will depend on the supportive evidence provided. The duration of the extension will also consider the timings of the Examination Boards.

2.3.9 Once the Panel has been convened, the Panel will notify the participant of the outcome by email, normally within five working days.

2.3.10 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 ECP and all such decisions must be reported explicitly to the officer with delegated authority from Senate.

2.4 Next Steps

2.4.1 If a participant receives notification that their application for extension has been declined they may submit an application for mitigation, as per the above procedure and time periods.

2.4.2 The Examination Board will receive notification of all other recommendations of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel. Once the Board has met a participant may lodge an appeal application if they satisfy and meet the grounds as sent out by AA1.5 of Lancaster University's Academic Appeals Regulation.

Section 3: Relevant references

3.1 Frontline 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