**Guidelines on Extenuating Circumstances for Postgraduate Research Students**

[**Extenuating Circumstances Form**](http://www2.essex.ac.uk/academic/students/pgt/extcircspg.doc) **(includes Medical Evidence Pro-forma)**  
Please print, complete and hand to the **Graduate Administrator** in your department.

These guidelines relate to the formal submission of an extenuating circumstances claim to your Supervisory Board and Research Student Progress Committee. This does not preclude you from informing your supervisor about any extenuating circumstances you experience during the course of your studies. In these cases you may wish to discuss with your supervisor whether a period of intermission would be appropriate. Further information about intermission can be found [here.](http://www2.essex.ac.uk/academic/students/pgr/absence.doc)



**A   What does the University define as ‘Extenuating Circumstances’?**

Extenuating circumstances are formally defined as “circumstances beyond the student’s control which cause the student to perform less well in his or her coursework or examinations than he or she might otherwise have been expected to do (on the basis of other work).  In general, extenuating circumstances will be of a medical or personal nature affecting the student for any significant period of time and/or during the examination period.”



**B   How do I inform the Supervisory Board and Research Student Progress Committee?**

It is **your responsibility** to inform the Supervisory Boardand Research Student Progress Committee (RSPC) about any extenuating circumstances you experience.  Although you may have previously discussed your difficulties with your supervisor or another member of staff in your department, this does not in itself constitute the formal submission of an extenuating circumstances claim.  You need to complete an Extenuating Circumstances Form which must be returned to the Graduate Administrator in your Department/Centre/School by no later than two weeks before the meeting of the Supervisory Board, or by the deadline published by the department/centre if different.  It cannot be guaranteed that forms submitted after this date will be referred to the Board.

You should note that it is essential to inform the Supervisory Board and RSPC of any extenuating circumstances **before** they meet.  You cannot subsequently appeal against a progress decision on the grounds of extenuating circumstances if you could reasonably have been expected to inform the Board and RSPC in advance.  It is also your responsibility to explain fully the impact of extenuating circumstances on your work.  If you do not sufficiently explain their impact then you cannot subsequently appeal and ask the Supervisory Board and RSPC to consider additional information.



**C   How much information do I need to include?**

You should include on the form details of how your progress has been affected by illness, personal difficulties etc.  Make sure you explain the impact these circumstances had on your performance.  It is **not** the role of the Supervisory Board and RSPCto try to work this out or to seek further information on your behalf.  Try to make your submission clear and **concise**.  Remember that the Supervisory Boardand RSPCare trying to determine whether the circumstances are likely to have **significantly** affected your academic performance and progress.



**D   What documentary evidence do I need to provide?**

1. **Extenuating circumstances of a non-medical nature**  
   You should if possible submit appropriate third party evidence to support your claim.  We realise that it in some cases it may be difficult to do this, and then Boards may accept claims which are not accompanied by documentary evidence.  However, lack of third party evidence may weaken your claim.
2. **Extenuating circumstances of a medical nature**  
   In consultation with the local Health Centre the University has developed a Medical Evidence Pro-forma for you to use if, having read the following guidelines, you see that you need to supply medical evidence to support your claim.  The Pro-forma is attached to the end of the Extenuating Circumstances Form.



**E   What circumstances are NOT taken into account?**

It is not possible to list every circumstance that the Supervisory Board and/or RSPC would not accept or take into account.  However some of the more obvious examples are listed below:

* general pressure of work is not taken to be circumstances beyond your control, as you are expected to plan your work schedule;
* a short-term problem or illness which has occurred during the year and which is not be deemed to have had an overall effect on your progress;



**F  How are extenuating circumstances judged by the Supervisory Board and RSPC?**

Your Supervisory Board and RSPC will try to determine whether, and to what extent, your reported extenuating circumstances have affected your academic performance and progress, and determine what action, if any, can be taken.  In assessing the significance of extenuating circumstances RSPCs will normally take into account:

* the severity of the problem and the length of time involved;
* any supporting documentary evidence;
* whether it is possible to gauge the effect of the extenuating circumstances upon academic performance;
* whether your achievement is consistent with past performance;
* whether it is possible to adjust the deadline for you to reach expected milestones.



**G   What action can the RSPC take?**

The RSPC can assess whether your extenuating circumstances have affected your ability to submit work to the Supervisory Board and/or RSPC by the required deadline and/or whether your extenuating circumstances have affected your progress in a way that means it is not reasonable to have expected you to reach the required milestone (including the criteria for Confirmation of PhD Status). In such cases, the RSPC may be able to extend the deadline for work to be submitted and/or extend the deadline by which you must have reached the relevant milestones in your study.

If appropriate, the RSPC may recommend that you take a period of intermission (leave of absence).

The Supervisory Board and RSPC cannot allow, or recommend to the Dean, an indefinite extension to your deadline.



**I   False Claims**

You should note that submitting a false claim could be regarded as an attempt to gain unfair advantage, which would be an academic offence and could be dealt with under the Academic Offences Procedures.



**J   Data Protection Act 1998**

By submitting an extenuating circumstances form you are agreeing to the University holding this personal data for the purposes of processing your claim.  The University will hold this data in accordance with its notification under the 1998 Data Protection Act.



**K   Equality Act 2010**

If you are providing information about your disability on your extenuating circumstances form, please note that this does not count as disclosure to the University as these forms are intended for use only by the Board of Examiners.  We strongly urge you to disclose any persistent medical condition, specific learning difficulty or disability to Student Support.

***IMPORTANT – PLEASE READ: Information about you that may affect professional suitability***

1) The University is committed to a fair and confidential process for handling extenuating circumstances and recognises that this process may involve the disclosure and handling of sensitive personal information.

2) The University is committed to full compliance with its obligations related to professional suitability in order to uphold the highest standards of conduct among its students both during and beyond their period as a student at the University.

3) All University students are required to comply with the University’s Disciplinary Regulations and other regulations of the University regarding conduct. Students enrolled on schemes where a practical professional placement is required have additional responsibilities placed upon them regarding their professional suitability. Failure to meet these responsibilities can lead to the *Breach of Professional Conduct, Fitness to Practise and Termination of Training Procedure* being invoked. You will have been informed when you registered as a student if your degree scheme is subject to this Procedure

4) Breaches of professional standards by students may involve a range of actions or omissions but may include:

* actions that are harmful to service users, other members of the public or service provides;
* actions that are likely to constitute an unacceptable risk to students or others;
* failure to disclose information about previous matters relating to professional suitability prior to enrolment on the scheme;
* contravention of the relevant professional code of conduct;
* actions that are prejudicial to the development or standing of professional practice.

5) Any information that is provided on any extenuating circumstances form that raises issues of professional suitability, whether it has been disclosed by you and about you or by another student on another form but relates to you will be disclosed as necessary to the relevant internal or external authorities. Information will only ever be disclosed on a need to know basis to ensure the University is able to comply with its obligations related to professional suitability. These authorities may include the Professional Practice and Conduct Committee, your employer if your registration as a student relates to Continuing Professional Development or any relevant Professional or Regulatory Body.



**L   Where can I get more guidance?**

If after having read these notes you feel you need more help in putting forward your extenuating circumstances, you should contact the Students’ Union Advice Centre, the Student Support Office or the Registry (Room 6.116).



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