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# Exceptional Circumstances: Covid-19

When the unexpected happens, this may affect your ability to study. This document covers 'Exceptional Circumstances' affecting assessment in light of the impact of Covid-19.

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## **What is the exceptional circumstances process?**

Sometimes things happen that can seriously impair your performance in an assessment or prevent you undertaking the assessment at the scheduled time. If these events are unforeseeable and exceptional (i.e. serious and unusual) you can submit a claim form requesting an extension or deferral (otherwise known as a 'sit as if for the first time') of an exam or assessment deadline to be put in place. Such 'unexpected' circumstances now include the impact of Covid-19 and the disruptive effect it has had on doing assessments.

## **Would my circumstances be considered as exceptional?**

Due to the multiple and potentially varied ways in which Covid-19 may have an impact on students' ability to study, the process has been altered to accommodate this. The University will now take into account a far wider and more flexible range of circumstances in addition to those that would normally be considered.

Examples Include:

- Lack of access to the internet or suitable resources e.g. a laptop required to complete assessments.
- Additional work responsibilities (paid or voluntary).
- Family issues e.g. if family members are ill or self isolating, or if your family situation has changed as a result, including caring responsibilities.
- Severe impact on student wellbeing due to Covid-19 (such as being physically unwell, emotional or mental wellbeing including anxiety or other resulting health consequences). Note that students can also make a claim based on the interaction of the impact of Covid-19 with pre-existing conditions and disabilities.

You can find more detailed guidance on the ways the Exceptional Circumstances criteria has changed [here](#):

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## Tell someone

If you're not sure whether your circumstances are exceptional, or you need guidance, you can contact the YUSU Advice and Support Service (or GSA for postgraduate students). Please note that advisors at the Student Union support services can provide confidential and independent advice and guidance to students. At present, these advice services are offering advice and guidance to students via email, phone or Hangouts Meet appointments. Please see below for their contact details. You could also speak to someone in your department

for guidance, such as your academic supervisor, to help you find out whether claiming for Exceptional Circumstances is right for your individual situation.

## Possible Outcomes

The potential outcome of your claim (if it is successful) depends on the type of assessment you are submitting an Exceptional Circumstances Claim for.

- **Written coursework.** You might be given an extension to the original deadline, **or** a deferral which means you can 'sit as if for the first time' in the late summer/August assessment period.
- **Online exams.** A deferral which means you can 'sit as if for the first time' at the next available opportunity. For undergraduate students, this is likely to be in the late summer assessment period (in August), though rescheduling of assessments for postgraduate students may vary...

## When will I know the outcome of my claim?

Please note that under current circumstances, departments are likely to be processing an extremely high volume of Exceptional Circumstances claims. Therefore it may take longer than usual to hear back with the outcome but departments are doing their best to process claims as soon as they can. If you have not heard back within a week or so, please contact your department for an update.

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### **If your claim is unsuccessful**

If your claim is rejected, you should be provided with an explanation of why it has not been upheld and you may be given the opportunity to provide further information in support of your claim. It may also be possible to submit a further claim if your circumstances change or progress. If not, students do have the right to **appeal** the decision.

Further information can be found about the appeals process on the University [website](#) and YUSU [website](#)

*Please also note that students are able to contact YUSU or the GSA advice service (for postgraduates) to get independent and confidential guidance about the appeals process.*

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## Submitting a Claim

### When should I submit?

You should...

- If possible, submit your claim in good time **before** your assessment. This will allow your department a chance to consider the claim and provide an outcome for you in good time.
- If this is not possible, you can still submit a claim up to 7 days after the deadline for written coursework.

### Online exams - **important information**

You can submit a claim when you take an online exam if:

- you start your online exam but experience exceptional circumstances that affect your performance and are not able to complete and submit the exam
- you start your online exam and experience exceptional circumstances that affect your performance, but still submit the exam (including if you submit the exam late as a result of these circumstances)
- In either case an ECA claim would need to be submitted **within 7 days of the end of the exam submission window.**

### How to submit

The application form is an online process.

To complete an Exceptional Circumstances form, see [here](#).

Click the 'Exceptional Circumstances Application Form' link at the bottom of the page. You will then be asked to enter your student username and password to proceed to the online form.

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In the form you will need to include:

- A brief **description** of your individual circumstances.
- How these circumstances have **impacted** your ability to study or complete your assessments. Examples might include being physically unable to because of health symptoms, or due to having to prioritise family, caring responsibilities or employment.
- We would recommend that you also include examples of the practical impact which your circumstances have had on your ability to study. For example, if you are finding it hard to think clearly, concentrate, sleep, or manage your time, it is helpful if you can describe this.
- You should also include the dates at which this circumstance has been affecting you.

### **What evidence do I need to provide?**

A **key difference** to the new process is that **there is no longer a requirement to visit medical or other professionals to obtain evidence in support of any Exceptional Circumstances claims.** This recognises the difficulties that students might currently face in accessing professional support, and also the need to relieve the burden on medical and support services of providing supporting letters or other evidence for students. This means you will be able to **self-certify** and submit a claim without supporting evidence such as a doctor's note, or other supporting evidence from a professional.

### **Things to consider when submitting an ECA claim...**

Do you think you will be able to undertake assessments in August?

If you are applying for Exceptional Circumstances with the possible outcome of undertaking your exams in August, will you be ready to complete your assessments by then? This is a difficult decision to make, and you may not be sure at this stage.

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It is worth noting that you would have the option of submitting a further Exceptional Circumstances claim in late summer/August if need be. However, if your current circumstances mean that you are unlikely to be able to engage with teaching and undertake assessments for a prolonged period of time (i.e. you anticipate that this will likely still be the case in late summer/ August) then a Leave of Absence may be a more appropriate option. If you're not sure of your options, you could contact your academic supervisor or the advice services at YUSU or the GSA.

If you are given a deferral until August and sit your exams/assessments as if for the first time, and then fail this assessment, you will not be able to take a second attempt before the new academic year. You would then normally need to take a period of Leave of Absence in order to complete your resit at a later date in the following academic year.

You can find more information on the University's Leave of Absence process [here](#).

It is advisable for any student who feels that their ability to undertake or submit assessments is likely to be significantly affected as a result of Covid-19 to submit an Exceptional Circumstances claim. The option to claim for Exceptional Circumstances is in place to mitigate the impact of these circumstances on your assessments, and that you have the opportunity to submit work at a time when your academic performance is not compromised so that it is reflective of your academic ability. Many students instead try to submit work when they are not in the best position to do so and their marks suffer as a result.

It is worth noting though that if you submit a claim that is upheld and are offered an extension or deferral but, you are not obliged to accept this outcome and can sit/submit your assessment/s as originally intended if it transpires that you are able to do so.

If in doubt, it is best to submit a claim in the first instance, as it is more complicated, time-consuming and difficult to retrospectively challenge your

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assessment results if you did not submit a claim at the time of the assessment/s.

Though students can appeal against academic outcomes/decisions on the grounds of exceptional circumstances, this process can take months and the chances of a successful outcome are limited, as it would be necessary not just to demonstrate that you were experiencing exceptional circumstances but also to provide a clear and compelling explanation for not having submitted a claim at the time of your assessments.

## **Further Advice and Support**

University services for advice and support are still available online, such as the Student Hub and Open Door. You can find full details of available services here:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/students/health/advice/coronavirus/>

Student Union Advice Services are still offering advice and guidance to students via email, phone or Hangouts Meet appointments.

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