Higher Education Extenuating Circumstances SOP

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Summary of Contents
The procedures for staff and students in submitting and reviewing an Extenuating Circumstances request for Higher Education students.

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1.0 Change History

Changes to this SOP are documented in Appendix 1 of this document. When reading electronic copies of this document, you can click here to view the change history.

2.0 Purpose

This document sets out the framework for Extenuating Circumstances for students enrolled on Higher Education (HE) programmes in South Eastern Regional College. The general principles of this document have been agreed at sectoral level by the Colleges in Northern Ireland. The processes set out ensure that requests for ECs are handled consistently, fairly and transparently, while safeguarding academic standards, student wellbeing, and compliance with national quality and regulatory expectations.

3.0 Scope

This procedure applies to:

- All students registered on Higher Education programmes delivered by the College, including franchised and validated provision.
- Full-time and part-time HE students (including Higher Level Apprentices).

This procedure **does not** apply to Further Education/ AppNI/ Traineeship (level 1-3) programmes, which are governed by separate arrangements.

Where the detailed regulations of an Awarding Body/ Organisation are more specific than this procedure, those external regulations take precedence. The College procedure should then be applied in a way that is consistent with those regulations.

This procedure applies where students request additional consideration in relation to:

- non-submission or late submission of part or all of an assessment;
- absence from an examination or time-limited assessment;
- significant adverse impact on assessment performance.

4.0 Principles

The College recognises that students may experience circumstances that impact their ability to engage fully with their studies.

This document is underpinned by the following:

- the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework: Requests for Additional Consideration
- Protection of academic standards and award integrity, in alignment with the QAA UK Quality Code 2024 for Higher Education
- The Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75) and associated equality duties, including the requirement to consider the impact of policy decisions on individuals and groups
- Awarding Body / Organisation requirements
- A student-centred and compassionate approach
- Consistency and equity in decision making
- Clear communication of implications for progression and assessment.

5.0 Definition of Extenuating Circumstances

Extenuating Circumstances are defined as unforeseeable, unpreventable, and serious events outside a student's control that severely impact academic performance or the ability to submit work on time.

To be considered under this procedure, circumstances must normally:

- be exceptional and beyond the normal pressures of student life
- be outside the student's control
- have had a direct impact on assessment
- be supported by appropriate evidence, where required

Students submitting requests under this procedure may be signposted to relevant wellbeing, disability, financial or academic support services where appropriate.

6.0 Relationship to Other Policies and Support Arrangements

This procedure applies to short-term and exceptional circumstances affecting assessment. Long-term or ongoing circumstances are normally managed through other College processes, including:

- Higher Education Leave of Absence SOP
- Authorisation of Absences for Full-Time Students SOP
- Higher Education Programme SOP
- Safeguard, Care and Welfare SOP
- Learning Support SOP

If you are a student with a disability, medical condition, mental health condition, or other support need that has not previously been disclosed to the College, please contact the Learning Support team at your campus to discuss reasonable adjustments and support arrangements that may assist your studies. Further information can be found on our website at Learning Support - SERC

7.0 Grounds for Extenuating Circumstances

An EC may be approved where a student is temporarily unable to engage effectively with their programme.

Note: a successful outcome will always involve further assessment or an extension of time to complete coursework in the module(s) concerned; examiners will not issue additional marks to compensate for extenuating circumstances.

As identified in the OIA Good Practice Guide, grounds may include, but are not limited to:

- Serious short-term illness or injury
- Worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions
- Symptoms of an infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others
- Death or significant illness of a close family member or friend
- Unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member or dependant
- Significant personal or family crises leading to acute stress

- Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident
- A crime which has had a substantial impact on the student
- Accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable
- An emergency or crisis that prevents the student from attending an exam or accessing an online assessment
- A technical problem that prevents the student from accessing online teaching or assessment
- Safeguarding concerns

An EC may not be approved in circumstances including, but not limited to:

- Normal examination stress
- Holidays, house moves or other events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected
- Minor illness such as common colds or hay fever, unless the symptoms are particularly severe
- Assessments that are scheduled close together
- Misreading the exam timetable
- Poor time management
- Minor transport disruption
- Computer or printer failure where the student should have backed-up their work
- Minor life events, unless the circumstances have had a disproportionate impact

These grounds are not limited and other circumstances will be considered on an individual basis. If an EC request is not approved, students will be signposted to the College support services and/or other options such as Leave of Absence, Learning Support or Reasonable Adjustments processes as appropriate.

8.0 Evidence Requirements

Evidence should normally:

- be relevant to the circumstances described;
- come from an appropriate independent or professional source where possible;
- be proportionate to the nature of the request.

The College may permit limited self-certification for short-term circumstances in accordance with institutional arrangements and Awarding Body/ Organisation regulations. This is limited to one instance of self-certification per semester for a maximum of 5 working days (retrospective ECs will not be approved in this instance).

9.0 Examples of Evidence

Examples of evidence may include, but are not limited to:

- medical certificates or fit notes
- hospital appointment letters
- counsellor or support worker letters
- death certificates or funeral notices

- police crime reference numbers
- employer letters
- court or jury service documentation
- correspondence relating to transport disruption or IT outages
- confirmation of disability or long-term medical condition through the College's Learner Support Team

Alternative forms of evidence may be accepted where conventional evidence is difficult to obtain or can be authenticated by a college member of staff.

A lack of independent evidence will not automatically result in rejection where the College is satisfied that the circumstances described are credible and proportionate.

The College reserves the right to verify evidence submitted in support of a request.

All information will be handled in accordance with data protection legislation and shared only with staff who require access for legitimate purposes. Where practicable, sensitive personal information will be minimised or redacted before consideration by panels.

10.0 Application Process

It is advised that students seeking EC:

1. Should discuss their circumstances with their Programme Co-ordinator/Director, and/or designated Student Support service who will liaise with the Programme Co-ordinator/Director, in support of the student application.
2. Must provide accurate information and supporting evidence where required.
3. Must submit requests within the defined timeframe, or as soon as reasonably practicable.
4. Must submit a formal written request for EC, supported by relevant evidence. (See Appendix 2- Extenuating Circumstances Form (EC1)).
5. Must be honest. Any student found to have submitted fabricated or falsified EC information to the College will be subject to investigation and disciplinary procedures under the grounds of Gross Misconduct.

10.1 Timescales of Application

Students should normally submit requests:

- To notify the College, as soon as reasonably practicable, and normally before the assessment deadline or examination.
- Within five working days of the assessment date or submission deadline where earlier submission was not possible.

Requests submitted after five days will only be considered where there is a clear and valid reason for late submission. This will be determined by the reviewer or panel. Other late requests will be considered by the next Progress or Examination Board.

11.0 Review and Decision-Making

Requests for short coursework extensions for one unit may be considered by authorised nominated staff such as a Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Curriculum Manager.

More significant requests, including requests involving missed assessments, deferred assessments or multiple assessments, will normally be considered by an Extenuating Circumstances Panel.

Panels should:

- include a minimum of 2 members
- include appropriately trained staff
- operate independently from marking processes
- apply this procedure consistently and fairly, in accordance with the Awarding Body/ Organisation regulations
- avoid conflicts of interest
- maintain confidentiality

In making decisions, the College will consider:

- the seriousness of the circumstances
- the timing and relevance to the assessment
- the impact on the student's ability to undertake the assessment
- the evidence provided

Decisions will focus on the impact of circumstances rather than requiring students to disclose extensive personal details or medical diagnoses.

12.0 Outcomes

Outcomes must follow Awarding Body/ Organisation regulations and timescales and may include:

- an extension to a submission deadline
- permission to submit at the next available opportunity as a first attempt
- deferral of an examination or assessment
- an uncapped reassessment opportunity where permitted by regulations
- removal of late penalties
- no action where evidence or impact is insufficient
- permission to use an alternative form of assessment

Approval of Extenuating Circumstances does not guarantee progression, award classification or professional accreditation outcomes.

Note: a successful outcome will always involve further assessment or an extension of time to complete coursework in the module(s)/unit(s) concerned. Students will not be awarded additional marks to compensate for extenuating circumstances.

13.0 Communication of Decisions

Students will normally be notified of decisions in writing within five working days of receipt of a completed application and supporting evidence using Section B of the Extenuating Circumstances form with the outcome and, if required, any conditions attached to the approval.

Communications will:

- confirm the outcome
- provide a brief explanation of the decision
- outline any further action required
- explain how to request a review or appeal where applicable

Records of decisions and rationale will be retained in accordance with the College's records management arrangements and be recorded with documentation made available for Progress or Examination Boards.

Communication templates can be found in Appendix 3 - Extenuating Circumstances Review Outcome Templates.

14.0 Review and Appeal

Students may appeal decisions relating to ECs through the College's Academic Appeals Process, where procedural irregularity has taken place, or new supporting evidence has been introduced. Information can be found at: Appeals Process - SERC

15.0 Monitoring and Enhancement

The College will monitor:

- the number and outcomes of applications
- timeliness of decision-making
- patterns and trends relating to equality and consistency.

This information will be used to:

- identify areas for improvement
- inform staff development
- enhance student guidance and assessment practices
- support equality impact assessment and quality assurance processes

16.0 Privacy

All requests will be treated as confidential in accordance with the Privacy Notice, and information will only be shared with individuals who have a legitimate reason for being informed.

17.0 Related Policies and Documents

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- HE Academic Appeals Process
- Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Higher Education Programme SOP
- Student Handbook and Programme Handbook
- Awarding Body/ Organisation Regulations
- Programme Regulations
- Higher Education Leave of Absence SOP
- Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Policy (includes Wellness to Study)
- Student and Trainee, Performance Management Behaviour and Disciplinary SOP

Appendix 1: Document Change History

Version	Date	Change Detail
1.0	May 2026	Introduction of an HE Extenuating Circumstances SOP following sectoral agreed principles providing further clarity on process for staff and students.

Appendix 2: Extenuating Circumstances Form (EC1)

PRIVACY NOTICE: Information gathered on this form will be processed within the provisions of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and used for the purpose of recording and managing extenuating circumstances. The College is permitted to process personal data where there is a 'lawful basis' to do so. This processing is necessary for the performance of your contract. Your information may be shared with relevant College staff for the purpose of recording and managing extenuating circumstances.

Further information on data protection and your rights are available on our website
https://www.serc.ac.uk/customer-privacy

SECTION A: To be completed by Student

1. Personal Information

Full Name: Click or tap here to enter text.

Student Number: Click or tap here to enter text.

College Email Address: Click or tap here to enter text.

Contact Number: Click or tap here to enter text.

2. Programme Information

Programme Code: Click or tap here to enter text.

Programme Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

Year of Study: Click or tap here to enter text.

Campus: Click or tap here to enter text.

Programme Co-ordinator/Director: Click or tap here to enter text.

3. Module/ Unit Information

Please provide the information below for **each module/unit affected by extenuating circumstances**. You should read the following notes carefully before completing this section:

Type and Date of Assessment*

i) The following codes only should be used to indicate Type of Assessment:
CT – Class Test, ES- Essay, EX – Examination, PR – Project, PT – Presentation, CW- Coursework; O – other;
ii) A separate entry should be provided for each type of assessment listed.
iii) The date entered should be the date of the examination or class test, or submission deadline for coursework.

Type of Circumstance **
The following codes only should be used to indicate type of Circumstance:
N – Non-attendance at examination or non-submission of coursework; P – Performance affected by extenuating circumstances

Module/ Unit Code	Module/ Unit Title	Type of Assessment *	Date of Assessment	Type of Circumstance**	Module/ Unit Coordinator
		Choose an item.		Choose an item.	
		Choose an item.		Choose an item.	
		Choose an item.		Choose an item.	

		Choose an item.		Choose an item.	

4. Details of Extenuating Circumstances

Nature of Difficulty (Tick as appropriate)**:** Illness ☐ Other Personal Circumstance ☐

Date(s) on which you were affected: Click or tap here to enter text.

Absence from Study (Tick as appropriate)**:**

☐ **Self-certification Option** Are you self-certifying for a period of up to five working days due to short-term illness/absence only for the first time in this semester?

☐ **Evidence based absence Option** Were you absent from the College for more than five working days as a result of your extenuating circumstances (illness or other personal circumstances)/ or have you had an approved Extenuating Circumstance request in this semester?

5. Supporting Evidence

Do you have medical certificate(s) or other supporting evidence? Choose an item.

- **If 'YES' is the evidence attached?** Choose an item.

If "No" please explain the nature of your extenuating circumstance below (You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary):

Click or tap here to enter text.

6. Effect of Extenuating Circumstances

Please explain the effect of the extenuating circumstances on performance in the assessments listed above. (You may continue on a separate sheet if necessary):

Click or tap here to enter text.

Please state what your preferred outcome would be (e.g. specify the length of extension requested for coursework):

Click or tap here to enter text.

7. Student Declaration

☐ I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information given on this form is a true and accurate statement of my personal circumstances.

☐ I agree to my information being referred to Student Wellbeing team to provide additional support if appropriate.

Student signature: Click or tap here to enter text.

Date: Click or tap here to enter text.

Submission guidance:

This form should be submitted normally before the assessment deadline or examination, or within 5 working

days if the assessment deadline or examination, to your Programme Co-ordinator/Director. Retrospective EC will be considered only where there is a clear and evidenced reason for delayed disclosure.

SECTION B – To Be Completed by the Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Extenuating Circumstances Panel Chair

8. Extenuating Circumstances Reviewer(s)

Which category does the EC request fall under:

☐ **Short coursework extensions** (may be considered by authorised nominated staff such as a Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Curriculum Manager.)

☐ **Significant request, including requests involving missed assessments, deferred assessments or multiple assessments** (will normally be considered by an Extenuating Circumstances Panel)

Please identify Programme Co-ordinator/Director/ EC Panel Members:

Click or tap here to enter text.

9. Outcomes

Please complete the details below in relation to the evidence presented.

Note:

- Retrospective self-certification should not be accepted
- No more than 1 self-certification across the programme will be accepted each semester

Is this the first self-certification in this semester? Choose an item.

If Yes, please provide high level details: Click or tap here to enter text.

If no, please note the applicant must provide supporting evidence for consideration, and complete the following questions for monitoring purpose.

How many previous self-certifications have been submitted (in programme)? Click or tap here to enter text.

Is there a recurring illness that requires evidence from a GP/medical practitioner? Choose an item.

Is there an attendance issue? Choose an item.

Is a referral to Learning Support required? Choose an item.

Is a referral for safeguarding intervention required? Choose an item.

Module/ Unit Code	Module/ Unit Title	Outcome of consideration of Evidence	Recommendation of Programme Director/ EC Panel (include key dates for submission/resit/ retake)
		Choose an item.	
		Choose an item.	
		Choose an item.	
		Choose an item.	

Outcomes may include:

- an extension to a submission deadline
- permission to submit at the next available opportunity as a first attempt
- deferral of an examination or assessment
- an uncapped reassessment opportunity where permitted by regulations
- removal of late penalties
- no action where evidence or impact is insufficient
- permission to use an alternative forms of assessment
-

10. Programme Co-ordinator/Director/ EC Panel Comments:

To include a rationale for the decision made - this should form the basis of communications with the student using Appendix 3.

Click or tap here to enter text.

11. Authorisation

Name of Programme Co-ordinator/Director or nominated EC Panel member: Click or tap here to enter text.

Signature: Click or tap here to enter text.

Date: Click or tap here to enter text.

Notes:

- Please inform the student in writing of the decision including any conditions and key dates
- Please add a copy of this document, any evidence and outcome letter to the relevant Progress/ Exam board folder.

Appendix 3- Extenuating Circumstances Review Outcome Templates

Template 1- EC Fully Approved

Date:

Student Name:

Student ID:

Programme:

Subject: Outcome of Extenuating Circumstances Request

Dear STUDENT NAME

Thank you for submitting your Extenuating Circumstances request, received on **[insert submission date].** Your application, including any supporting evidence provided, has now been carefully considered in accordance with the College's Extenuating Circumstance Policy.

Following review, your Extenuating Circumstances request has been **approved**.

As a result, the following academic adjustment(s) will apply:

- [e.g. Extension to coursework submission until: **date**]

These outcomes are consistent with the range of actions permitted under the policy and are designed to ensure that you are not academically disadvantaged while maintaining academic standards.

Further Support

If you are experiencing ongoing or longer-term difficulties, you are encouraged to seek appropriate support. Depending on your circumstances, this may include:

- Learning Support / reasonable adjustments
- Student Wellbeing services
- Leave of Absence or Interruption of Studies

The College can provide guidance on the most appropriate support arrangements.

Review and Appeal

If you believe that this decision has not been made in line with College procedures, or if you have new supporting evidence that could not reasonably have been provided earlier, you may submit an appeal under the Academic Appeals Policy.

Appeals can be made in line with regulations outlined in the SERC Academic Appeals Process available on our website and the HE Student Handbook and must be received by 2.00pm on **[insert date following appeals sop]**. Appeals should be submitted to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk.

You should now:

- Ensure you understand any revised deadlines or assessment arrangements;
- Submit any outstanding work in accordance with the updated requirements;
- Contact your Programme Co-ordinator/Director if you require clarification.

If you have any questions regarding this outcome, please contact [insert contact – e.g. Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Quality Office].

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Role – Programme/ Co-ordinator Director / EC Panel Chair]

Template 2- EC Partially Approved

Date:

Student Name:

Student ID:

Programme:

Subject: Outcome of Extenuating Circumstances Request

Dear STUDENT NAME

Thank you for submitting your Extenuating Circumstances request, received on **[insert submission date].**Your application, including any supporting evidence provided, has now been carefully considered in accordance with the College's Extenuating Circumstance Policy.

Following review, your Extenuating Circumstances request has been **partially approved**.

The Panel/Programme Co-ordinator/Director recognised that your circumstances had some impact; however, this was not considered sufficient to fully support all requested adjustments.

The following adjustments have been granted:

- [Insert approved actions]

The following elements were **not approved**:

- [Insert elements not approved, if relevant]

A balanced decision has been made based on the evidence provided, the timing of the circumstances and the impact on your assessment.

Further Support

If you are experiencing ongoing or longer-term difficulties, you are encouraged to seek appropriate support. Depending on your circumstances, this may include:

- Learning Support / reasonable adjustments
- Student Wellbeing services
- Leave of Absence or Interruption of Studies

The College can provide guidance on the most appropriate support arrangements.

Review and Appeal

If you believe that this decision has not been made in line with College procedures, or if you have new supporting evidence that could not reasonably have been provided earlier, you may submit an appeal under the Academic Appeals Policy.

Appeals can be made in line with regulations outlined in the SERC Academic Appeals Process available on our website and the HE Student Handbook and must be received by 2.00pm on **[insert date following appeals sop]**. Appeals should be submitted to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk.

You should now:

- Ensure you understand any revised deadlines or assessment arrangements;
- Submit any outstanding work in accordance with the updated requirements;
- Contact your Programme Co-ordinator/Director if you require clarification.

If you have any questions regarding this outcome, please contact [insert contact – e.g. Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Quality Office].

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Role – Programme Co-ordinator/Director or EC Panel Chair]

Template 3- EC Not Approved

Date:

Student Name:

Student ID:

Programme:

Subject: Outcome of Extenuating Circumstances Request

Dear STUDENT NAME

Thank you for submitting your Extenuating Circumstances request, received on **[insert submission date].**Your application, including any supporting evidence provided, has now been carefully considered in accordance with the College's Extenuating Circumstance Policy.

Following review, your Extenuating Circumstances request has **not been approved**.

This decision has been made on the basis that:

- The evidence provided was insufficient and/or did not demonstrate a direct impact on assessment; and/or
- The circumstances described fall outside the criteria for Extenuating Circumstances as defined in the policy (e.g. not unforeseen or beyond your control).

Further Support

If you are experiencing ongoing or longer-term difficulties, you are encouraged to seek appropriate support. Depending on your circumstances, this may include:

- Learning Support / Reasonable Adjustments
- Student Wellbeing services

- Leave of Absence or Interruption of Studies

The College can provide guidance on the most appropriate support arrangements.

Review and Appeal

If you believe that this decision has not been made in line with College procedures, or if you have new supporting evidence that could not reasonably have been provided earlier, you may submit an appeal under the Academic Appeals Policy.

Appeals can be made in line with regulations outlined in the SERC Academic Appeals Process available on our website and the HE Student Handbook and must be received by 2.00pm on **[insert date following appeals sop]**. Appeals should be submitted to academicappeals@serc.ac.uk.

You should now:

- Ensure you understand any revised deadlines or assessment arrangements;
- Submit any outstanding work in accordance with the updated requirements;
- Contact your Programme Director if you require clarification.

If you have any questions regarding this outcome, please contact [insert contact – e.g. Programme Director or Quality Office].

Yours sincerely,

[Name]
[Role – Programme/ Co-Ordinator Director / EC Panel Chair]

Appendix 4- Student Summary

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES (EC)

What are Extenuating Circumstances?
Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) are serious, unexpected events outside your control that affect your ability to complete assessments or perform at your best. They must be:

- Unforeseeable
- Beyond your control
- Have a clear impact on your assessment
- Supported by evidence (where required)

When can you apply?
You can apply if your circumstances affect:

- Assignment submission (late or non-submission)
- Exams or timed assessments
- Your overall academic performance

Examples of circumstances likely to be accepted	Examples of circumstances likely to be not accepted
• Serious short-term illness or injury • Worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions • Symptoms of an infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others • Death or significant illness of a close family member or friend • Unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member or dependent • Significant personal or family crises leading to acute stress • Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident • A crime which has had a substantial impact on the student • Accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable • An emergency or crisis that prevents the student from attending an exam or accessing an online assessment • A technical problem that prevents the student from accessing online teaching or assessment • Safeguarding concerns	• Holidays, house moves or other events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected • Minor illness such as common colds or hay fever, unless the symptoms are particularly severe • Assessments that are scheduled close together • Misreading the exam timetable • Poor time management • Minor transport disruption • Computer or printer failure where the student should have backed-up their work • Normal exam stress • Minor life events, unless the circumstances have had a disproportionate impact

Please note both lists are not exhausted and each case will be reviewed on an individual basis

What do you need to do?

- Tell someone early (Programme Co-ordinator/Director or Student Support)
- Submit a formal EC request
- Provide evidence where possible
- Be honest – false claims may lead to disciplinary action

Important deadlines

- Apply before your assessment where possible
- Or within 5 working days after the deadline
- Late applications need a valid reason

What evidence is needed?
Examples include:

- Medical notes

- Appointment letters
- Counsellor/support letters
- Death notices
- Police reports
- Employer or official documentation

Short-term issues:
You may be able to self-certify once per semester (up to 5 days).

What could happen?
If approved, you may receive:
- Extra time (extension)
- Deferral to a later assessment
- First attempt at next opportunity
- Removal of late penalties
- Approved alternative form of assessment

You will **NOT** receive extra marks.

How will you hear?
- You'll normally get a decision within 5 working days of submission
- You'll be told the outcome and any next steps through written communication

What if you disagree?
You can appeal the decision based on procedural irregularity or new evidence.

Support is available
Contact your Programme Co-ordinator/Director, Student Union or Learning Support Services.

If you're struggling, speak to someone early — support is available, and EC is just one option.

Your data
Your information is confidential and handled in line with data protection law.