

HIGHER EDUCATION EXCEPTIONAL FACTORS POLICY

Author: Deputy Principal

Equality Assessment: Deputy Principal

Date: August 2025

Version and Date		Actions/Notes
1.0	February 2025	AL Usage added requirement to declare and authenticate any use of AI tools assessment to ensure compliance with academic integrity
		Recruitment and distance learning challenges: updated procedures to include flexibility for claims related to unforeseen disruptions stemming from these areas
		Communication process to meet QIA requirements ensuring clarity and transparency for students

Approved by SMT: September 2025

Approved by Corporation: n/a

Date of Next Review: August 2026

Related policies or procedures or parent policy if applicable:

This policy is not applicable to students following University programmes, who should refer to the relevant University policy.

- Academic Appeals Procedure
- Additional Learning Support Policy
- Assessment Malpractice and Maladministration Policy
- HE Assessment Board Operational Procedure
- HE Higher Education Assessment Submission Policy
- HE Student Sickness Certification Procedure

Groups/bodies consulted in the development of the policy: NA

To be published on College Website: Yes

To be published on Student Hub: Yes

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' ASSESSMENT

Introduction

Throughout their studies, students are required to complete and submit, or sit, a wide range of assessments. This will require students to balance their workload and time management skills to ensure that assessments are submitted to stated deadlines. However, the College recognises that illnesses and difficult or distressing life events do occur, outside of students' control, and that it is a normal part of life to have to manage these and continue with work or study. Such circumstances may prevent students from completing assessments and any exceptional factors should be considered when determining students' results.

1 The Aim of the College's Procedures for the Submission and Consideration of Exceptional Factors affecting Students' Assessment.

To clarify the types of serious adverse events and/or circumstances that the College will consider as exceptional factors and to set out the process by which exceptional factors claims are to be submitted and considered.

To ensure fair and equitable treatment of all students when considering exceptional factors, including appropriate provision for disabled students and those with chronic conditions.

2 What are Exceptional factors?

Exceptional Factors (EF) are exceptional, short-term events which have a serious impact on the student's assessment in one of two ways:

Preventing a student from attending, completing or submitting an assessment on time
Significantly affecting performance in an assessment.

Exceptional Factors are serious events which impact upon performance. Exceptional Factors must be:

- **Severe:** The event or circumstance must have had a serious impact on assessment performance.
- **Unexpected:** The student must have had no prior knowledge that a particular event would occur.
- **Unpreventable:** There must have been no reasonable steps that the student could have taken to prevent the event or circumstance from occurring.
- **Relevant:** The event or circumstance must have occurred at the time of the assessment or during the period immediately leading up to the assessment.
- **Corroborated:** The claim for exceptional factors must meet the requirements for independent documentary evidence that are outlined in this policy.

It is important to note that even if extremely difficult, distressing or unpleasant events have happened, these are not in themselves exceptional factors. There must also be evidence of a demonstrable adverse effect on academic performance, which may take various forms, including that:

The student has been unable to submit work by a deadline date or attend a presentation, test or examination.

The event or circumstances have meant that the work which has been completed by the student has not been to his/ her usual standard, with the result that the student has underperformed in the assessment task.

3 Changes in Circumstances

Long-term circumstances (life and occasional) may come within the scope of the Exceptional Factors Policy if there is a serious, unpredictable and unpreventable increase in their severity at the time of the assessment or in the period immediately leading up to the assessment. Full independent documentary evidence in support of the exacerbation of the circumstances (not just evidence of the circumstances themselves) would be required.

4 What are not "Exceptional Factors"?

Examples of situations which would not normally be accepted as exceptional factors

All students are expected to conduct their work and study with maturity and diligence, and to cope with what could be reasonably considered to be normal life events. In addition, students should try to avoid situations which might otherwise lead to exceptional factors claims, and should try to limit adverse effects on academic performance.

Exceptional Factors are not a substitute for academic performance and should not be submitted as an insurance against possible poor performance. The acceptance of Exceptional Factors will not result in individual marks being raised.

Examples of situations which could have been avoided, or in relation to which, a student could have acted to limit the impact of the circumstances

- Completing and submitting coursework too late and missing deadlines (time management problems)
- Non-availability of books or other resources
- Losing coursework (not backed up)
- Financial problems (other than cases of the most extreme hardship)
- House moves, family celebrations or other events where the student either has control over the date or may choose not to participate
- Problems with postal delivery of work (students are advised to obtain receipts for assessments submitted in this manner)
- Normal work commitments reducing time available for study or coursework
- Appointments (legal, medical, etc.) which could be re-arranged
- A long-standing condition, such as susceptibility to hay fever
- Misreading the examination timetable
- Over sleeping / alarm clock not going off causing a student to be late for or miss an examination or assessment
- Holidays or travel

Long-Term Life Circumstances

Long-term life circumstances such as a disability or a chronic/on-going medical condition are not dealt with under the Exceptional Factors Procedures. If a student has a disability or medical condition that may affect their assessment, they should seek advice from the College's Welfare Team.

If a disability or a chronic/ongoing medical condition worsens significantly, or such a condition develops following the commencement of the programme of study, students should seek advice from the Welfare Team.

5 Submission of Independent Evidence

Please refer to **Appendix 1**

Independent Documentary Evidence

Claims for Exceptional Factors will not be considered unless they are supported by independent documentary evidence. The claim will be considered once the documentary evidence has been received.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in assessment.

Independent evidence must confirm that any AI-generated work is appropriately declared and does not breach academic integrity. Failure to disclose AI usage will be treated as malpractice.

Adequate Evidence

Independent evidence would normally be an original document on headed paper written and signed by an appropriate third party, giving details of the circumstance, its dates and/or duration, and, where possible, its impact. An appropriate third party would be one who knows the student in a professional capacity or one who can verify the circumstance from a position of authority (e.g. police officer, solicitor, GP, College Counsellor) and who is in a position to provide objective and impartial evidence. Electronic evidence such as emails will only be accepted from verifiable email addresses.

Evidence in English

All evidence must be provided in English. If the documentary evidence is not in English, it is the student's responsibility to ensure that it is accompanied by a translation which has been certified as correct by a Public Notary or translated by an accredited translator (i.e. be a member of the Association of Translation Companies).

Tutor support

Students are advised to keep their tutor(s) informed of Exceptional Factors and ask them to provide a supporting statement on their application if relevant and appropriate.

Medical evidence

A student must submit medical evidence in support of an exceptional factors claim, for example if he/she is suffering a temporary serious incapacitating medical condition that may have directly affected his/her ability to attend or complete an assessment or to perform to the full extent of his/her ability. In such cases, any medical certificates/notes to support an exceptional factors claim must:

Relate specifically to the dates and duration of the illness

Contain a clear medical diagnosis or opinion and not merely report the claim that the student felt unwell, nor report any claim that there was reason to believe that the student was ill. It will probably be difficult for a student to obtain an acceptable medical certificate where a retrospective consultation and request is made of a doctor.

The College will not normally consider claims for Exceptional Factors that relate to longstanding controlled conditions, or self-limiting illness. This is because the student would normally have had the benefit of experience, medical knowledge or help to control the condition.

6 Submission Procedures

Exceptional Factors Form

Normally, the claim is made by means of an Exceptional Factors Form completed by the student. Where exceptionally a student is unable to complete the Exceptional Factors Form

for valid reasons, a form may be submitted by an appropriate third party. Claims related to these factors will be accepted where evidence demonstrates significant disruption to academic progress.

Confidentiality/ Personal Information

The confidential nature of information provided by students will be respected by the College in accordance with data protection requirements.

Assistance with Submission

If students require assistance with the procedural matters, such as completion of the Exceptional Factors Form or procedures in relation to the submission of Exceptional Factors to the College, they should contact the Welfare Team.

Retrospective Claims

Retrospective claims for previous assessment periods will be rejected. A claim of Exceptional Factors can only be submitted in relation to the assessment period in which they occurred. A new claim must be submitted for each period of assessment affected.

Submission Dates

In relation to all assessment, claims must be submitted prior to the submission date for the assignment. Forms submitted after the deadlines will be not automatically are considered.

Timescale of exceptional factors

Any notification of exceptional factors must show that their timing was such that it might have adversely affected assessment, and must include evidence of the timing.

If there are exceptional factors which adversely affect a range of assessments, or if there are non-academic reasons which will adversely affect performance over a longer period, the student may wish to discuss some other course of action with the relevant Course Leader/ Centre Principal. This may include repeating the level of study.

7 How are exceptional factors considered?

Exceptional Factors Panels

Exceptional factors claims are considered by an Exceptional Factors Panel. Panels meet at intervals during the year.

Panels decide whether the circumstances described by students are valid exceptional factors or not, and assess whether or not they are likely to have adversely affected performance. Panels notify these decisions to students and to the appropriate Course Leaders.

8 What happens if the Panel decides the circumstances are valid and acceptable?

Possible outcomes in the affected element of assessment

If a Panel is satisfied that a student's absence, failure to submit work, or poor performance, was due to a valid and acceptable cause, the Panel will:

Recommend to the Assessment Board that the student be assessed or reassessed as if for the first time, or without further penalty if already reassessed, in the unit in any or all of the assessments which the Panel decides were adversely affected. This will apply irrespective of whether the student has passed or failed the assessment concerned. This means that the student has another assessment opportunity, without being affected by exceptional factors.

In cases where exceptional factors claims relate to coursework, an Exceptional Factor Panel may agree to offer the student an extension to the published submission date.

If, in relation to (i) above, the student has already achieved a pass mark and is claiming underperformance, the student will be given the opportunity to take the assessment or reassessment again as if for the first time.

Continuing Inability to Proceed Owing to Exceptional Factors

Students with exceptional factors would normally be required to undertake an assessment as if for the first time (or second/ third time in the case of exceptional factors affecting reassessment), unless they were unlikely to be able to complete further assessment as a consequence of the circumstances. On advice from Exceptional Factors Panels, Boards of Examiners/Tutors would have the discretion to require medical evidence that the candidate was able to undertake further assessment. The final decision of the Assessment Board/Course Manager must take into account the programme requirements and ensure the learning outcomes are fulfilled.

A student whose health (or other) problems have prevented her/him making academic progress in the previous session, for example, in a second repeat of Year 1, will be referred to the appropriate Programme Manager for guidance on suitable courses of action.

What happens if the Panel decides that the circumstances are not valid and acceptable?

If the Panel decides that a student's absence, failure to submit work, or poor performance, was not caused by exceptional factors, or that the claim and/or evidence provided does not demonstrate exceptional factors, the claim will not be accepted.

This means that the College has decided that the assessment was not affected by the circumstances and the mark awarded by the tutor will stand.

Communication of Decisions to Students

Students will be notified of the decision by the Panel in the following categories, within five working days of the relevant Panel meeting:

Were considered to be substantial and appropriate action was taken
Were not considered substantial and no action was taken.

Details of external routes to escalate complaints such as the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) will be included in the decision letters, along with contact information and timelines for submitting complaints to these bodies.

The decisions of the Exceptional Factors Panel are final and any challenge to these decisions must be submitted via the College appeals procedure.

APPENDIX 1: Types of Exceptional Factors

Code	Description of Exceptional Factors	Evidence
A1	ILLNESS/INJURY/HOSPITALISATION Acute illness or injury (less than five working days) Acute illness likely to have incapacitated the student on the date the assessment element was due to be undertaken or submitted OR Acute incident or exacerbation of long term or chronic condition which was likely to have incapacitated the student to a greater extent than that to which she/he is normally accustomed on the date the assessment element was due to be undertaken or submitted OR A personal injury to the student likely to have incapacitated the student on the date the assessment element was due to be undertaken or submitted. Extended illness or injury (more than 5 working days) Illness likely to have incapacitated the student during the period she/he might reasonably have been expected to give time to the production of the assessment element <u>OR</u> Brief incident or exacerbation of a long term or chronic condition which was likely to have incapacitated the student to a greater extent than that to which she/he is normally accustomed during the period she/he might reasonably have been expected to give time to the production of the assessment element <u>OR</u> A personal injury to the student likely to have incapacitated the student during the period the student might reasonably have been expected to give time to the production of the assessment element. Minor illnesses such as colds, sore throats, headaches, digestive problems etc. would not normally be acceptable grounds for Exceptional Factors. However, a minor illness may be considered if it can be demonstrated that it was severe and had a demonstrable impact upon performance. Pregnancy is not an illness, but it is recognised that events may arise during pregnancy that may give rise to exceptional factors, and these need to be judged on an individual basis. (Note that U.K. legislation does not allow a woman to work in the first six weeks following the birth).	Required A + (B or F) A + B A + D

Code	Description of Exceptional Factors	Evidence
A2	ILLNESS OF A DEPENDENT/RELATIVE Acute illness, injury, or incident or exacerbation of long term or chronic condition, affecting a person or persons which required the close and frequent attention of the student on the date the assessment element was due to be undertaken or submitted, and where no other person might reasonably be expected to have supplied that attention <u>OR</u> Acute illness, injury, or incident or exacerbation of long term or chronic condition, affecting a person or persons who require the close and frequent attention of the student, and where no other person might reasonably be expected to have supplied that attention, during the period she/he might reasonably have been expected to give time to the production of the assessment element. An explanation must be included why the student's personal attention was required and there was no one else available to provide support.	A + (C or F) Or A only If A only, this will be cross-referenced to the student's history in this regard, and the validity of such
A3	BEREAVEMENT If the student has been affected by a death of someone other than a close relative, (partner, parent, child, close family member), there will be a requirement to clarify the relationship to the deceased and the impact upon performance in assessment.	A + E
A4	PERSONAL/EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS AND TRAUMA This can include a whole range of issues and can include separation from spouse/partner, conflict with others, acute examination stress etc. The statement must verify how the student has been affected and what impact this has had upon assessment. It is not sufficient to just state that the circumstances have occurred. Examination stress is a common experience and not considered an exceptional factor (unless in an acute form which can be documented either by a counsellor or a doctor). The typical symptoms include: anxiety, nausea, sleep disturbances, etc, which are not considered to be good reasons for missing an examination.	A + (B or F or G)
A5	VICTIM OF CRIME The student was the victim of a crime that has been reported to the appropriate authority for investigation and that crime was likely <u>either</u> to have prevented the student's attendance on the date the assessment element was due to be undertaken <u>or</u> to have prevented the student from submitting the assessment element on the due date, <u>or</u> to have affected his/ her performance during the period the student might reasonably have been expected to give time to the production of the assessment element.	A + N

Code	Description of Exceptional Factors	Evidence
	It is acknowledged that in certain circumstances victims of crime will not have contacted the Police, in such circumstances evidence from a counsellor or doctor will be accepted.	
A6	PLACEMENT ISSUES This problem will most typically affect students on placements of a nature which can be emotionally distressing (e.g., counselling, social work, etc.). These students often have to submit work based on taped interviews with clients. It is often the case that certain interviews cannot be taped or clients fail to turn up for interviews which can delay completion of the work.	A + M
A7	COURT ATTENDANCE This can include tribunals, jury service and the requirement to attend court as a witness, defendant or plaintiff.	A + H
A8	WORK COMMITMENT (Part-time students only) The College appreciates that many students work to finance their studies however full-time students will not normally be eligible to claim for work-related Exceptional Factors. It is the student's responsibility to decide whether he/she can comply with the requirements of the course before enrolling at the College. Part-time students should only submit Exceptional Factors if the work requirement is unexpected and/or non- negotiable.	A + P
A9	FINANCIAL PROBLEMS Students may experience financial problems while studying at college. However, these cannot normally be considered as Exceptional Factors unless they are exceptional, e.g. bankruptcy. Problems with the payment of college fees will not be admitted as exceptional factors.	A + Q
A10	COMPUTER PROBLEMS Computer problems experienced due to the failure of college network systems will only be considered if the network failure exceeds 24 hours. Students should plan to finish and submit coursework prior to the deadline in order to limit the impact of such a problem. Routine computer problems such as viruses, disk corruption, printer problems, and short-term network problems are not acceptable as Exceptional factors. Students are expected to take proper precautions and make backup copies of data.	A + R
A11	TRANSPORT PROBLEMS Difficulties with transport will only be considered if it can be demonstrated that they were severe and unpredictable i.e. an unexpected and sudden closure of the rail network. Students are expected to make adequate preparations to ensure that assessments are submitted and/or an examination is attended on time. This includes allowing for public transport strikes or delays, road closures or problems with private transport such as a car breakdown or traffic jam.	A + T

Code	Description of Exceptional Factors	Evidence
A12	REPRESENTING COUNTY OR COUNTRY AT SPORT Where a student was selected to represent country or county at sporting event which required absence from the College on the date the assessment element was due to be undertaken or submitted, or for at least five consecutive working days during the period she/he might reasonably have been expected to give time to the production of the assessment element.	A + L
A13	OTHER SERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES The list of Exceptional Factors is not exhaustive and the College appreciates that other serious Exceptional Factors may arise which are not detailed in this policy. If a student feels that he/ she has been seriously affected by circumstances not covered in appendix 1 which meet the absolute criteria then an Exceptional Factors Form in accordance with this policy should be submitted.	A

Appendix 2: Exceptional Factors – Guidance on Types of Evidence	
A	The student's statement of case.
B	Medical Certificate signed while the illness or incident was affecting the student, or other medical evidence such as copies of prescriptions, certificates of attendance at surgery or hospital, a doctor's opinion given after receiving the student's permission to release information. The Medical Certificate cannot just state that the student was unwell; it must be a confirmed diagnosis by the doctor and be specific about the nature of the illness and the likely impact it has had. The date of the certificate is important. It must be clear that you visited the doctor during the period of illness, not afterwards. Post-dated medical evidence and self-certificates will not be accepted.
C	Medical Certificate signed while the illness or incident was affecting the other person, or other medical evidence, together with a statement by the student about the nature of the relationship, explaining why their personal attention was necessary and why no other person could reasonably be expected to have provided attention. The Medical Certificate cannot just state that the person concerned was unwell; it must be a confirmed diagnosis by the doctor and be specific about the nature of the illness. The date of the certificate is important. It must be clear that the person concerned was diagnosed by a doctor during the period of illness, not afterwards. Post- dated medical evidence and self-certificates will not be accepted.
D	Midwife report (or similar) which demonstrates that specific complications have arisen in the pregnancy, which have impacted on the student's ability to perform the assessment. Evidence of medical appointments.
E	Death Certificate/ Coroner's Report. The College appreciates that Death Certificates are often difficult to obtain. However, the requirement to see this documentation is in order to prevent fraudulent claims. The Death Certificate will be photocopied and the copy will be signed by the accepting administrator and the original returned to the student.
F	Corroboration from a person with whom the student has a professional, not a personal, relationship (eg signed copy from a professional counsellor/ doctor). This may include the student's Course Leader.
G	Corroboration by a member of the student's family.
H	Official correspondence from the Court or Tribunal Authority confirming attendance. Solicitor's letter detailing the nature and dates of the legal proceedings.
J	Letter of corroboration (that must explain why the commitment was non-negotiable and/or unanticipated) signed by the student's line manager or supervisor, or by an appropriately senior and authorised representative of the relevant organisation.
L	Letter from the appropriate sporting association or authority that explained why the absence was necessary.
M	Signed letter from the placement provider explaining the nature of the problem.
N	Corroboration of the reported crime from the Police or other investigating authority (eg copy of the Police/ crime report; signed copy from a professional counsellor/ doctor).
P	Signed letter from the employer confirming the commitment and duration of the work and that the work could not have been undertaken by another member of staff.
Q	Official confirmation of bankruptcy proceedings or similar.
R	Confirmation from member of Macclesfield College IT Services.
T	Confirmation from a transport official and proof of travel arrangements such as a ticket, booking confirmation or compensation claim.

Appendix 3

SUBMISSION OF EVIDENCE OF EXCEPTIONAL FACTORS

1 PERSONAL DETAILS

Name:		Student ID:
Programme Title:		
Programme Code:		Academic Year:
Address:		Contact Tel No:
		Mobile No:
Postcode:		
e-mail Address:		

FOR USE BY OFFICE STAFF ONLY

DECISION OF EXCEPTIONAL FACTORS PANEL: Comments

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APPROVED/NOT APPROVED

Date of Panel

UNIT(S) AFFECTED

Unit Title:		Unit Code:				
Element of Assessment: Please tick one*	Coursework	☐	Examination	☐	Class Test	☐
	Presentation	☐	Practical	☐	Lab Test	☐
Coursework Title						
Date of Assessment/Deadline date:						
Documentary Evidence covers the period from: to:						
Unit Title:		Unit Code:				
Element of Assessment: Please tick one*	Coursework	☐	Examination	☐	Class Test	☐
	Presentation	☐	Practical	☐	Lab Test	☐
Coursework Title :						
Date of Assessment/Deadline date:						
Documentary Evidence applies from: to:						

Unit Title:		Unit Code:	
Element of Assessment: Please tick one*	Coursework ☐	Examination ☐	Class Test ☐
	Presentation ☐	Practical ☐	Lab Test ☐
Coursework Title			
Date of Assessment/Deadline date:			
Documentary Evidence covers the period from: to:			
Unit Title:		Unit Code:	
Element of Assessment: Please tick one*	Coursework ☐	Examination ☐	Class Test ☐
	Presentation ☐	Practical ☐	Lab Test ☐
Coursework Title :			
Date of Assessment/Deadline date:			
Documentary Evidence applies from: to:			

Unit Title:		Unit Code:	
Element of Assessment: Please tick one*	Coursework ☐	Examination ☐	Class Test ☐
	Presentation ☐	Practical ☐	Lab Test ☐
Coursework Title			
Date of Assessment/Deadline date:			
Documentary Evidence covers the period from: to:			
Unit Title:		Unit Code:	
Element of Assessment: Please tick one*	Coursework ☐	Examination ☐	Class Test ☐
	Presentation ☐	Practical ☐	Lab Test ☐
Coursework Title :			
Date of Assessment/Deadline date:			
Documentary Evidence applies from: to:			

*If circumstances affect more than one piece of work within an element of assessment, please use more than one box

DETAILS OF EXCEPTIONAL FACTORS

Please describe fully the nature of the circumstances. Explain how the circumstances affected your ability in the assessment(s) identified above (eg time was lost, concentration was affected, a task could not be completed, etc) If the circumstances affected more than one unit or element of assessment, identify clearly how each unit/element of assessment was specifically affected.

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Please list below the documentary evidence you are submitting with this form:

If documentary evidence is not attached to this form, please identify the date by which this information will be submitted (normally this should not be more than 5 working days)

I will submit the relevant evidence by

5 CERTIFICATION OF FORM

Confidentiality

In accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018 and Data Protection Act 1998, we are required to gain your consent to the following: -

to hold some elements of the information you have provided on an electronic database to disclose the information that you have provided to authorised members of college staff as required for the reasonable purposes connected with the investigation in the case of an Appeal or Complaint.

By signing here, you confirm that you agree with the above statements and indicate your consent for the information provided to be used as detailed above.

False Claims

You should note that the submission of a false claim or fraudulent documentation is a serious matter and is an academic offence, which will be dealt with under the College's Student Disciplinary Procedures. The College reserves the right to check on the validity of the document(s) submitted by contacting the third party directly.

I agree with the statements contained in (a) above and confirm that the information which I have given is true and that I have read and understood the Procedures for the Submission of Exceptional Factors.

Signed.....Date.....