



## Student guide: Mitigating circumstances notices to examiners (MCEs)

If you are affected by illness or other acute circumstances which significantly affect your performance in assessment, the University has a process under [Part 13](#) of the 'Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations' within the *Examination Regulations* for students to be able to submit a mitigating circumstances notice to the examiners (MCE), to make the exam board aware of how you were affected.

Students can submit MCEs due to:

- 'illness or other urgent cause that is unavoidable and/or insurmountable'**

This is a guide for students thinking about submitting an MCE. **Act early!**

Talk to your college or departmental officers as soon as there's a problem. MCEs are normally only for **acute circumstances which have affected you during an examination or completion of a piece of submitted work**. There may be better university processes to help you succeed in your assessment. It is always better, if possible, to make adjustments ahead of assessments, to give you the best possible opportunity to succeed in your assessments.

Even where you have been affected by illness or other acute circumstances, the exam board is limited in the actions it can take (see section 2). In particular the Board cannot change the mark of an individual paper. In practice, the majority of MCEs do not lead to students being given a different overall classification or award outcome.

It is your responsibility to submit the MCE and to provide the evidence needed.

The official policy in this area is set out in the [Examinations and assessment framework](#)

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## 1. Submitting an MCE

### a. When can I submit an MCE?

You should submit your MCE as soon as possible after you have sat the affected papers or submitted the work. You should not normally submit your MCE before an examination or deadline as you will need to include your assessment of how you believe your circumstances have affected your actual performance in your MCE.

MCEs must be submitted by noon the day before the final meeting of the examiners which will decide your overall results. Your college will be able to tell you when this is.

**b. What if I miss the deadline to submit my MCE?**

If you are unable to submit your MCE by noon the day before the final exam board, then you can still submit your MCE. The reasons for late submission will be considered by the Proctors. Your MCE will only be passed onto the exam board if it is received within one month of the final meeting of the exam board **and** if at least one of the following criteria is met:

- Your condition prevented you from submitting your MCE earlier
- Your condition was not known or diagnosed until after the deadline for submission of an MCE
- There was a procedural error beyond your control which prevented your MCE from being submitted.

**c. How do I submit an MCE?**

You can submit your MCE online through Student Self Service. The Self Service for Students Manual, which contains a section on MCE submission is available from [the Student Self Service webpage](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/selfservice) <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/selfservice>.

You are encouraged to discuss your circumstances with your college office, as they may be able to advise on what to include in your MCE. They may also be able to advise whether there are any other university processes that may be able to help you with your circumstances. However, it is your responsibility to submit an MCE on time, and to make sure it includes any information and evidence you want the exam board to take into account.

When you have entered your information, you can submit your MCE directly to the exam board. If instead you opt to submit your MCE to the college to review and submit on your behalf, you should allow sufficient time for the college to process your request.

**d. What information should be included in my MCE?**

The online form will guide you through the basic information which needs to be included. You should be clear about which assessment or assessments have been affected by your circumstances, including whether a particular question has been impacted. The form will also ask you to complete a candidate statement. This is where you can provide details about your circumstances and how your performance in assessment has been affected. Whilst it is important to provide the context of your circumstances (e.g. the basic details of your illness, bereavement, etc.), the most important thing is to provide clear detail on how you feel your performance in assessment was affected.

**e. What evidence do I need to include with my MCE?**

You must include at least one piece of independent evidence to support your MCE. Further details on evidence requirements can be found in [section 4](#) of this document.

If you are submitting an MCE relating to complex circumstances, you are encouraged to submit independent evidence which supports each aspect of your circumstances.

**f. What kinds of circumstances would fall under ‘illness or other urgent cause that is unavoidable and/or insurmountable’?**

MCEs should only be submitted in relation to acute circumstances which have seriously affected your performance in assessment. This could include:

- Sudden illness or accidental injury
- A change to or exacerbation of a long-term condition or disability during the assessment period
- Bereavement
- Significant adverse personal/family circumstances
- Other serious circumstances (such as the impact of a crime)
- Significant disruption during an examination (such as evacuation due to a fire alarm), where you have been particularly impacted. There is a separate group MCE process under which the Chair of Examiners will be notified of disruption during an exam (see section 1 question h below).

Your circumstances should have affected you during the assessment (i.e. whilst writing a piece of submitted work, in the immediate run up to or during an examination). You should contact your college or departmental offices as soon as there is a problem. If your teaching or revision has been affected by your circumstance, it is likely that there are better university processes to help you to succeed in your assessment. These may include organisation of catch-up teaching, applying for exam adjustments or a dispensation, or suspension.

**g. I want to submit an MCE, but I don’t think my circumstances would fall under ‘illness or other urgent cause that is unavoidable and/or insurmountable’ – what should I do?**

MCEs are intended to inform examiners of acute circumstances which have affected your performance in assessment. If you have circumstances which have affected you throughout your course of study, it is likely that there are more appropriate university processes for you to follow.

If you have a disability then you can request adjustments to your examinations, such as extra writing or rest time or the use of a computer. In the first instance, you should discuss your circumstances with your college or department. If required, the college or department can submit a request to Education Committee for adjustments to your course.

The earlier you can have these conversations, the better the University will be able to put in arrangements that support you to succeed on your course. The exam board is limited in the actions it can take in response to an MCE – it is always better, if possible, to make adjustments ahead of assessments, to give you the best possible opportunity to succeed in your assessments.

However, even if you have adjustments in place, it may be that you should still submit an MCE. This may be because:

- You have experienced a significant change or exacerbation in your circumstances during the assessment period

- Your adjustments were not sufficient to fully mitigate against your circumstances.

Or, it may be that you were not able to apply for adjustments in time for your examinations because of a late diagnosis or late recommendation from the Disability Advisory Service (DAS).

In these cases, you can submit an MCE and your candidate statement should include details on:

- What adjustments you did have in place (this includes extensions granted for submitted work), or what adjustments were recommended to be in place
- How and why these adjustments were not sufficient to help you successfully complete the assessment.

#### **h. What if the circumstances impacted other people as well?**

If you are affected by circumstances that have also affected other students, this is normally dealt with as a group MCE. For example, significant disruption during an examination such as evacuation due to a fire alarm.

In this case the Proctors will be notified of the disruption, and will provide relevant information to the Chair of the Examiners. The Chair of Examiners will let the affected students know that the impact will be considered by the exam board.

If you feel that you were significantly more impacted than the other students affected, e.g. you have a history of panic attacks and an attack was triggered by the alarm, you can submit an individual MCE and supporting evidence.

## **2. Consideration of MCEs**

### **a. How will my MCE be considered by the exam board?**

Your MCE will be considered very carefully by the exam board. A subset of the board (the “Mitigating Circumstances Panel”) will consider each issue raised in your notice, the paper(s) affected, and the evidence you have supplied. The Panel will provide details of the considerations of their assessment of the impact of your circumstances on your examination(s) to the Exam Board.

### **b. What actions can the exam board take as a result of my MCE?**

The exam board is limited in the actions it can take, particularly if all of your assessments have been affected, because the examiners’ primary job is to mark what they see. They cannot accurately or fairly award marks for a level of performance for which no (or only limited) evidence has been provided. The examiners also cannot change the mark for an individual paper, except where finalising the mark for the paper on the basis of the work completed.

Actions that the exam board may take:

- Disregarding a paper or papers. This exceptional outcome is most likely where there is evidence that an individual paper has been affected by acute illness, for instance if

you attend an examination but quickly become too ill and have to leave without completing the paper. If the exam board decide to disregard a paper, then your overall classification or outcome will be awarded on the basis of your remaining assessments, and the mark for the affected paper will be recorded as 'no result expected'.

- Finalising the mark for a paper on the basis of the work completed. This is most likely if you have been unable to complete a whole exam – for instance, if you were supposed to answer three essay questions but only managed to answer two, then the exam board can finalise your mark for the paper as though only two answers were required.
- Reviewing the classification/overall outcome requirements. If there is evidence that your performance has been affected over one or more papers **and** this leaves you just below a classification or progression boundary overall, the exam board may consider awarding the higher classification. None of your original marks would be changed – this action effectively means that the exam board is willing to award you the higher classification despite you not meeting the normal requirements.
- Removing the cap on the resit. If the examiners do not consider it appropriate to award a pass mark or disregard a paper, and the resit for the paper would normally be capped at a pass, the exam board can recommend to the resit board that the resit attempt result should not be capped.
- Passing the MCE onto the final exam board. If your course releases final marks throughout the course, the examiners will pass the MCE to the final results/classification board. The examiners can still take action in relation to the affected paper (for instance disregarding the paper) if this is appropriate for progression, but will review the MCE as part of the final classification.
- Recommending an application to Education Committee. Where the exam board feels there has been serious impact but it is not appropriate to take any of the above actions, they can consider recommending an application to Education Committee for a dispensation. Most commonly this would be a request to retake the assessment when it would not normally be permitted e.g. an exceptional third attempt.

### **3. Outcome of an MCE**

#### **a. How do I find out the outcome of my MCE application?**

The outcome of your MCE application will be available on Student Self-Service, once it has been confirmed by the exam board. A technical guide to using Self-Service can be found on the [Student Self Service webpage https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/selfservice](https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/selfservice).

#### **b. I'm not happy with the outcome of my MCE application – what can I do?**

If you are not happy with the outcome of your MCE then you can submit an academic appeal against the decision of the exam board. However, you should be aware that the decision about whether to take any action in relation to your MCE (and which action to take) is classed as academic judgement, and therefore cannot be appealed. You can appeal the impact rating that your MCE was given only on the following grounds:

- There was a procedural error in the decision-making process
- There was a procedural irregularity
- There was bias or perception of bias in the decision-making process.

Full details on the academic appeals process can be found on the [student website](#).

## **4. Evidence to support your request**

All MCEs must be submitted with at least one piece of supporting independent evidence to show that your circumstances fall under the definition of 'illness or other urgent cause that is unavoidable and/or insurmountable'. Supporting evidence must

- give a clear indication of the time period (including dates) during which you were impacted by the circumstances
- be directly relevant to the circumstances presented, both in timing (e.g. how close to the assessment period) and sufficient to document the severity of the impact on your performance in assessment
- be dated
- be signed or otherwise authorised (e.g. from an NHS email address), with the identity of the source made clear (e.g. headed paper, email signature)
- clearly legible (ideally typed rather than handwritten)
- provided in an easily accessible and secure format generated by the source (e.g. PDF)
- provided in English.

If you cannot provide the evidence in English, then please provide the original and a translation. You may be asked for an official translation.

All evidence must be from an independent source – this means an unbiased item of evidence or testimonial which corroborates your statement. This can cover a wide variety of sources and further guidance is provided below. You cannot provide evidence from friends or family.

### **a. Acute illness, injury, or exacerbation of a chronic condition**

'Acute illness' is a term that can cover a very wide range of severity of situations, including what might be considered a 'minor illness'. MCE applications should only be submitted in relation to an acute, debilitating illness that would reasonably be considered to have a significant impact on your ability to work.

All applications relating to acute illness, injury or exacerbation of a chronic condition require medical evidence.

### **b. What kind of medical evidence do I need?**

The University uses the same [standard for medical evidence](#) in all its processes. You need to make sure any medical evidence you supply with your application meets these requirements.

If your MCE is related to the exacerbation of a long-term condition that you have already disclosed to the university, you do not need to provide evidence of your original diagnosis. Your statement should explain how the exacerbation affected your performance in assessment and the supporting medical evidence should confirm the exacerbation.

If your MCE is because the exam adjustments you had in place were not sufficient, you do not need to provide medical evidence of the long-term condition which necessitated the adjustments. Your candidate statement should explain why your adjustments were not sufficient and you should provide a copy of the confirmation of your adjustments, along with

any other appropriate evidence such as medical evidence or a statement from an appropriate person.

For a sudden and debilitating illness at or towards the end of an exam (e.g. panic attack, seizure etc) that caused you to leave an in-person exam, a report from an independent party (e.g. member of college or department staff) at the time of or very shortly after the incident can be used to support your application.

## 5. What is an 'urgent cause'?

### Bereavement

If you experience a bereavement during your assessment period, your MCE should include a statement explaining your relationship with the deceased. If your assessment has been affected by the need to attend a funeral, you should include the date of the funeral and any travel required. You should also provide independent evidence of the death such as a death certificate, order of service, published obituary, letter from a funeral director, or evidence of travel. If the deceased is not a close relative you should also provide a statement of relationship from an independent person, such as a member of college or department staff (e.g. for the death of a fellow student or member of staff), solicitor or any person of professional standing who is not a relative.

If your MCE is due to the wider impact of a bereavement, such as losing time due to ongoing responsibilities for the deceased's estates, then an application should include a statement from an appropriate independent person (such as a solicitor), in addition to the above evidence.

If your performance in assessment has been affected by ongoing grief or if the bereavement has had a detrimental impact on your mental health, you should follow the same guidelines as for exacerbation of a long-term condition i.e. your statement should detail how your performance was affected and the evidence should confirm the ongoing impact during assessment.

### Work commitments

Full-time students cannot submit MCEs on the grounds of work-related commitments. This includes volunteering, internships, and interviews.

Part-time students can submit MCEs on the grounds of work-related commitments only if they relate to exceptional, unexpected, and time-limited additional commitments which have impacted you during the assessment period. Evidence should be provided in support of the MCE by your line manager. If you are self-employed or otherwise do not have a line manager (e.g., CEO) you should provide a statement explaining the circumstances and any relevant evidence which is available, for example, contractual agreements or other such documents.

### Impacted by crime

Applications should be supported by independent evidence of the crime (e.g., a police report, letter from a health or other professional who has provided support where the crime has not been reported, insurance letter etc.) and a statement explaining the impact of the crime on your performance in assessment. If relevant, medical evidence can be provided to support this.

If your MCE is related to exacerbation of ill health related to an earlier crime, you do not need to provide evidence of the crime itself. Instead your statement should explain the impact of the exacerbation on your performance in assessment and you should provide either medical evidence or a supporting independent statement (e.g. from a counsellor, solicitor, college welfare dean).

## **Significant adverse personal or family circumstances**

MCEs may be submitted in relation to significant adverse personal or family circumstances where the circumstances are exceptional and impact you during the assessment period.

You should provide a statement describing the impact of the circumstance on your ability to perform in assessment. It is appreciated that in some cases providing evidence may be difficult, but you should supply any evidence you have available, and can include a statement from an appropriate independent person. This could include a solicitor, chaplain or similar, therapist or counsellor, family member's doctor, supervisor, senior tutor, college welfare dean, but should not include family members or friends.

## **Exam adjustments not able to be put in place**

Where your college has applied for exam adjustments (e.g. use of a PC, extra time) to be put in place – either on the basis of a Student Support Plan or due to acute illness or injury – but it is too late for those adjustments to be put in place, you can submit an MCE. Your candidate statement should explain what adjustments were applied for and you should provide a copy of the evidence provided for the adjustment application (this may be your Student Support Plan), along with any other appropriate evidence such as medical evidence or a statement from an appropriate person.

## **Serious disturbances during the exam**

If your examination is significantly disrupted (such as evacuation due to a fire alarm) and you are significantly more impacted than other students, your statement should provide details on why you were particularly affected, along with any other appropriate evidence such as medical evidence or a statement from an appropriate person.

## **6. What circumstances are not considered valid grounds for an MCE?**

- Difficulties experienced submitting work electronically including, but not limited to: failure of hardware, failure of internet connection, failure of software, and lost or stolen files. You should ensure plenty of time to submit your work by the deadline and ensure you have backed up your work, including both physical backups and online. Only failure of a University system would be considered valid grounds, but this should be dealt with via a request to Education Committee for a dispensation, rather than through an MCE
- Social obligations and similar avoidable/adjustable events, foreseeable or routine commitments. This may include, but is not limited to: holidays, weddings, parties, routine medical appointments, moving house, changing job.
- Other commitments including: normal work commitments, voluntary commitments, extracurricular activities, regular caring commitments, job interviews, internships, sporting commitments etc.
- Failed travel arrangements or inadequate travel planning (including leaving insufficient time to apply for a visa).
- Financial difficulties.

- Poor planning or time management, clustered deadlines (including due to previous extensions), misreading of the examination timetable (including misunderstanding of time zones), misreading assessment requirements or location of submission.
- Failure to familiarise yourself with the course information (Examination Regulations, examination conventions, course handbook) or other key information such as the Student Handbook.
- Very minor acute illness (such as a mild cold)
- Poor sleep the night prior to an examination
- Minor disturbances in an examination (e.g. coughing of other students)

MCEs cannot be used to address complaints, e.g. that there were problems with the teaching or supervision you received, because the exam board is not an investigatory body. These issues should be addressed using the Student Complaints Procedure [Complaints and academic appeals | University of Oxford](#)

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