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Exceptional Circumstances Policy

Undergraduate Students

RCSI DEVELOPING HEALTHCARE LEADERS WHO MAKE A DIFFERENCE WORLDWIDE

Policy / Regulation History

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Introduction

As a Health Sciences University, RCSI strives to provide a supportive environment that prioritises the well-being and success of our students. Our goal is to help our students become successful, competent graduates and professionals while fostering their development as responsible, compassionate and resilient individuals.

This document outlines the RCSI policy on exceptional circumstances. It reflects our dedication to understanding and accommodating the diverse needs and challenges that some students may encounter during their educational journey in RCSI.

This policy outlines the framework for considering exceptional circumstances. The management of this process depends on the assessment model used in each programme. For example, the new Medicine curriculum uses a programmatic assessment model with specific rules for assessment, reassessment and supplemental assessment. Programme-specific rules are detailed in the relevant Marks and Standards and programme documentation. While some programmes may allow reassessment or reweighting, this depends on the type of assessment and the specific programme, and it may not always be possible. Absences, even if approved and authorised under this Exceptional Circumstances policy, may result in no mark being awarded for an assessment component.

Therefore, this policy should be read in conjunction with the relevant Marks and Standards for the student's programme of study, as well as any additional relevant regulations.¹ All documents mentioned are available on the [Registry Moodle page](#).

1. Scope

This policy applies to all registered undergraduate students and all students registered to a programme leading to a primary healthcare qualification in RCSI.

2. What are Exceptional Circumstances?

Exceptional Circumstances are defined as serious and extraordinary circumstances outside the individual's control, normally unforeseeable, unpreventable and which go beyond the scope of normal life events. In general, exceptional circumstances are usually medical or personal in nature.

¹ Regulations including Student Attendance; Examination and Assessment; Disciplinary; and Appeals, take precedence over this policy and associated procedures.



Key points to note:

- i. Exceptional circumstances refer to acute, short-term incidents and reasons that a student believes have impacted their performance/ability to attend an assessment.
- ii. Exceptional circumstances do not relate to reasons why a student may not have been able to study or complete their programme as designed.
 - a. If a student faces issues which affect their ability to complete their programme, they should discuss these with a member of staff in their School. For chronic or long-term conditions or circumstances, e.g. anxiety, asthma, migraines, caring responsibilities, students should consult with their School, Learning Support learningsupport@rcsi.ie , student welfare swo@rcsi.ie within CoMPPAS, to explore options. This may include taking a leave of absence to stabilise or resolve the situation.
- iii. The definition and application of exceptional circumstances takes into account a student's actual performance compared to their expected performance based on other work.

2.1 Examples of Exceptional Circumstances

All exceptional circumstances applications are considered on an individual basis, based on each student's unique circumstances. The review process is conducted confidentially and anonymously. Some examples of circumstances which have been upheld as exceptional are given below. These typically will be supported by documentation which provides evidence of the event.

Circumstance	Supporting Documentation
Acute illness which prevented attendance at an assessment	Letter/certificate from a health professional or counsellor, hospital appointment, prescription or medicine labelling
Acute illness which prevented submission of an assessment (coursework) on time.	
Unforeseen major travel disruption which caused a student to be late/miss an examination/assessment	Report from media or letter from transport company
Legal matters	Letter/documents from court/solicitor
Personal or domestic problems which occurred in the period leading up to an examination or assessment deadline	Letter from someone with direct knowledge of the problems and/or has been involved in providing support/ resolving the problems e.g. spiritual leader, member of law enforcement, Employer, Counsellor, Student Welfare Officer.



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Bereavement	Supporting evidence of bereavement, e.g. Death Certificate or notice, or other supporting letter
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2.2 What Does Not Count as Exceptional Circumstances?

Long-term issues, such as ongoing health, anxiety, personal difficulties, or financial issues, which affect a student's ability to study or to perform academically do not count as exceptional circumstances.

Students experiencing long-term issues should seek support from the available RCSI services. This includes discussing their situation with their School, Student Welfare Officer, CoMPPAS or treating healthcare professional. For example, it may be possible for RCSI to make special arrangements for sitting examinations, or provide additional academic support or equipment. Ultimately, a Board of Examiners can only judge a student's ability over time, based on their actual performance, to achieve competence and demonstrate achievement of the programme level learning outcomes.

The following are examples of circumstances, which are not likely to be upheld as exceptional:

- Late submission due to technical issues with computer equipment or not having work backed up
- Work (paid or voluntary) or religious commitments
- A minor ailment such as a cold
- A minor domestic upset
- A long-standing condition, such as susceptibility to hay fever, migraines etc.
- Misreading assessment schedules
- Oversleeping/alarm clock not going off causing a student to be late for, or to miss an examination or assessment
- Attending family weddings
- Holidays or travel
- Chronic ill health
- Prolonged personal difficulties which have affected the student's capacity to learn and/or revise.



3. How and When Should an Exceptional Circumstances Application be Submitted?

3.1. Exceptional Circumstances Application Deadline

Students must submit an Exceptional Circumstances Application within **three** working days of the affected assessment. Applications submitted after this deadline will not be accepted unless the student can provide a compelling reason for the delay e.g. the student was unwell in hospital.

3.1.1 Exceptional Circumstances Application forms for students registered to the Medicine programme in years 1-3 are specific to each year and are available on the student's programme Moodle page.

3.1.2 All other students should submit the Form available on the Moodle page for their programme.

3.1.3 All applications should be submitted within the deadline even if the student is still awaiting supporting documentary evidence. Any missing documentation must be provided as soon as is practicable with an explanation as to the reason for the delay.

3.1.4 Students should note that documentation may be independently verified.

Medical certificates should state the actual reason why, rather than a simple statement of "unfit". Please note that those that lack sufficient or relevant detail may be rejected.

3.2 Exceptional Circumstances Process post assessment

Applications are checked by Registry to make sure they can meet the definition of exceptional circumstances as outlined in this policy. If the criteria can be met, Registry anonymises the application and sends it, along with the supporting documentation for review by an Exceptional Circumstances Committee, which is comprised of academic members of staff from across the university.

The Committee reviews the application and makes a recommendation. All recommendations are forward to the relevant Board of Examiners for their consideration.

If a Committee upholds the Exceptional Circumstances Application, it requests the Board of Examiners when exercising its academic judgment to be cognisant of the fact that the student's performance was impacted adversely.

The Board of Examiners decides how to reflect the impact of the exceptional circumstances in the student's results. This may be at the assessment, module or year level.

If a student's application for exceptional circumstances is upheld at the supplemental examinations, it may still not be possible for the student to progress to the next year of their programme. Instead, subject to progression eligibility and programme rules, the only option available may be to **repeat** the academic year in the next academic session.



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4. Examinations, Clinical Placements and Core Assessments

Students who are unable to attend on the day of an examination, clinical placement or core assessment should follow the RCSI Student Attendance Regulations² and inform their School as soon as possible.³ If the student is aware in advance that they will not be able to attend, students must inform their relevant point of contact as soon as possible.

5. Authorised Absence from Examinations

In rare cases, a student who has fully attended the teaching programme may experience exceptional circumstances that prevent them from sitting their examinations. In such cases, the student may request an Authorised Absence for the affected examination period in advance by submitting an Exceptional Circumstances Application.

5.1. Exceptional Circumstances Process

All applications for consideration including submissions for an Authorised Absence for an exam period, should be sent to Registry using the following email address:

exceptionalcircumstances@rcsi.ie

The Registry Services team will acknowledge receipt of the application and advise that the student will not be attending the examinations with the relevant school.

Registry will review the application to ensure it can meet the criteria for exceptional circumstances. If it can meet the criteria, an Exceptional Circumstances Committee will be convened to confidentially review an anonymised copy of the Application. If the Committee accepts the exceptional circumstances, it will recommend to the Board of Examiners that the student's absence be authorised. Once approved by the Board of Examiners, the student's transcript will record this Authorised Absence, and their supplemental examinations will be uncapped.

If the application is rejected the supplemental examination marks will be capped.

² RCSI Student Attendance Regulations are available on [Moodle](#)

³ RCSI Examination and Assessment Regulations are available on [Moodle](#)

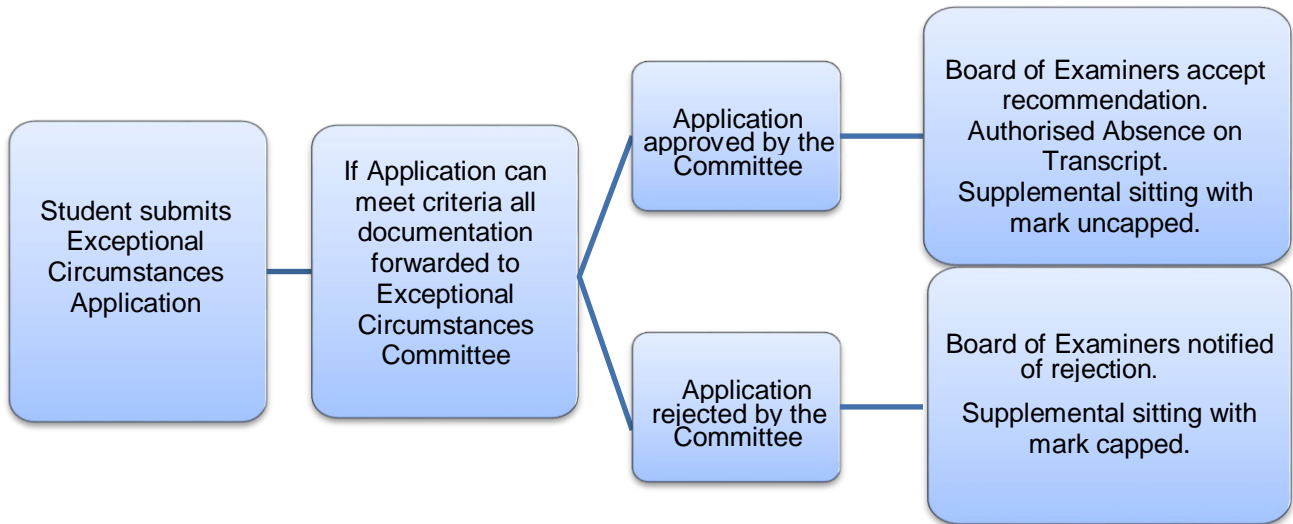


Figure 1 Authorised Absence Workflow

If a student is granted an Authorised Absence from the supplemental examinations, the student will not be eligible to progress to the next year of their programme. Instead, subject to progression eligibility and programme rules, they may be eligible to begin a **repeat** academic year in the next academic session.

If a student absents themselves from any assessment without prior permission, then in keeping with the assessment regulations, they may face disciplinary action, which could include discontinuation or expulsion from the University.⁴ At the very least, their absence will be counted as an actual sitting of the relevant examination.

Please note: if a student presents for an examination or assessment, the Board of Examiners can consider that the student has declared themselves fit to sit the exam and reject any subsequent application for exceptional circumstances.

6. Board of Examiners and Exceptional Circumstances

When an Exceptional Circumstances Committee reviews a student’s application, it considers the contents and supporting evidence provided; following which the committee will:

- i. Determine if the circumstances are, in its opinion, exceptional
- ii. Evaluate the weight of the supporting evidence
- iii. Decide whether the circumstances are likely to have affected the student’s performance in the way described in the application

⁴ RCSI Examination and Assessment Regulations are available on [Moodle](#)



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- iv. Decide to accept or reject the Exceptional Circumstances Application.

Any submission to the Exceptional Circumstances Committee which raises concerns, including about the student's ability to engage with their programme, may be referred to the relevant department e.g. CoMPPAS for follow-up.

If the Exceptional Circumstances Committee accept the student's application it will inform the Board of Examiners of its recommendation. Once referred to the Board of Examiners, the primary responsibility for deciding the impact of the exceptional circumstances on the student lies with the Board of Examiners.

In making its decision, the Board will consider each student's results holistically, on a case-by-case basis. The Board, in exercising its academic judgement may⁵:

- i. In the case of a late submission, remove or reduce any penalties which have been automatically applied
- ii. In the case of a missed assessment, consider compensation in line with the relevant Marks & Standards; re-weight the assessments; or allow re-assessment at the next available opportunity
- iii. In the case of a failed module:
 - In extraordinary cases, where a student's actual performance is close to the pass mark and expected performance can be clearly estimated, a pass may be awarded **OR**
 - In cases where a student's actual performance is close to the compensatable mark (in line with Marks and Standards) and expected performance can be clearly estimated, a compensatable mark may be awarded**OR**
 - Decide to "Defer" the examination, requiring the student to attempt relevant assessments at the next available sitting where the marks in those assessments will be uncapped.
 - When the module concerned has been passed and the module contributes to the final degree classification, the Board of Examiners will hold over the claim of exceptional circumstances until the final year Board of Examiners, so the circumstances can be taken into consideration when awarding the degree classification.

⁵ This list is not exhaustive as Boards of Examiners can reach different decisions, based on the circumstances and their academic judgement.



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In making such decisions, the Board of Examiners will consider the impact of the exceptional circumstances in light of non-affected work, i.e. it will make a judgement about the student's potential to have gained a higher mark based on their other marks. The Board must also consider whether the student has met the learning outcomes of their programme and can demonstrate that they have acquired the necessary skills before progressing to the next stage of their programme.

After the Board of Examiners has reviewed the student's results, the student will receive an acknowledgement that their exceptional circumstances were considered and they will be informed of the outcome.

All Exceptional Circumstances Committees and Boards of Examiners meetings are confidential. By submitting an Exceptional Circumstances Application, the student agrees to allow anonymised information from their application to be considered by the Exceptional Circumstances Committee and recorded on their student record (this information will not be recorded on any statement of results).

7. Can the Decision of the Board of Examiners be Appealed?

Students can appeal against a final decision of the Board of Examiners using the Student Appeals procedure.⁶ Students cannot appeal against the academic judgement of the examiners.

8. Discretionary Submissions

In extreme cases, the Student Welfare Officers may submit an Exceptional Circumstances Application on the student's behalf.

⁶ Appeals Regulations are available on [Moodle](#)