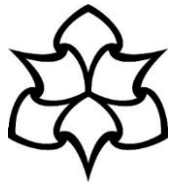


Procedure for the Consideration of Exceptional Factors for Postgraduate Research Students

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New for academic year 2020-21

The **Procedure for the Consideration of Exceptional Factors for Postgraduate Research Students** is reviewed annually. Changes may be made throughout the year, so please refer to the [Graduate School website](#) for the latest version of this document.

This procedure is owned and updated by the Manchester Metropolitan University Graduate School on behalf of Academic Board. Queries should be directed to the [Graduate School](#).

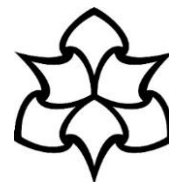
Introduction

Manchester Metropolitan University produces a suite of documents that outline the formal regulations and procedures for postgraduate research degrees.

This document should be read alongside the guidance documents that are available on the [Graduate School website](#).

The Procedure for the Consideration of Exceptional Factors for Postgraduate Research Students provide guidance on how to make an application for exceptional factors relating to a research degree milestone, a piece of assessed work during the study period, or an application to extend the period of resubmission or revision following examination.

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1. Exceptional Factors

The Procedure for the Consideration of Exceptional Factors allows postgraduate research students to provide evidence of circumstances that have affected, or may affect their performance in milestones, assessments, oral examinations and resubmission of thesis following examination.

The Guidance on Concessions contains advice on the process for research students requesting an extension to their maximum period of supervised study (where they require additional time to submit their thesis) or interrupting their studies (where they are prevented from making progress with their work).

1.1 Definition

Exceptional Factors are short-term events which have a serious impact on a student's assessment in one of two ways:

- (i) Preventing the student from attending, completing or submitting an assessment on time;
- (ii) Significantly affecting performance in an assessment.

They are serious events which impact upon performance, and they must be:

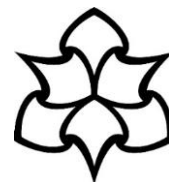
- **Severe:** The event or circumstance must have had a serious impact on assessment performance;
- **Unexpected:** The student must have had no prior knowledge that an event would occur;
- **Unpreventable:** There must have been no reasonable steps that the student could have taken to prevent the event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

It is important to note that even if extremely difficult or distressing events have occurred, these are not in themselves exceptional factors.

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

Cases relating to illness should refer to the [Guidelines on Concessions](#) and in the case of long-term health issues where an interruption may not be appropriate, students must speak with their Principal Supervisor about whether a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) would be helpful to ensure wider support for them over a prolonged period. More information is available from [Disability Support](#).

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 their Principal Supervisor.



1.2 Leave of Absence

For information relating to taking a leave of absence please see the [Guidance on Concessions](#).

2. Making an application for exceptional factors

Where for exceptional reasons a student is unable to submit work by the deadline and requires a short period of additional time, they must complete the RDEF form which is available on the [Graduate School website](#). The form must be accompanied by appropriate documentary evidence to support their application (See Evidence Requirements below). Students must also provide a 'Personal Impact Statement' within the Exceptional Factors (RDEF) form.

The student should be clear about the remedy that they are seeking (See Remedies below).

Applications without supporting evidence will not be considered. These will be rejected and the student asked to apply again with supporting evidence.

To apply for exceptional factors, a student will need to demonstrate that they have made reasonable progress to date and have a justifiable reason for the extension or concession.

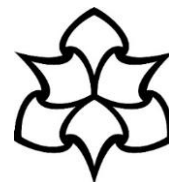
2.1 Reasons for an application for exceptional factors

Examples of what might be considered valid exceptional factors are listed below. These would need to be fully evidenced and must have affected a student's ability to meet the milestone deadline.

- Delays in progress with research studies due to the lack of required University resources (e.g. essential laboratory equipment, software etc.), or changes in supervision which are outside of the student's control. Any problems must have been reported at the time, and alternatives explored in order to avoid an application for exceptional factors being made
- Sudden illness or injury during the period near the submission date
- A significant worsening of a long-term health condition or disability
- Bereavement of a close relative or friend near the submission date
- Unexpected illness of a close family member which requires the student to look after them or significantly impacts the student's health or well being
- Being the victim of a crime.

The following are not considered exceptional factors and will not be accepted as valid grounds for an application for exceptional factors:

- Inadequate time management, not submitting chapters or drafts in time for the supervisor to review, not allowing sufficient time to address any issues raised in Turnitin reports
- A history of poor academic progress
- To carry out additional primary research or studio/laboratory work (if applying for additional time for revisions and resubmissions to the thesis after examination)
- Writing papers or carrying out additional work for the supervisory team or department
- Non-availability of books or journals
- Not backing up the thesis electronically; students are expected to take appropriate precautions to back their work up.
- A long-standing condition for which the student has a Personal Learning Plan (PLP) in place where reasonable adjustments have been put in place which fully mitigate the impact of the long-standing condition



- Financial problems
- Visa issues
- Holidays, house moves, family celebrations or other events where a student has control over the date or could choose not to participate
- Problems with postal delivery of the thesis or assignment (students are advised to obtain receipts if submitting by post)
- Normal work commitments reducing time available for research
- Long-standing appointments (legal, medical, etc.) which could be re-arranged
- Ongoing caring responsibilities
- Requirement to improve language skills.

2.2 Evidence requirements

All applications must evidence 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 an oral assessment;
- That the event or circumstances have meant that the student has underperformed in the assessment;

All applications must be accompanied by appropriate and sufficient supporting evidence. Details of suggested acceptable evidence can be found on the [Student Case Management website](#). Applications submitted without evidence will not be considered. Evidence should normally be submitted at the same time as the application. If this is not possible, students must clearly indicate the reasons for the delay in the application. Where there are reasons of confidentiality, students should refer to this on the form, you should contact the [Graduate School](#) to discuss the individual circumstances. Evidence will still be required.

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). The University will also accept a translation from the [Manchester City Council Translating Service](#).

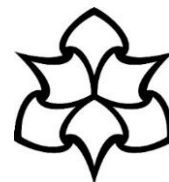
2.3 Work plan

All applications for exceptional factors must be accompanied by a work plan which highlights the work that has been completed and the work that is outstanding and how the requested period will be used effectively in order to meet a revised deadline.

A student's work plan should provide a schedule of the outstanding work and the timeframe for completing each section.

2.4 Assistance with submission

If students require assistance with procedural matters, such as completion of the RDEF form or procedures in relation to the submission of exceptional factors to the University, they should contact the [Graduate School](#) team. Advice on the merits / strengths of individual circumstances will not be



given, since a full consideration of a student's circumstances will be undertaken through the exceptional factors procedure. Students wishing to discuss their exceptional factors in confidence should contact the Students' Union Advice Centre.

2.5 Retrospective applications

A claim for exceptional factors must normally be submitted prior to the assessment to which the claim is concerned. If this is not possible, claims should be submitted within four weeks of the assessment, and applicants must outline the reason for the delay. A new claim must be submitted for each assessment affected.

3. Remedies

If an application is approved the remedies fall broadly in to two categories:

- An extension to a deadline;
- A second attempt at an assessment.

Extensions are normally for periods of up to one month; longer extensions may be requested if sufficient evidence is provided. In all cases, the extension request must bear a close relationship to the grounds cited, and appropriate documentary evidence must be provided in support of the application.

It should be noted that an extension to a deadline for a milestone does not change the final thesis submission date.

Where a piece of work has already been submitted for assessment, and the assessment has taken place, the normal remedy available will be a further opportunity to submit as a first attempt during the next assessment period. In situations where the assignment concerned was already at the resubmission stage, the student would be permitted the opportunity to resubmit as a first resubmission.

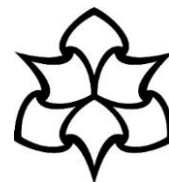
4. Consideration of exceptional factors

4.1 Review of applications

Exceptional factors applications are considered by senior Graduate School professional services staff and, where academic input is required, the Heads of Faculty Research Degrees. Applications are dealt with on a case by case basis. The individuals will review the information as the delegated authority of the Faculty Research Degrees Committees to consider and make decisions on exceptional factors.

In making a decision relating to an exceptional factors request, the following will be taken into account:

- whether the exceptional factors cited are genuinely circumstances beyond the student's control or ability to foresee, and whether they may seriously impair the student's ability to meet the deadline, or have affected performance in an assessment;
- the severity of the event or circumstance;
- the length of time it lasted;
- the closeness in time of the event or circumstance to the assessment/submission;



- whether all/other assessment(s) might be equally affected;
- whether there is verifiable and current third party evidence to support the request for deferral;
- In the case of a submission, to determine where appropriate a revised submission date.

5. Outcome of the application

There are two possible outcomes to an application;

- Approval
- Not approved

Where an application is approved the remedy may not be the same as requested. For example if a student has requested a two month extension to a deadline but has only evidenced a one month delay the remedy would likely to be a one month extension.

An extension or concession request may be refused where, for example:

- Inadequate reasons are given for seeking an extension or concession
- Acceptable evidence has not been provided
- A work plan has not been provided or the work plan does not provide sufficient detail to justify the requested extension period

Students will normally be notified of the outcome within 5 working days via email, if approved this communication will include the remedy. This will not affect the student's thesis submission deadline.

If the extension or concession application is not approved, and the student wishes to submit additional evidence to support an extension or concession request, they should submit a new exceptional factors application.

If the research student does not agree with the outcome of the exceptional factors claim, they have the right to appeal the decision using the appeals procedure on the basis:

- That the decision of the extension or concession request was not reasonable
- That the correct procedure was not followed in the consideration of the request

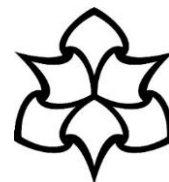
Please see the [Academic Appeals](#) and the Step by Step guide to Submitting an Appeal for more information.

6. Continuing inability to proceed owing to exceptional factors

A student whose health, or other problems have prevented him/her from making academic progress in the previous academic session may be referred under the [Procedure to Support Postgraduate Research Progress](#) to identify a suitable and appropriate course of action to support progression.

7. Support for students

The University has a range of support services that are available to all students:



- [Students' Union Advice Centre, s.u.advice@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:s.u.advice@mmu.ac.uk), +44 (0)161 2476533
- [Student Support Officers](#)
- [Disability Service, disability.service@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:disability.service@mmu.ac.uk), +44(0)161 247 3491
- [International Office Visas and Immigration](#), +44 (0)161 247 2000 (students should provide their Manchester Met Student ID number in any correspondence).