

1. **Introduction**

From time to time circumstances arise which are outside a student’s control and which may prevent them from performing to their full potential.

The University’s General Regulations contain guidelines on applications for exceptional circumstances which are considered by the School Exceptional Circumstances Committees (SECCs).

In addition, the Student Finance Framework sets out University policy on when exceptional circumstances meet the threshold for a tuition fee liability review. The Framework states in Section 5.6 that “to meet the threshold for an adjustment to tuition fee liability there must be clear evidence of a significant negative impact on the student’s ability to engage with their studies over the period of the semester and/or academic year”. In such cases the Tuition Fee Liability Review Group will consider applications for an adjustment to a student’s tuition fee.

These procedures provide guidance to students in relation to requests for review of a tuition fee liability due to exceptional circumstances.

Exceptional circumstances are circumstances that are exceptional or ‘unforeseen’ and are over and above the course of everyday experience. Examples of exceptional circumstances that can be considered under this review process are defined in Appendix 1.

1.1 Scope

The Tuition Fee Liability Review process is available to all students, including students on a Leave of Absence, undertaking Undergraduate, Postgraduate Taught and Research programmes.

# **2. Requests for Tuition Fee Liability Review**

The Tuition Fee Liability Review Group, which is made up of representatives from the Finance and Academic and Student Affairs Directorates, will consider applications for adjustment to a student’s tuition fee liability, based on exceptional circumstances.

The Tuition Fee Liability Review Group will consider the following types of application:

* Retrospective permanent or temporary withdrawal or dropping modules
* Extensions with module re-enrolments

2.1 Retrospective Permanent/Temporary Withdrawal or Module Drops

When a student withdraws permanently or temporarily, or drops modules, their tuition fee will be re-calculated with reference to published liability dates. These dates and the impact these have on a student’s tuition fee are set out in the Student Finance Framework at Section 5.

The date a student notifies their School in writing of their intention to withdraw or drop a module(s) is the date normally used to re-calculate a student’s tuition fee. Any request to use an earlier date must be considered under this review process.

2.2 Extensions and Module Re-enrolment

Where a School Board of Examiners has, on the recommendation of its Exceptional Circumstances Committee, given an extension to a submission date which requires the student to re-enrol on a module(s) in a subsequent semester or year, a student may apply for a review.

1. **Procedures for Tuition Fee Liability Review**

The procedures that must be followed to submit an application for a tuition fee liability review is set out below.

## 3.1 Submission of Application to the School

Where a student is experiencing exceptional circumstances which significantly impact their ability to engage with their studies they are required to inform their School, at the earliest opportunity.

The student can request that their School submit an application for an adjustment to their tuition fee to the Tuition Fee Liability Review Group.

School approval will only be given where there is clear evidence of a significant negative impact on the student’s ability to engage with their studies over the period of the semester and/or academic year.

Evidence Required

The application should make reference to the exceptional circumstances experienced, their timing, duration and the impact they have had on the student’s ability to engage with their studies.

1. All applications for consideration of exceptional circumstances must be accompanied by independent third party evidence (e.g. from a General Practitioner or Other Medical Professional) which must confirm the timing and existence of the exceptional circumstances.
2. Evidence must contain a clear medical diagnosis or opinion and state how the reported circumstances have impacted on the student’s ability to engage in their studies.
3. Evidence must be relevant to the period the student was unable to engage with their studies. Documentary evidence that is contemporary with events, rather than retrospective, is required.
4. Evidence must be legible and in English. Evidence obtained from overseas which is written in another language must be accompanied by a certified translation (with any costs incurred in obtaining evidence being borne by the student).
5. A letter from a GP stating that the student reports that you felt unwell is not considered sufficient evidence on its own.

Examples of the type of appropriate evidence are detailed in Appendix 1.

Where a School has any concerns about the authenticity of evidence of exceptional circumstances, it reserves the right to contact the author of the supporting evidence.  Where a student is suspected of submitting evidence which is not authentic, the matter will be considered under the Conduct Regulations.

Applications submitted without evidence will be rejected without consideration.

3.2 Submission of Application to the Tuition Fee Liability Review Group

The Group will consider the application and undertake further enquiries as are deemed necessary. Once all required information has been provided, the Group will make a decision and will send a written response to the School, normally within 15 working days.

In some circumstances the decision of the Group may require the student to complete a fitness to study check before returning to study.

The School is responsible for informing the student of the outcome of the application.

3.3 First Stage Appeal

If a student is dissatisfied with the decision of the Tuition Fee Liability Review Group, they may appeal in writing to the Director of Finance within 10 working days of having been notified of the Group’s decision. Copies of previous correspondence and any supporting documentation should be included. This is a first stage appeal.

The only ground on which an appeal of the decision may be made is that new evidence has become available which was not taken into account at the time of the initial review.

3.4 Second Stage Appeal

If a student is dissatisfied with the decision of the Director of Finance they may submit a second stage appeal.

An Appeals Panel shall be convened to meet within 25 working days of receipt of the second stage Appeal. The Panel shall normally comprise:

- Pro-Vice-Chancellor, or nominee (Chair)

- Director of Academic and Student Affairs or Director of Marketing, Recruitment, Communications and Internationalisation; or nominee

The Appeals Panel may seek written evidence from any witness or person who in the Panel’s judgement may have relevant information to contribute.

The Appeals Panel will be serviced by the Finance Directorate and a formal record of the meeting will be taken and retained. The Panel’s decision will be communicated to the student or applicant within 5 working days of the Appeals Panel’s meeting, and circulated to relevant Directorates and Schools.

There is no further appeal permitted beyond the Second stage appeal. However, a student who feels aggrieved by the final decision of the internal process may make a complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman <https://nipso.org.uk/nipso/about-us/who-we-are/>.

**4. Further Information**

These procedures should be read in conjunction with the following University policies:

* Student Finance Framework

For further advice and information in relation to these procedures please contact Student Registry in the first instance.

**Appendix 1 - Examples of Exceptional Circumstances**

To meet the threshold for an adjustment to a tuition fee liability there must be clear evidence of a significant negative impact on the student’s ability to engage with their studies over the period of the semester and/or academic year.

Exceptional circumstances must meet the following criteria:

* They must be out of the student’s control; in other words the student could not have prevented them.
* They must have had a significant impact i.e. a demonstrably negative impact on the student’s ability to study.
* The timing of the circumstances must be relevant to the claimed impact, that is, they must have impacted the student’s ability to engage with their studies over the period of the semester and/or academic year in question, and not just a period immediately preceding an assessment.

The following may not be regarded as exceptional circumstances:

* Medical circumstances outside the relevant period for which appropriate adjustments for exceptional circumstances have already been made.

* Financial problems and work related pressures or their effect, where these are reasonably foreseeable.
* Long term health conditions for which the student is already receiving reasonable or appropriate adjustments.

Prolonged, chronic or long-term conditions are not normally considered a basis for exceptional circumstances. Students with a chronic illness or disability are advised to access the support services available which can put in place reasonable adjustments for specific learning requirements and examinations. However, the timing of the diagnosis, or a marked deterioration of an existing condition may be considered a basis for exceptional circumstances.

The following table provides a few examples of exceptional circumstances. It is a guide and is not meant to be prescriptive.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Exceptional Circumstances – Normally Acceptable** | Evidence Required |
| **Death of a close relative or friend** | Where there is a demonstrably close relationship between the student and the deceased, a death certificate or a letter confirming the death from an independent person should be submitted. |
| **Serious illness of student** | Medical certification must be obtained, self-certification is not acceptable. Details of the incapacitating illness, the timing of diagnosis, details of periods of medical treatment, along with explanation of the impact on the student’s ability to study should be submitted. |
| **Serious illness of a close relative** | A medical certificate or letter from the appropriate medical professional should be submitted. Documentation should explain how the circumstances have impacted on the student’s ability to study. |
| **Acute Personal/Emotional Circumstances** | * A medical certificate or letter from an appropriate medical professional. Documentation should where applicable should include details of the timing of diagnosis, details of periods of medical treatment and should explain how the circumstances have impacted the student’s ability to study. * Where available a letter from the University Counselling Service, or equivalent confirming the nature of the circumstances and that the student has attended counselling. * Documentation should include, where applicable, third party evidence such as solicitor’s letter, police report. |
| **Victim of Crime** | A written statement of events which is supported by written evidence from the police and/or appropriate medical professional will be required. The statement should explain how the circumstances have impacted the student’s ability to study. |
| **Pregnancy** | A medical report from the student’s doctor or midwife must be provided in support of such grounds. This also includes the stages following childbirth. Pregnancy of a wife/partner would be acceptable in appropriate circumstances. These circumstances may also be dealt with under the University’s Student Maternity Policy, see <https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/AcademicAffairs/GeneralRegulations/Policies/StudentMaternity/>. |
| **Worsening of a Long-term chronic health condition** | A medical report from the student’s doctor evidencing the timing of diagnosis, or a marked deterioration of an existing condition, along with explanation of how this has impacted the student’s ability to study. |

**Appendix 2**

**Queen’s University Belfast**

**Tuition Fee Liability Review Request Form**

**Section A: To be completed by Student**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student Name |  |
| Student Number |  |
| Course |  |
| Career | UG / PGT / PGR |

|  |
| --- |
| **Nature of exceptional circumstances and impact they have had on your ability to engage with your studies over the period for which you are requesting a tuition fee liability adjustment** |
|  |

|  |
| --- |
| Please provide detail of the **evidence** submitted to support **Exceptional Circumstances** |
|  |

*Forms which are not fully completed and are without the required documentary evidence will not be considered.*

Applicant declaration:

I confirm that the above statement is a complete and accurate record and that no relevant information has been knowingly omitted. I consent to the information being used by the Tuition Fee Liability Group, and understand that the information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Signature: Date:

**Section B: To be completed by School**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Request Made** | **Summary of Request** |
| Retrospective Withdrawal/LOA Date |  |
| Drop/swap modules |  |
| Extension to dissertation submission date |  |
| Exit on a lower qualification |  |
| Other |  |

|  |
| --- |
| **Additional Information** |
|  |

**To be completed by School Manager (or nominee)**

I confirm on behalf of the School that I have approved the above-named student’s Exceptional Circumstances Request Form.

Signed: …………………………………………………………..… Date:…………………………

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| FOR USE BY THE TUITION FEE LIABILITY GROUP ONLY | |
| Recommend that the following action be taken in respect of this claim: | |
| Signature |  |
| Date |  |