



Categories of Possible Extenuating Circumstances

Post-submission of thesis but prior to the viva

1. Known events

Anything which the student could reasonably expect, in advance of the date of the *viva*, might affect their performance, e.g. personal or other problems not of the student's making, including ongoing known stress and anxiety e.g. illness of a family member, financial or accommodation difficulties, issues raised as complaints.

Expectation: the student should be able to submit an exceptional approval claim in good time in advance, normally up to five working days before the day of the viva. The student should be able to provide documentary evidence and/or to have discussed issues with appropriate staff.

2. Last minute events

Anything which might affect performance that occurs sufficiently close to the date of the *viva*, which would mean that the student's ability to notify anyone in advance of the exam would have been hampered, e.g.

- illness or unforeseeable events only within at least 48 hours of the relevant date or on the day concerned.

Expectation: the student should be able to submit an exceptional approval claim no later than five working days after the relevant date. The student should be able to provide documentary evidence.

During the viva

Anything which might affect performance that occurs whilst the student is attending the *viva* and of which the student was aware at the time e.g.

- illness
- disturbance (e.g. fire alarm)
- material administrative or procedural errors (e.g. error in paperwork regarding the timing of the *viva* or incorrect information provided to Examiners, reasonable adjustments not being applied as agreed)
- environmental factors (e.g. adverse temperature, external noise)

Examiners should be instructed to note on their report any issues raised by students during the viva.

Evidence

The case submitted by the student must explain:

- what the circumstances are
- how it might affect/did affect the student in relation to their performance at the *viva*

**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CODE OF PRACTICE – APPENDIX 6 – Annexe 1
Categories of Possible Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the Viva Voce
Examination**

- precisely when the circumstances occurred

Evidence should be submitted wherever possible. Independent documentary evidence will be necessary in most cases, although evidence which is less independent may be acceptable in some cases where it is accepted that independent corroboration is difficult to obtain. Submitted evidence should be dated and its source or author clearly stated. Where no evidence (independent or otherwise) can be provided, it is at the discretion of those involved in considering the claim to decide whether it is more likely than not the claimed circumstances have occurred.

The following evidence is suggested as appropriate:

Student's physical illness

Written independent evidence on headed paper from a medical practitioner (letter from GP or consultant, hospital discharge notice where the student missed the viva due to hospitalisation), nurse practitioner or dentist. Written evidence from Complementary Therapists or overseas practitioners will only be considered where UoL is satisfied that the therapist or practitioner is a member of a recognised professional body. Evidence must include a clear statement of diagnosis or, where this has not yet been reached, details of symptoms. The claim must also include a clear statement of why and how the student considers that this illness might affect/has affected their performance in the viva. Submission of a prescription form or notes on possible side-effects from medication should not be accepted on their own. It will normally be expected that the student has consulted the person providing the evidence in person and, for example, evidence obtained following an online or telephone consultation, may not be accepted.

Student's mental illness

Written independent evidence on headed paper from GP, psychiatric practitioner or counsellor including explanation of why and how the student's studies have been affected and the period affected. UoL's Counselling Service will only provide a letter where a student has received support over a period relevant to the exceptional approval claim and will not normally provide a letter following a first consultation made after the viva. The claim must also include a clear statement of why and how the student considers that this illness has affected their assessment. It will normally be expected that the student has consulted the person providing the evidence in person and, for example, evidence obtained following an online or telephone consultation, may not be accepted.

Long-term condition or disability

Where the effects of a long-term health condition or disability may be expected to have a potential impact on a student's studies, UoL expects that the student will discuss this with the Disability Support Team in good time before a scheduled viva to determine whether UoL needs to make reasonable adjustments for the viva. An exceptional approval claim will only be considered where either (a) a new condition or disability is diagnosed too late to allow reasonable adjustments to be considered or put in place or (b) the student is affected by a sudden deterioration or change in their condition [e.g. side effects from recent change of medication, flare-up/incident in close proximity to the viva (e.g. epileptic seizure, migraine on the day)]. Written independent evidence on headed paper from a GP, consultant, needs assessor or the Disability Support Team including an explanation of why and how the student's studies have been affected over and above any reasonable adjustments already made. Where the claim relates to a flare-up/incident: written independent evidence on headed paper from a GP or consultant.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy and its normal course in itself does not constitute extenuating circumstances. However, a student may submit an exceptional approval claim if there is some medical

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CODE OF PRACTICE – APPENDIX 6 – Annexe 1
Categories of Possible Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the Viva Voce Examination

complication over and above the normal course (e.g. threat of or actual miscarriage, excessive morning sickness, pre-eclampsia), in which case it should be evidenced and treated as for a physical illness (see above) or if a psychological effect on the student's performance can be evidenced (e.g. threat of or actual miscarriage, decision about possible termination, adverse reaction from partner or family) in which case it should be evidenced and treated as for either a physical illness or a mental illness (see above) or relationship problems (see below).

Illness of family member

Written independent evidence on headed paper from a GP or consultant or hospital discharge notes with an explanation of why and how the student's performance in the viva might be or have been affected and documentary confirmation of relationship to the student.

Caring responsibilities

The expectation is that students with known caring responsibilities should normally have made appropriate arrangements to be able to manage these ordinarily alongside their studies. An exceptional approval claim, therefore, will only be considered where there are unforeseen circumstances (e.g. illness of another carer, unforeseen need to change care arrangements). For example, a parent may be expected to foresee that they will need to make care arrangements for their child during a half-term holiday but not to foresee that a child-minder is unwell and thus unable to care for their child on the day of the viva. Equally, a student who has an elderly parent with Alzheimer's Disease may need to make an exceptional approval claim if their studies are affected by an unforeseen need to respond to a deterioration in their parent's condition requiring new care arrangements to be made for the day of the viva.

Accident to student, family member, student's property etc.

Police report, insurance claim document, doctor's letter or hospital records, newspaper article, solicitor's letter. The case will need to include a clear statement of when the accident occurred and how the student considers it has affected them.

Relationship problems

It is recognised that it may be difficult to obtain independent evidence but those involved in considering the claim will expect to see a case which includes details of the nature of the relationship (i.e. break-up of the student's own relationship or of a relationship which has a significant impact on them (e.g. parental separation/divorce), a statement of the extent to which the student considers it has impacted on them and any evidence which can be provided, preferably by a third party. This might include a change of address/bank account/tenancy agreement or a letter from a third party e.g. family friend, Relate, solicitor. Those involved in considering the claim will need to take into consideration the timing of the break-up and the duration of the relationship and any associated circumstances (e.g. change of accommodation) which may also have impacted on the student's performance. Decisions may need to be taken on the balance of probabilities rather than on firm evidence.

Bereavement

Death certificate, funeral service booklet, newspaper obituary, letter from minister or undertaker. The claim should also make clear the nature of the kinship or relationship between the student and the deceased and how the student considers that they have been affected by the bereavement. This is particularly necessary where the kinship is not within the immediate family (e.g. a step-grandparent, a cousin) or the relationship is not one of kinship (e.g. death of a friend, death of a friend's parent). Claims relating to bereavements will normally be accepted only when the bereavement occurred in the

**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CODE OF PRACTICE – APPENDIX 6 – Annexe 1
Categories of Possible Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the Viva Voce
Examination**

period following submission of the thesis. If the student considers that they have been affected for longer, additional evidence of how they have been affected will be required (e.g. letter from GP or counsellor).

Illness or death of a pet (companion animal)

In cases of illness, the expectation is that the student will normally be able to make arrangements for the animal to be seen by a veterinary surgeon at a time which does not impact on their attendance at the viva. Where this is not possible, or where it is claimed that a protracted illness or treatment has affected their performance in the viva, the case will need to include a clear statement of how the student considers that they have been affected and evidence will be required (e.g. bill from a veterinary surgeon).

In cases of death of a pet, a bill from a veterinary surgeon or pet undertaker should be provided. The case will need to include a clear statement of how the student considers that they have been affected by the bereavement and those involved in considering the claim may take into consideration the type and age of the animal and the circumstances of the death.

Victim of crime

Crime incident number, victim support letter, newspaper article, solicitor's letter. The case will need to include a clear statement of when the crime occurred and how the student considers it has affected them.

Witness to crime

Police or court correspondence, solicitor's letter. The case will need to include a clear statement of when the crime occurred and how the student considers it has affected them.

Accommodation problems

Letter from Hall Warden/Manager or Residential Advisor, correspondence with landlord/letting agent, correspondence with Council, solicitor's letter.

Financial problems

Bank statements, correspondence with a sponsor or funder, letter from Financial Support Team, correspondence with employer. The case will need to include a clear statement of when the problems occurred, what the student has done in response to them and how the student considers it has affected them.

Travel problems

Online or newspaper weather/traffic reports from the day in question, correspondence from travel provider, tickets.

IT failure

Claims of failures of University equipment, including IT systems and computer viruses will only be accepted when they are verified by IT Services. Failures of IT systems external to the University will require documentary evidence from the service provider or a repair service, verifying the timing and nature of the fault.

Religious observance

Independent documentary evidence is required in all cases (e.g. from a member of the clergy or religious leader) and students must demonstrate that there was a requirement for them to attend or participate, and the reasons why they could not attend on a different occasion which did not coincide with their scheduled viva. Where religious observances require fasting, UoL will not regard this as an extenuating circumstance unless this

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CODE OF PRACTICE – APPENDIX 6 – Annexe 1
Categories of Possible Extenuating Circumstances in relation to the *Viva Voce* Examination

significantly affects a student's health and/or they have a medical condition which may impair their performance or prevent them from attending their scheduled *viva*. In such cases the student will need to provide independent documentary evidence as for a physical illness (see above) to support their claim for exceptional approval to be accepted.

Employment

Full-time students will not normally be eligible to make an exceptional approval claim in relation to employment. Part-time students will need to provide written evidence from their employer if unexpected additional work duties prevent them from attending their scheduled *viva*. Evidence should normally include a letter from the employer.

Events occurring during a viva

Students are expected to raise with the Examiners any issue which occurs during the *viva* which they consider has affected their performance. The Examiners should record this in the Examiner's report.

Foreseeable events

Reasonably foreseeable events will not normally be considered as extenuating circumstances e.g. any event that could have been reasonably expected or anticipated, such as sporting events or pressures from employment, or other study commitments.

Visa or passport problems

These will only be accepted where there is evidence, which shows that any delay in obtaining or renewing a visa or passport has not been of the student's making (e.g. not because the student has failed to apply in good time or to satisfy financial requirements). Letter from UKVI, letter from passport authority, letter from International Advice and Guidance.