

## Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC): FAQ Guidance for Submission

*This document should be read in conjunction with the [PEC Submission Guidance](#), the [PEC Policy](#) and [PEC Procedure](#).*

### What is a PEC?

A PEC request can be submitted to your School to advise them if you are experiencing **unforeseen and unavoidable** personal circumstances that you believe may be adversely affecting your ability to study and/or to complete any assessments.

The request will be considered by your School and they will decide whether an appropriate adjustment can be made to your assessments to mitigate against your individual circumstances.

### What adjustments might be given as a result of a PEC request?

Possible adjustments will vary depending on the time of year, but could include:

- An extension to a submission;
- An exemption from doing a minor element of work
- A deferral of an assessment to another time;
- Permission to set aside attempts of an assessment or period of tuition (this means that you may retake an assessment or Stage/semester as a first attempt);
- Permission to retake a module or semester or stage as if for the first time.

If none of these adjustments are appropriate, it may be decided that your circumstances are forwarded to be considered for [discretion by the Board of Examiners](#) at the end of the year. This means that the Board of Examiners may; allow you to pass a Stage despite having failed a module; or allow you to pass a module by discretion; or alter your degree classification, if appropriate.

You should be aware that some adjustments may have additional implications that you will need to consider. For example, if you are repeating any period of tuition (for example, repeating a module, Semester or Stage), you will usually be required to pay the appropriate tuition fees to do so.

If you are requesting or have been offered a deferral, it is also important to note the additional considerations regarding implications for programme progression/award outlined below in '**What is a deferral of an assessment?**'

### When can I submit a PEC?

A PEC can be submitted if you are experiencing any significant personal and extenuating circumstances that are having an impact on your ability to study or your performance in your assessments/examinations.

The circumstances you are reporting in your PEC should generally be unavoidable and unforeseen and be having a demonstrable negative effect on your studies or ability to complete assessments.

Your PEC request should be submitted prior to the submission or assessment deadline where possible and will only be considered retrospectively in specific circumstances. If the adjustment you are requesting is an extension, you should submit your PEC form before the advertised submission date.

## On what grounds can I submit a PEC?

PECs may be considered for:

- Bereavements;
- New periods of ill health or a worsening of an ongoing disability;
- Industrial action which has meant that you have not received the necessary teaching or support for your assessments;
- Any other significant personal difficulties (experienced by you or your dependents) that are outside of your control and which may impact on your ability to study or complete assessments.

## What is a deferral of an assessment?

A deferral is normally only appropriate if you are unable to attend a scheduled examination, or if an extension of up to two weeks for the submission of an assignment isn't appropriate. In cases such as this, you can submit a PEC to request (or be offered) for your assessment to be deferred. This would usually be to the next normal occasion (the Summer/August assessment period), or to a later normal occasion (the assessment period at the end of the relevant Semester), unless you are given a specific alternative submission date or deadline by your School.

It is important to note that if you defer an examination or assignment to the August assessment period and you subsequently fail the assessment, you will not normally be able to progress and register onto the next stage of your programme and/or be awarded your degree until you have met the relevant requirements for your programme. Your second attempt at the assessment will usually be arranged to take place during the next normal assessment period, which could be at the end of the relevant Semester, and you would be required to interrupt your studies until then to allow you to re-take and pass the assessment before being allowed to progress onto the next stage of your programme by the end of year Board of Examiners.

If you are requesting, or have been offered, a deferral of an assessment, module or stage, there may be financial implications you will need to consider. You may find it helpful to speak to the Student Health and Wellbeing Service's [Financial Support team](#), who can help you understand if you will be required to pay any additional tuition fees.

## When is a PEC not appropriate?

PECs are not normally accepted for:

- Instances where appropriate adjustments have already been made (for example if you have already had an extension);
- Minor illnesses such as coughs, colds, headaches or hayfever, (unless as a self-cert or supported by specific medical evidence);
- Problems with printing;
- Issues with online timed assessments (such as 24/48 hour takeaway papers) which result in you submitting your assessment up to 30 minutes late. In these instances, an extension of up to 30 minutes will be granted without the need to submit a PEC;
- Circumstances which could have been avoided, for example through more effective time

- management or failing to create data backups;
- Holidays, house moves, sporting or social commitments;
- Transport problems (except where you can demonstrate that adequate time was allowed for travel);
- Unspecified anxiety or examination stress (unless as a self-cert or supported by specific medical evidence);
- Known employment or financial responsibilities, unless you are a part-time student where employment is your primary activity (unless as a self-cert or supported by a statement/evidence as a result of a cost of living emergency);
- Distress relating to a family pet (unless as a self-cert);
- Retrospective reporting of extenuating circumstances, without appropriate reason for the delay.

### **What is a self-certification (self-cert)?**

On up to two occasions per semester (up to a maximum of four times per academic year), you can submit a PEC to request a short extension to an assignment deadline without having to provide evidence of your illness or circumstances. This is known as a 'self-cert' and will be accepted on trust without the need to provide additional evidence (such as a personal statement or medical evidence). Each submitted PEC form is counted as one request, although if you have similar submission deadlines one PEC request can cover a number of deadlines as long as the PEC form relates to the same period of illness/circumstances).

Self-certs can only result in an adjustment extension of up to 7 days for an assignment submission.

### **What if I need further adjustments after my self-cert period?**

We understand that sometimes personal difficulties can continue for longer than you first anticipated, or other problems may arise during your period of self-certification. Although self-certs can only ever result in an extension of up to a maximum of 7 days, it may be appropriate for you to submit a full PEC request for further adjustments if your difficult personal circumstances continue to have an adverse impact on your ability to study, submit assessments, or sit your exams beyond your self-cert period. If this happens, we would encourage you to speak to your personal tutor, senior tutor or degree programme director as soon as possible to discuss option and support available to you.

### **How do I submit a PEC?**

All PEC forms must be submitted to your School, via the [S3P online system](#) .

You should submit your form as close as possible to the time that the problem arose and, wherever possible, in advance of assessment deadlines.

### **What should I include in my PEC?**

We ask that you complete your [PEC form](#) fully and provide clear details of the issues you have faced, including the dates that you were impacted and how long the problem(s) lasted. This is important so we can assess your case.

PEC requests should include details of precisely how your work was affected (for example, if you did not have time to revise, you missed laboratory hours, etc.). You should also specify which assessments/examinations you believe may have been adversely impacted.

You should provide supporting documentary evidence alongside your PEC form, which should be clearly marked with your name and student number. Documentary evidence can include medical notes, tutor reports, SSPs, statement of support from a Student Health and Wellbeing Advisor or any other documents but must be relevant to your PEC submission and should detail all the important points you would like to be considered. Evidence should not be created after the event (for example by asking a doctor to provide a retrospective note). You should avoid providing details relating to another person's personal data in your submission unless you are able to provide their consent to share their data along with your PEC request.

In the [PEC form](#) you will be asked to suggest what adjustment you feel would be appropriate to your circumstances. Please note that your suggestion will be considered but the PEC Committee will make the final decision (for example, you may be given a shorter extension than requested).

If your PEC relates to the death of a close family member, the University understands that it can be difficult to assess and articulate the impact on your studies. It may be helpful in such situations if you can provide as much information as possible alongside your PEC form, such as: your relationship to the deceased; the timing of the death in relation to your assessments; how much study time was lost (i.e. for attending the funeral, being with family). It is also helpful if you can provide additional evidence, such as a supporting statement from your personal tutor or relative.

### **What kind of evidence do I need to provide?**

If your PEC request is a self-cert, you don't need to provide any further evidence alongside it. However, for anything else (including where you have previously had a self-cert but now need a further adjustment for the same assessment), you should provide independent documentary evidence if this is available.

If the difficulty you are facing is a medical issue (including mental health difficulties), we would ask that you speak to your GP or other healthcare provider and obtain evidence from them. This would normally be in the form of a "fit note" from your GP, but it could also be a letter from a psychological therapist or other healthcare specialist. This doesn't mean that you need to be actively receiving treatment or taking any medications, only that you have consulted with a healthcare professional about your difficulties.

If your difficult personal circumstances have arisen because you have recently experienced a bereavement or a member of your close family is seriously ill, we understand that it may be difficult to obtain evidence. In these circumstances, we would **not** expect you to provide death certificates or medical notes relating to another person, but would instead ask that you speak to your personal tutor, senior tutor or degree programme director about your circumstances and ask that they provide a supporting statement for you to submit alongside your PEC.

### **What if I can't obtain independent evidence?**

We understand that there are situations where it is not possible or practical for you to be able to obtain additional evidence. In these circumstances, you may wish to provide a supporting statement from your

Personal Tutor or the Student Health and Wellbeing Service, or you may wish to write your own personal statement.

If you are planning to submit a personal statement alongside your PEC, it may help you to think about the following:

- What difficulties have you been facing/do you continue to face?
- How are these impacting on your ability to study or complete assessments?
- When did your difficulties begin? How long did they last?
- Which assessments do you feel may have been negatively affected by your difficulties?
- What would be your desired outcome for your PEC application? (i.e. extension, resubmission as first attempt, deferral of assessment)

### **I do not want other people to know about my personal circumstances – can I still submit a PEC?**

Information you provide within your PEC request and accompanying documentation will be treated as confidential. However, if the circumstances you are reporting are particularly sensitive, you may wish to submit accompanying evidence directly to the PEC Committee and not via your School. In such cases, you should submit your [PEC form](#) as normal via S3P and indicate on your form that your case is highly confidential. You should then submit an outline of the confidential circumstances, together with relevant documentary evidence, to your School office in a sealed envelope marked '*Strictly confidential – PEC evidence for the attention of the PEC Committee only.*'

### **I have a Student Support Plan (SSP) – can I still submit a PEC?**

If your Student Support Plan (SSP) identifies specific circumstances where an extension or deferral would be appropriate, you are still required to submit a PEC form to indicate to your School that you wish to submit your work with an extended deadline. However, in this situation, you may provide your SSP as documentary evidence and no further additional evidence will be required.

Additional PECs are not normally accepted if you have an ongoing medical conditions or disabilities for which you are already receiving adjustments via your SSP, unless there has been a change in your condition or additional problems have arisen for you.

If you are experiencing additional personal extenuating circumstances unrelated to your ongoing medical condition or disability, or if there has been a change in your circumstances (for example, a worsening of an existing medical condition), you may submit a PEC for consideration of additional adjustments via the route outlined above.

### **Should I submit a PEC if I need a temporary adjustment for my Examination?**

No. If you have a temporary disability that requires a short-term adjustment for an examination period (for example if you have broken your arm and require a scribe or extra time), you should complete the online [Temporary Examination Arrangements Form](#) to request an appropriate adjustment for your examination from the Examinations Office.

### **How is the University handling COVID-related PECs?**

If your PEC relates to circumstances arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and you are requesting an extension of up to 7 days for an assessment deadline, you are not required to provide additional evidence of your personal circumstances. Instead you may submit a self-certification PEC up to twice per semester (up to a maximum of 4 times per academic year).

If you are requesting any other adjustment as a result of COVID-related issues, you are asked to provide additional evidence of your personal circumstances. COVID-related evidence may include a photograph of a positive COVID-19 lateral flow or PCR test result, or NHS email confirmation of a positive test result. Where this evidence is not available, you are required to submit a personal statement which outlines your circumstances, the negative impact it is having on you, and any contact you have had with your personal tutor or wellbeing advisor about this issue.

### **How is the University handling Industrial Action-related PECs?**

If, as a result of Industrial Action, you are concerned that you have not received the required teaching or appropriate support relating to your assessments, you are encouraged to speak to your student course representatives in the first instance. However, if you believe that this has had an adverse impact on your performance within your examinations or assessed coursework, you may submit a PEC about your individual circumstances.

You should detail the specific impact the Industrial Action has had on your studies, such as: the dates of missed teaching sessions; which assessment/s you believe have been affected; and whether your Academic Unit took any mitigating action in relation to the missed sessions (for example, by providing additional tuition or teaching materials). You will not be required to provide any additional evidence relating to periods of Industrial Action.

Please note that PEC forms are for individual adjustments only – if an issue or disruption is module or programme-wide it will be dealt with within the school and there is no need to submit a PEC to cover this.

### **How is the University handling PECs relating to the Cost of Living Crisis?**

We understand that during the current Cost of Living Crisis, you may be experiencing additional financial hardship, responsibilities or anxieties relating to paid employment, which may have a negative impact on your ability to study or complete assessments.

While known employment responsibilities are not usually accepted as PEC grounds, we appreciate that the current Cost of Living Crisis is having a negative effect on many of our students and so there may be times when you need to take on additional paid work in order to meet your financial responsibilities. In these circumstances, you are able to submit a self-cert PEC for an extension of up to 7 days to any assessment (*see: 'What is a self-cert?', above*) without the need to provide any additional evidence of your circumstances.

If you require any adjustments beyond a short extension (of up to 7 days) to the submission date of an assessment, you will need to complete a full PEC request and attach supplementary evidence. In these circumstances, a personal statement outlining your current situation will usually be appropriate. Guidance on writing a personal statement can be found in Appendix 2 of [the PEC Procedure](#).

There is also help and support available to you during the Cost of Living Crisis, and you may find it useful to consult NUSU's Cost of Living Crisis Hub: <https://nusu.co.uk/support/cost-of-living> or access additional support available via the University: <https://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/cost-of-living-support/>.

### **How is the University handling PECs relating to travel disruption?**

Transport problems are not normally accepted as grounds for submitting PECs, unless you are able to show that you have allowed adequate time for travel.

While we would always expect students to plan ahead and make alternative travel arrangements where possible, we understand that the current rail strikes may be having a significant adverse effect on students travelling to Newcastle to attend lectures, seminars or assessments. As such, if you feel that you have been significantly impacted by travel disruption as a result of strike action, you may submit a PEC for your School to consider your individual circumstances and whether an adjustment to your assessment is appropriate.

Your PEC should be accompanied by a [written statement](#), which details how your plans were disrupted, any measures you have taken to mitigate against the travel disruption, and the specific assessment/s you feel may have been negatively affected. Where possible, you should also provide copies of travel documents (such as train tickets, e-receipts) to demonstrate that you have attempted to travel despite the disruption you have faced.

### **How is the University handling PECs relating to COVID-related travel restrictions?**

As of January 2023, all arrivals into the UK from China will be subject to [additional COVID-19 testing](#). If you are planning to return to the UK from China to resume your studies and/or undertake assessments, and you test positive for COVID-19 either before departure or upon arrival in the UK, please follow the above guidance: “**How is the University handling PECs relating to travel disruption?**” and “**How is the University handling COVID-related PECs?**”.

### **I am an Elite Athlete can I request an adjustment due to representing the University?**

If you are an elite athlete, or you represent the University or your country at a high level, and you need an adjustment to an assessment because of a commitment in relation to your field of competition, you may submit a PEC. However, you will normally need to provide a letter of support from the Director of Sport or your Performance Manager as additional documentary evidence.

How will my PEC be processed?

