

# CIT Policy Governing Individual Extenuating Circumstances Relating to Examinations and Assessment

Approved by CIT Academic Council 1<sup>st</sup> June 2011

## Individual Extenuating Circumstances

### 1. Intent and objectives

Individual Extenuating Circumstances (IECs) describes conditions which temporarily prevent a student from taking an assessment(s) or significantly impair a student's performance in an assessment(s). This policy is intended to detail the Institute's provision and support for students who experience IECs. The policy is based on the following principles:

- Support of the student – CIT is at its core a student centred institution and for this reason it seeks to provide every support possible to allow its students to achieve their true potential. This policy is intended to address circumstances which impact directly and negatively on a student's assessment performance. This policy is not intended to provide compensation for all challenging and difficult circumstances a student may experience.
- Fairness and consistency – Any provision or action in relation to IECs should have due regard for the Institute's obligation to ensure fair and consistent treatment for all its students.
- Protection of academic standards – It is essential that the integrity of the Institute's academic standards is not undermined by any action or provision in relation to IECs.

This policy is intended to provide guidance for students and staff regarding what constitutes valid IECs and how any claims pertaining to these should be addressed.

### 2. Defining Individual Extenuating Circumstances

Students will experience difficulties, problems and illnesses which are part of normal life. Such issues do not constitute Individual Extenuating Circumstances (IECs). IECs must be extraordinary in nature and more specifically they must:

- Be unexpected
- Be beyond the student's control
- Have a significant impact on assessment performance

It is not possible to be entirely objective and prescriptive in relation to what does and does not constitute valid IECs. A level of subjective decision making will always be required of the individuals and Boards that will consider claims of IECs. However the following sections provide some guidance that will assist in this decision making process. The guidelines will also assist students in determining if their particular circumstances may be accepted as valid IECs.

#### 2.1 Circumstances that qualify as IECs

The following examples would be likely to be considered as valid IECs if the timing were such as to have a significant impact on the student's assessment(s):

- Death, or sudden serious illness, of a close relative or friend.
- A serious or incapacitating injury, illness, or medical condition (or a sudden, marked deterioration in an on-going or longer-term condition), or an emergency operation.
- Serious unexpected disruption of personal life.
- Premature childbirth (self or partner), or related post-natal care.

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## *2.2 Circumstances that do not qualify as IECs*

Normally, the following would be unlikely to be considered as valid IECs:

- On-going or longer-term conditions or circumstances are not IECs, and should normally be handled by disability support and/or special assessment arrangements: they are likely to give rise to valid IECs claims only if they first come to light or are diagnosed, or become unexpectedly and markedly worse, at assessment time.
- IECs claims without appropriate, independent supporting evidence.
- Minor illnesses or ailments (e.g., coughs, colds, hangovers).
- Personal/domestic events which could have been anticipated and/or planned otherwise (e.g., moving house; marrying; routine childcare).
- Choices and preferences in personal life (e.g., attending a wedding; holidays; attending social events, sporting fixtures).
- Poor management of time (including oversleeping) or misunderstanding deadlines/dates.
- Examination nerves, self-diagnosed stress.
- Failure of computer or other equipment being used to produce work to be assessed, including work not backed up.
- Individual transport/travel problems (unless due to strikes or disruptions which could not be foreseen or worked around).
- Relative cost of travel arrangements.
- Financial difficulties (if very serious, suspension of study might be appropriate).
- Demands of paid or unpaid employment, and job interviews (unless exceptional circumstances prevail in work that is undertaken as a condition or necessary counterpart of the programme of study).
- Failure of others to submit group assignments.
- Multiple examinations within a short period.
- Language of assessment not being the student's main language.
- Late applications for IECs (unless good evidence of the unavoidability of the delay is also provided).
- Long-term illness or disability where earlier disclosure would have allowed appropriate adjustments to be made.
- Assessments already subject to special arrangements to accommodate disabilities or other known conditions.
- IECs claims which fail to make clear how performance in assessment was significantly affected.

## *2.3 Other Extenuating Circumstances*

From time to time, a structural problem will occur with an assessment. For example, a fire alarm may disrupt an examination taking place. These circumstances are referred to as General Extenuating Circumstances and will usually have impacted upon a group or cohort of students. These may not be used as part of a claim for IECs and should be addressed by another means.

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## **3. Addressing Individual Extenuating Circumstances**

In the first instance the onus is on the student to address any issues that have a negative impact on academic performance. The normal-life issues referred to above should be addressed by the student and he/she should take steps to minimise the impact of these.

Ongoing or longer-term conditions or circumstances are not IECs, and should normally be handled by disability support and/or special assessment arrangements. They are likely to give rise to valid IECs claims only if they first come to light or are diagnosed, or become unexpectedly and markedly worse, at assessment time.

The ability to study effectively might also be affected by IECs, but any ongoing or long-term inability to study should lead to consideration of the need to suspend study.

If a student believes that their particular circumstances constitute IECs they should, at the earliest possible opportunity, communicate these to the appropriate individual or Board according to the procedures set out in this document.

Once an individual or Board is formally informed of circumstances pertaining to a particular student and assuming that the particular set of circumstances have been adjudged to constitute IECs as defined above the next issue that arises is how to address those circumstances. In addressing any claim of IECs an individual or board must first assess two key aspects of the claim:

1. The validity of the IECs claimed – Appropriate corroborating evidence (e.g., a medical certificate for illness) will normally be required in support of IECs claims. This corroborating evidence must be from a suitable independent source. Self-certification or certification by a third party who is not qualified to certify the circumstances claimed and who is merely conveying the circumstances as told to them by the claimant, will not normally be acceptable. The corroborating evidence should be assessed according to the principle of the balance of probabilities.
2. The impact of the IECs claimed – Any assessment of the impact of IECs should seek to determine the impact on the specific assessment(s) and not the impact on the individual. IECs in and of themselves do not need to be addressed unless the individual or Board are satisfied that they have had a significant impact on an assessment(s).

Once the individual or board are satisfied as to the validity and impact of the IECs they should proceed to determine the most effective way to address those circumstances.

When considering how to address these circumstances the principles of supporting the student, fairness and consistency and maintenance of academic standards should be upper-most in the minds of the individual or Board. For this reason it is essential that examiners for modules mark the assessment(s) according to normal criteria without making adjustments for any IECs of which they may be aware. This approach will provide the best basis for ensuring that academic standards are protected and that there will be fair and consistent treatment for students across all modules and programmes.

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It is not possible to give a detailed and exhaustive list of possible actions that may be considered but the following provides an indicative list covering the different categories of actions available:

- Student guidance and support – Where possible in addressing IECs the Institute should seek in the first instance to provide guidance and support. This should allow the student to complete their assessment(s), achieve their full potential and obviate the need for further extraordinary actions. Among the provisions in this category are pastoral counselling, academic assistance, medical treatment and disability support.
- Restructuring or reconfiguration of assessment(s) – Certain types of assessment are amenable to restructuring or reconfiguration. The types of actions which may be considered include the extension of submission deadlines, the provision of reassessment opportunities and the modification of assessment requirements (e.g. a student may get a derogation from the presentation part of a project assessment).
- Removal of penalties – If a board deems that IECs are valid they may decide to rescind any penalties that have been applied for late-submission of assessment(s).
- Deferral of assessment – If it is not possible to restructure or reconfigure the affected assessment(s), the next available option is to award a deferral. This allows the assessment(s) to be completed at a later date once the IECs have abated and the student can perform to their potential. The decision to award a deferral may only be taken by the appropriate Board.
- Adjustment of marks – If a student's marks fall within the defined borderline range the Board may decide to adjust the student's module mark or overall result. It is always preferable that marks and credits are awarded based on the demonstration of learning rather than on the basis of IECs. Therefore, in order to ensure that the Institute's academic standards are protected this action should only be used as a last resort when all other available actions have been considered.

## **4. Procedure Overview**

As a general principle all claims in relation to IECs should be initiated by the student. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that they understand and engage with the Institute's IECs procedures. There is no expectation that the Institute should be pro-active in seeking out students with IECs.

The procedures for addressing IECs are divided into three phases as follows:

1. Pre-claim phase
2. Informal claim phase
3. Formal claim phase

### **4.1 Pre-claim phase**

If a student is experiencing circumstances which they believe may impact their academic or assessment performance they may reveal these to a suitable officer of the Institute i.e. lecturer,

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programme co-ordinator, Head of Department or student counselling/medical staff. During this pre-claim phase the goal is to direct the student to the appropriate supports and services to allow them to address their circumstances.

It is vital that all parties understand that any engagement during this phase does not constitute a claim for IECs. The onus is on the student to initiate a subsequent claim if they believe that the IECs have persisted and actually impacted on their performance. The officer(s) of the Institute involved in this pre-claim phase is not required to enquire or follow-up regarding circumstances revealed during the pre-claim phase when a student's performance is assessed.

## ***4.2 Informal claim phase***

A student who believes that they have valid IECs should in the first instance seek to address these via an informal IECs claim. This type of claim is particularly suited to continuous assessment(s). Pursuing an informal claim does not prevent or prejudice a subsequent formal claim.

An informal claim is initiated by the student when they inform their lecturer(s), programme co-ordinator or Head of Department in writing (including via email) that they believe that they have valid IECs. The student must clearly state the nature of the circumstances and must identify the assessment(s) affected and the severity of the impact.

On receipt of such a claim, sufficient details of the claim must be communicated by the recipient to the relevant lecturer(s), module co-ordinator(s), programme co-ordinator and Head of Department. Any such communications must seek to strike a reasonable balance between the need for sufficient information on the part of the Institute's officers and the student's right to confidentiality.

The validity and impact of the IECs claimed should be assessed by an appropriate individual(s) at the appropriate level. If the claim is deemed valid the IECs should be addressed by:

- Student guidance and support
- Restructuring or reconfiguration of assessment

It is essential that sufficient details of the assessment of the claim and any resulting action are communicated to the relevant lecturer(s), module co-ordinator(s), programme co-ordinator and Head of Department.

In determining the appropriate individual(s) to assess and address informal claims of IECs the following factors should be considered:

- When the IECs relate to the assessment of a single module the decision regarding validity and appropriate action can be taken by the lecturer concerned in consultation with the module co-ordinator.
- When the IECs relate to the assessment of a number of modules the decision regarding validity and appropriate action should be taken by the Head of Department in consultation with all relevant lecturer(s), module co-ordinator(s) and programme co-ordinator.

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## ***4.3 Formal claim phase***

If a student is experiencing circumstances which they believe may impact their academic or assessment performance they may complete an Individual Extenuating Circumstances Claim Form and submit it to their Head of Department. A formal IECs claim may only be submitted via the Head of Department. Upon receipt of a formal IECs claim the Head of Department must communicate sufficient details of the claim to the relevant lecturer(s), module co-ordinators and programme co-ordinators. Any such communications must seek to strike a reasonable balance between the need for sufficient information on the part of the Institute's officers and the student's right to confidentiality.

A formal IECs claim should be assessed and addressed by the appropriate Module Examination Board(s) and/or Progression and Awards Board. The Board should first assess the claim in terms of validity and impact. If the outcome of the assessment deems the claim valid the IECs should be addressed by:

- Removal of penalties
- Deferral of assessment
- Adjustment of marks

It is essential that the Board's decision and any resulting action(s) are communicated to the relevant lecturer(s), module co-ordinator(s), programme co-ordinator and Head of Department.