

Guidance notes for exam allowances - for certain Postgraduate courses

Guidance notes for staff and students

These guidance notes explain the exam allowances for Postgraduate students on the following courses:

- MPhil by Advanced Study
- Diploma in Economics
- PG Diploma International Law
- Master of Studies (MSt)
- Master of Research (MRes)
- PG Diploma in Legal Studies
- Certification of Postgraduate Study (CPGS)
- Master of Education (MEd)

These guidance notes are for applications relating to the academic year 2024-25. The guidance notes complement the relevant Ordinances, which can be found online in [Chapter VI \(regulation 12\)](#) and [Chapter VII \(regulation 15\) for the Master of Studies Degree](#).

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Key changes for 2024-25 guidance notes

- Students to receive the exam allowance outcome
- All decision-makers to receive the full exam allowance application
- Colleges will be informed of direct applications from students upon receipt

1 Criteria for granting an exam allowance

1.1 What is an exam allowance?

An exam allowance is a remedy for a student whose assessment(s) (exam, coursework or other formal assessment where the marks contribute to the student's formal examination result) are impacted by illness or grave cause. In such circumstances the University can grant an examination allowance so that the student is not substantively disadvantaged.

For information on how to intermit, extend submission date or other postgraduate matters please see [here](#).

1.2 Who can receive an exam allowance?

These guidance notes explain the exam allowances available for postgraduate students on the courses: MPhil by Advanced Study, MRes or MSt degrees, the Diploma in Economics, the Postgraduate Diplomas in Legal Studies and in International Law, or the Certificate of Postgraduate Study (CPGS).

Different guidance on exam allowances is available for students on the Foundation Year Programme; and undergraduates and the following postgraduate taught courses: EMBA; LLM; MAcc; MAST; MBA; MCL; MEng; M.Fin; MMath; MMus; MSci; PGCE, MArch. It is available [here](#).

Students registered for the PhD, MLitt or MSc or MPhil by thesis degrees are not eligible to receive examination allowances and in case of difficulties in an examination should consult their Supervisor or College Tutor for advice. Following the publication of examination results, an [Examination Review](#) can be sought for these students.

1.3 What is illness or grave cause?

An exam allowance can be granted where a student has experienced illness or grave cause that is:

- a) serious;
- b) unanticipated;
- c) entirely beyond the student's control;
- d) close in time to the assessment; and
- e) evidenced by contemporaneous evidence from an independent, appropriately qualified source.

1.4 Examples of illness or grave cause

Where the circumstances meet the criteria set out at 1.3 above, the following are a non-exhaustive list of examples that are **likely** to be accepted:

- short-term illness or injury;
- worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions;
- symptoms of an infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others;
- death or significant illness of a close family member or friend;
- unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member or dependant;
- significant personal or family crises leading to acute stress;
- witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident;
- a crime which has had a substantial impact on the student;
- accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable;
- an emergency or crisis that prevents the student from attending an exam or accessing an online assessment.

The following list are examples of circumstances **unlikely** to be accepted:

- holidays, house moves or other planned or expected events;
- minor illness such as common colds or hay fever;
- assessments that are scheduled close together;
- misreading the exam timetable;
- forgetting or otherwise accidentally not attending exams or not submitting assessments at the appropriate time;
- poor time management;
- minor transport disruption;
- computer or printer failure where the student should have backed-up their work
- exam stress;
- minor life events, unless the circumstances have had a disproportionate impact that meet the criteria in section 1.3;
- the impact of a University sanction, including an academic penalty, as a result of academic misconduct or another breach of the University's Rules of Behaviour.

1.5 Evidencing illness or grave cause

As outlined in the criteria in section 1.3, contemporaneous evidence from an independent, appropriately qualified, source must be provided in order to be granted an exam allowance.

Evidence should include the nature, severity and impact of the illness or grave cause; it should state how the condition is likely to have affected the student's examination preparation and / or performance. The evidence should be precise, self-explanatory and where relevant, should offer a clear diagnosis from a medical professional.

Evidence should be obtained as close to the date of the examination as possible, students are expected to make use of College Nurses, Tutors and welfare staff, in addition to GP services. Evidence obtained after the impact of the illness or grave cause that states the student 'reported' they were impacted by illness or grave cause is unlikely to be sufficient. Where an existing or long-term condition is relevant to the circumstances, pre-existing evidence can be used to confirm the condition, alongside contemporaneous evidence documenting the circumstances affecting the relevant assessments.

Where a student is aware of a long-term condition that affects their day-to-day activities, it is their responsibility to seek reasonable adjustments in advance of the examination taking place. Only unanticipated worsening or changing of the condition shall be considered to meet the illness or grave cause criteria and this will need to be sufficiently evidenced.

Evidence is treated sensitively and confidentially and is only seen by decision-makers and those staff administering the decision-making processes. Consequently, redacted medical evidence is not accepted.

Evidence must be from an independent source, not family or friends, and the author must be sufficiently qualified to provide the relevant evidence e.g. a doctor is qualified to diagnose illnesses, a nurse is qualified to report medical symptoms, an accredited counsellor is qualified to confirm the engagement they have had with a student; the ADRC (Accessibility and Disability Resource Centre) can provide screening assessments or evidence of engagements regarding a student's disability. Where a student's referral to a specialist medical advisor has been delayed for reasons outside the student's control, this should be made clear.

Evidence must be in English or include an official translation from a third party (not generated or translated by AI).

2. Types of Exam Allowances

Where a student's circumstances meet the criteria for illness or grave cause, in line with section 1 above, the student shall be eligible for the most relevant exam allowance, as set out in Statutes and Ordinances, Chapter VI and VII 'Allowances for illness, etc'. When an exam allowance is granted, conditions may be imposed, for example, requiring medical evidence of fitness to resume and sustain study.

Further information on each allowance follows.

2.1 To be approved for the qualification for which they are registered without further examination

Where students have not met the criteria to be awarded the qualification for which they are registered, this allowance grants the student the degree.

Additional criteria for the exam allowance

- The Degree Committee concerned judge the student to have performed with credit in a substantial part of the examination;
- This allowance can only be granted once all exam marks are known.

What appears on the transcript?

The transcript will confirm the awarded degree. The marks attained, including any fail marks, are retained and displayed. On request, the EAMC will provide a letter to complement the transcript detailing the exam allowance.

2.2 To be allowed the opportunity to be examined or re-examined

The student is permitted to be examined or re-examined under such conditions and at such time as determined following consultation with the relevant Degree Committee. This may include the opportunity for a student to revise and resubmit work, to be re-examined later in the same academic year or to return to study the following year and retake assessments along with the subsequent student cohort.

What appears on the transcript?

The mark obtained as a result of the re-examination opportunity is the mark awarded and retained on the transcript, regardless of whether the mark is lower or higher than any original result.

2.3 Return to study (to be examined or re-examined)

Where a student's circumstances require it, it may be appropriate for the student to return to return to study in the next academic year to re-sit the exam(s) in question, providing this will not provide unfair advantage to the student in comparison to their peers.

In exceptional circumstances and following consultation with the Degree Committee, permission may be granted for a student to re-start the course afresh. In this circumstance, the student is able to choose different paper options or topic choices, where available, and normally repeats all forms of assessment and examinations. Exceptional circumstances would involve significant and sustained mitigating circumstances throughout a student's final year or a significant change to the course.

If a student is offered the opportunity to return to the course for all or part of the following academic year, the student will be liable for fees, unless a [Fee remission](#) has been requested and granted. Where the student returns to re-start the course afresh, the fees due will be at the rate for the new academic year.

It is the student's responsibility to ensure that they have sufficient finance to cover any living costs and where applicable, to ensure that they obtain a visa in good time for their return to study. Further information on entry clearance to the UK can be obtained from the [International Student Team](#).

Returning to study

Where return to study is conditional on the student's fitness to return, resume and sustain study, medical evidence must be provided by the student and approved by the EAMC, College and Degree Committee in advance of their return.

Wherever possible, medical evidence confirming fitness to return should be provided by the same person who made the original diagnosis. Where this is not possible, the student should arrange for the current practitioner, for example GP or consultant, to see the medical evidence from the time of the original diagnosis to inform their judgment on the student's fitness to return. Further medical evidence may be sought by the EAMC or College.

The medical evidence should be provided to the College by the student so that it can be submitted to the EAMC between 8 and 12 weeks prior to return. The relevant Degree Committee will be consulted but medical evidence and any other confidential material will not be shared.

In cases where continued medical treatment is required, the EAMC needs to be satisfied that such treatment can satisfactorily be delivered in Cambridge and that the student's condition will not have an adverse effect on their performance in the examinations.

3. How to make an application

3.1 General information

Applications for exam allowances are submitted by email to EAMC@admin.cam.ac.uk by a College on the student's behalf (via Tutor or wellbeing advisor) or via direct application from a student, within three months of the formal notification of the student's exam results.

The application must be complete at the time of submission and the email must include all of the following:

- a completed and signed application form;
- a statement(s) from the College and/or student;
- a completed student declaration form;
- evidence of the medical circumstances or other grave cause;
- the full student support document (SSD), where appropriate, to include the disability information and document sections
- any academic evidence available. The College should supply whatever testimony of the student's industry and ability it can.

Exceptionally, where the sender has become aware of an error in the submission of an application before the application has been considered, the application must be re-submitted in full, with an explanation for the re-submission. The date of re-submission will be used in determining at which meeting the application will be considered.

Students can expect an application to be considered at the meeting following the meeting deadline, with an outcome being sent within ten working days of the meeting date. Details of meetings and submission deadlines can be found [here](#).

Direct applications

Where a direct application is received from a student, the student's College will be informed of the application and the allowance requested. The College shall then be informed of the outcome in due course. The College may be asked to supply further information for the application where relevant, e.g. all supervision reports, or confirmation of relevant College action.

Students are also encouraged to seek support and make their College aware of any direct application submitted. Failure to keep the College informed, including where the Review procedure is initiated, may affect future provision (e.g. accommodation) should the exam allowance be granted.

3.2 College and student statements

Where an application is made to the EAMC from a College on the student's behalf, it is expected that the student's Senior Tutor or Tutor shall provide a statement about the application. The College may wish to draw attention to any matters which it would like the Committee to take into consideration. There may be instances in which an additional statement by a DoS is helpful. The Committee pays close attention to the care with which College statements are prepared.

Students may also wish to provide a brief statement outlining the impact of the illness or grave cause. Any statement should be concise, factual and linked to the relevant criteria.

3.3 Deadlines

Applications for allowances should be made as soon as possible, and no later than three months from the date of publication of the outcome of the examination. Applications received after this date will only be considered where the Secretary of the EAMC considers that there is valid and exceptional reason for delay, based on the evidence submitted within the application.

3.4 Academic Evidence

The EAMC will consult the relevant Degree Committee regarding the student's academic progress to date and to obtain a profile of their marks and any other formally assessed work completed throughout the year. However, please supply as much information as possible in the original application.

Further information will be sought from the Degree Committee, if this information is provided by a delegated representative of the Degree Committee, the EAMC will need to have this information confirmed by the full Degree Committee before the allowance can be granted and the final outcome confirmed. This may extend the usual timeframes for confirming an outcome.

If the further information sought from the Degree Committee or its delegated representative is not received by the submission deadline, the application may be considered at a later meeting of the EAMC.

4. Exam warnings

Guidance on exam warnings is available [here](#). Exam warnings are submitted by the College via CamSIS to act as a contemporaneous indicator that a student has experienced a problem during the examination period. No action is taken at the submission stage.

If the College subsequently makes an application for an exam allowance, the details of the exam warning will be included. If the College does not make an application, no action is taken in relation to the exam warning.

Exam warnings are not disclosed to Chairs of Examiners, Degree Committees nor the Examination Boards. Examination Boards only consider the academic work presented and mark and class on that basis.

5. The consideration process for exam allowance applications

5.1 The Examination Access and Mitigation Committee

The Examination Access and Mitigation Committee (EAMC) is a committee of the General Board which meets at least monthly throughout the year to consider applications for examination allowances and related matters. Its membership includes representatives from across the Collegiate membership and medically qualified members. There is also a large volume of student casework undertaken under delegated authority, much of which involves the expert opinion of its medically qualified members.

The EAMC may only consider cases and make decisions within the bounds of the authority granted within Statutes & Ordinance and in accordance with this guidance. Applications that fall outside these parameters shall be declined.

The EAMC has the following overarching aims:

- To grant relief where students would otherwise be substantively disadvantaged by illness or grave cause in relation to their assessments;
- To endeavour to ensure parity of treatment between applicants to the Committee who share similar circumstances, while recognising that each case is individual.
- To be mindful of the interests of students undertaking the same course but who are not applicants to the EAMC.

All correspondence relating to exam allowances must take place using the EAMC@admin.cam.ac.uk. There must be no attempt to correspond with individual EAMC members, Examiners or the Degree Committee regarding the details of applications.

5.2 General overview

The EAMC receives copies of applications seven days prior to a meeting. Prior to the Committee meeting, the Secretary may contact the Department or Faculty for further information, e.g. information on grade boundaries.

In considering the application, the EAMC shall consider the application presented, any additional information received from the Department, Faculty or relevant University office, and any previous applications that have been made to the EAMC.

Where the criteria of a requested examination allowance have not been met, the EAMC may grant a different exam allowance to the student.

Where a student who has already been granted one examination allowance applies for a second or further allowance, each application will be considered on its own merits. In awarding multiple allowances, the EAMC will have particular regard for maintaining equality of educational outcomes between students in different circumstances.

5.3 Matters dealt with by delegated authority

Some matters may be dealt with by authority delegated to the Chair and/or Secretary. Typically, this includes straightforward applications, such as undergraduate resume study or disregard terms (colloquially known as intermission).

In very exceptional circumstances i.e. where a decision cannot reasonably wait until the next scheduled meeting of the Committee and where the case is not straightforward, the Committee may be prepared to consider an application by circulation. If, however, in such circumstances any member of the Committee wishes the application to be considered at a scheduled meeting, then the application will need to await that meeting.

5.4 Communication throughout the process

It is not appropriate for the Degree Committee and the College or student to communicate directly regarding the form of allowance. All communications between the College or student and the Degree Committee should be via the EAMC to ensure parity of treatment and for approval of any offers made. Agreements made outside of the EAMC process, and therefore not approved by the EAMC, may not constitute a formal allowance.

5.5 Outcomes

Once the EAMC has made a decision an outcome letter will be sent to the College and the student via email, with the College receiving at least 24 hours' notice of the decision.

Outcome letters will normally be issued within ten working days of the EAMC meeting at which the application was considered.

Some cases need confirmation from the appropriate Degree Committee before the final outcome can be confirmed. Where this is the case, the College and the student will be notified of the EAMC's initial decision. Subsequently, once the Degree Committee has confirmed its decision, the College and student will receive the final decision. Consideration by the Degree Committee is likely to lengthen the timeline, as some Degree Committees only meet twice a term.

6. Reviewing exam allowance decisions

Where a student is dissatisfied with the decision in relation to the exam allowance application, a review can be submitted within 14 days of receiving the decision in line with the [Procedure for the Review of Decisions of University Bodies](#).

Requests for review can only be made on set grounds: procedural irregularities; new evidence that for good reason could not be submitted with the original application; or a belief that the decision is wholly unreasonable. If the student remains dissatisfied following the review outcome, the student may take their case to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

7. Questions and further information

Any queries regarding exam allowances should be directed to eamc@admin.cam.ac.uk.