Exceptional Assessment Circumstances Policy and Procedure

Effective for students commencing study on modules/ stages of programmes from September 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this policy on exceptional assessment circumstances (EACs) is to ensure that no student is disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control, within a framework of meeting our responsibilities to maintain academic standards.

EACs are temporary, short-term circumstances which:

- affect your ability to attend or complete assessment(s)
- are exceptional
- are outside your control
- can be corroborated by independent evidence
- occurred during or shortly before the assessment in question

This means they are not:

- something that is recurring or more than short-term
- something that could have been anticipated
- something that you can plan for

More details of the definitions of exceptional assessment circumstances (EACs) are given in section 2 of this document.

If your participation in an assessment or ability to attend scheduled learning and teaching activities (including placements) has been affected by an EAC, then you can ask Norland to take this into consideration.

Section 3 of this document tells you how to submit an EAC claim and section 4 tells you what will happen if your circumstances are accepted as valid.

Norland operates a 'fit-to-sit policy'. If you believe that your academic performance will be affected by personal or health circumstances you must submit an EAC form, and must not complete/submit the assessment. If you complete/submit an assessment, this will normally be taken as a declaration that you consider yourself fit to do so.

2. SCOPE OF EXCEPTIONAL ASSESSMENT CIRCUMSTANCES

2.1 What is an EAC?

EACs are temporary, short-term circumstances, usually less than 3 weeks in duration, which:

- affect your ability to attend or complete an assessment or a number of assessments or scheduled learning and teaching activities
- are exceptional
- are outside your control
- can be corroborated by independent evidence

- occurred during or shortly before the assessment or learning and teaching activity in question

Examples of situations that are likely to be consider valid EACs are included in section 3.2 of this document. Section 3.3 provides guidance on situations that are likely to be considered invalid EACs.

2.2 Temporary, acute conditions which last for more than three weeks

If you have a temporary, acute condition which lasts or will last for more than 3 weeks, such as a broken wrist, you should contact your personal tutor, as soon as possible, both in terms of providing additional support for study and to put in place an appropriate arrangement to address difficulties. Again, it is anticipated that the EAC procedure will not be required unless other issues have arisen or the support in place did not sufficiently address the problem.

If circumstances arise which prevent you from engaging in learning, teaching and assessment activities for more than two consecutive weeks, or if you find that you are needing to claim EACs over several assessments, a Cause for Action may be raised and you may be referred to other frameworks, such as the Interruption to Studies policy or the Fitness to Practise or Fitness to Study procedures.

2.3 Long-term conditions

If a condition arises which lasts or will last more than 3 weeks, EACs are not appropriate and you will be referred to other appropriate policies such as Reasonable Adjustments, Fitness to Practise or Fitness to Study.

If a condition arises which prevents you from engaging effectively with learning, teaching and assessment activities over a period of 12 consecutive weeks or more, you may be advised or required to interrupt your studies for 12 months to allow you time to recover. This is because success in your studies and in your future employment is likely to be affected by prolonged absence. See the Interruption to Studies policy.

2.4 Stress, anxiety and underlying mental health conditions

In the main, you are expected to manage your health and minor illnesses or disruptions alongside your studies. If you have several weeks or even months to complete a written assignment, you are expected to plan appropriately and work round any short-term illness or condition. Norland understands that assessments and deadlines can be stressful; tolerable stress is a normal part of life experienced by most people. Therefore, stress or anxiety which is caused by assessment deadlines is unlikely to be an acceptable reason for claiming EACs and Student Services can support you in developing strategies to deal with it.

Underlying mental health conditions are also not acceptable reasons for EACs because they are known about and can be accommodated within the Reasonable Adjustments process.

If you are experiencing medically diagnosed stress or anxiety which affects your ability to engage with teaching, learning or assessment but which is short-term, please ask your medical practitioner to provide evidence of this so that you can apply for EACs.

3. HOW TO MAKE A CLAIM FOR EXCEPTIONAL ASSESSMENT CIRCUMSTANCES

If you wish to claim EACs, you should complete this form. The form will be automatically submitted to eac@norland.ac.uk, which is the email address to which you should also submit your independent corroborating evidence. Figure 1 outlines the entire process.

It is essential that you complete the details of dates, module codes and details of assessments/sessions accurately on the claim form. Failure to do so may mean your circumstances are not fully taken into account. Circumstances are valid only for the period covered by the evidence.

EAC claims should be submitted as soon as possible and normally before the deadline.

3.1 Retrospective claims

Norland's Academic Regulations state that retrospective claims of EACs will not normally be considered unless there were the most exceptional reasons for doing so. This would normally be only because you were prevented from engaging with the EAC process at the appropriate time, because of, for example, impaired judgment through mental health issues, and can evidence this inability to engage with the EAC process in the time periods required. Evidence from any staff member at Norland will not normally be accepted for retrospective claims.

EACs can be submitted confidentially via email, therefore the fact that you did not wish to disclose personal information will not normally be considered as exceptional circumstances.

With this in mind, please note that unless there are exceptional circumstances as detailed above, EAC claims which are submitted after the assessment deadline will be deemed to be invalid.

3.2 What might be considered valid Exceptional Assessment Circumstances?

Examples of EACs that are likely to be deemed valid:

- Hospitalisation, including operations
- Health issues (physical or mental health) which are not minor, have been diagnosed by a medical practitioner (including a counsellor) and can be evidenced as having an impact on the assessment
- Health issues (physical or mental health) for which you have been referred to see a specialist and can evidence this
- Pregnancy-related conditions and childbirth (including a partner in labour)
- Bereavement causing significant impact/effect
- Major accident or injury, acute ailments or conditions which coincide with an assessment deadline or an examination or test, or are sufficiently long-lasting to impact on a significant part of a term
- Recent burglary/theft/serious car accident which has had an impact on your ability to complete an assessment
- Jury service which cannot be deferred
- Late diagnosis of a learning need, for example, dyslexia, resulting in no support or examination provision for the assessment in question

- Separation or divorce - student or parental (provided the facts and the effects are independently corroborated)
- Unavailability of the student portal prior to the deadline for an assignment or examination where it has been confirmed by the module/unit leader(s) that this would have had a material effect on the preparation for an assessment
- Examination disruption (e.g. fire alarm going off; excessive noise from building works)
- Force Majeure events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which have had a significant impact on the time available for you to complete your assessments.
- A placement family or setting requesting the student does not attend placement where the reasons are outside the student's control with evidence to support this request. For example, if the student is possibly contagious or the family have an event which they are attending etc.

3.3 Examples of circumstances that are likely to be deemed invalid:

- Alarm clock did not go off
- Car broke down, train/bus delayed or cancelled, other public transport problems (unless the student can demonstrate that he or she had allowed adequate time to compensate for such problems as might reasonably have been anticipated)
- Childcare problems which could have been anticipated
- Accidents or illness affecting relatives or friends (unless serious, or you are a sole carer)
- Unspecified short-term anxiety, mild depression or assessment stress
- Cough, cold, upper respiratory tract infection, sore throat or minor viral infection, unless the illness was at its peak at the time of an assessment and the corroborating evidence refers to the impact on your performance
- Financial problems (other than cases of exceptional hardship or significant changes in financial circumstances since enrolment)
- Holidays, house moves, family celebrations or other events where you either have control over the date or may choose not to participate
- IT problems, for example corrupt data, disk or printer failure or similar
- Time management problems
- Appointments (legal, medical etc.) which could be rearranged
- Sporting or recreational commitments
- Atypical performance
- Close proximity of assessment deadlines to one another
- E-submission of an assessment file in an incorrect format.

As a full-time student, you may not make an EAC claim relating to pressures of work, since you have by implication made a commitment to make available the time necessary for study.

3.4 Corroborating evidence

All claims for EACs must be accompanied **by independent, reliable documentary evidence** that confirms the nature, timing and severity of the circumstances and your inability to comply with the assessment requirements or to attend teaching or undertake required study.

The burden of proof to support a claim lies with the student at all times. Norland reserves the right to take such steps as are deemed necessary to verify the evidence submitted without prior notification. Where Norland is unable to authenticate the material to its satisfaction, the claim may not be accepted.

Members of staff at Norland will not be able to provide you with evidence to support any EAC claim on medical or mental health grounds because they are not qualified to be able to verify the impact of any condition on your ability to engage with assessment. They will be able to signpost you to a counsellor if a medical practitioner cannot provide evidence. In exceptional circumstances, EACs may be temporarily granted if you are unable to see the counsellor or a medical practitioner prior to the assessment deadline. In these circumstances, EACs will be granted for a maximum of 10 working days and if **independent, reliable documentary evidence** has not been provided within that time, the assessment will be expected within 1 working day of the expiry of the temporary EAC.

3.5 Self-certification – assessment deadlines

Once per academic year, you may request an extension of up to 5 days without giving any reasons or evidence. Please email eac@norland.ac.uk stating you wish to self-certify and include relevant details. Do not complete the associated online form.

Requests directly to module/unit staff will not be recorded or accepted.

3.6 Self-certification – placement sick days

Each academic year, you may self-certify for up to a total of 4 days of illness across each placement without giving evidence. These do not have to be consecutive days. Please email eac@norland.ac.uk stating you wish to self-certify and include relevant details. Do not complete the associated online form. You must email eac@norland.ac.uk for each day you wish to self-certify due to ill health. You should note that any authorised absences (as formally approved by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning & Teaching)) during a placement count towards the 4 day limit.

Any absence where you are unwell for half of the day or part of the day will still, , for the purpose of self-certification, constitute a full self-certification day. Any absence of less than half a day does not qualify for a self-certification day and the time should be made up later in the week or at the next opportunity.

You must continue to report any absence from placement to the placements@norland.ac.uk and absence@norland.ac.uk email addresses as usual. Students must declare any and all days of self-certification due to ill health on their placement timesheet. Students who have more than 4 sick days from any individual placement in an academic year will be invited to discuss their health with the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning & Teaching).

Repeated periods of absence from placement may result in a Cause for Action to investigate your fitness to practise.

3.7 Standards of evidence

Independent evidence used to corroborate extraordinary assessment circumstances must meet the following standards. It must confirm the nature, timing and severity of the circumstances. It should be:

- written by appropriately qualified professionals who are independent to the student

  - For EACs not related to physical or mental health conditions, we may accept evidence provided by people such as your personal tutor, or other academic staff closely involved in your pastoral care, such as student support staff or the module/unit leader(s). Where evidence is from a member of academic or support staff, such as your tutor, this must be countersigned by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) in order to prevent conflicts of interest.
  - Statements from your personal tutor, other lecturing staff or student services staff are only acceptable in instances where other evidence may be difficult to source, for example in the case of the illness or death of a family member or friend, and where the member of staff has evidence to support their statement.
  - Statements from Norland staff must clearly state a) that they have evidence of the circumstances in questions and b) the impact of your circumstances on your ability to complete your work by the deadline.
- on headed paper and signed and dated by the author. Evidence presented by email may be acceptable if the email has been sent by the author from the official domain name of the author's organisation
- confirming specifically that the circumstances were witnessed on the relevant date as opposed to being reported retrospectively, and that the circumstances specifically impacted on your ability to undertake the assessment/s
- original. Copies of supporting evidence will be accepted only in exceptional circumstances and if they are unaltered by the student.

Norland will only consider upholding a student's claim of EACs when, in their opinion, all of the above conditions are fully satisfied. If there is evidence that a student has fraudulently presented documentation to Norland, the matter will be referred to Norland's Academic Misconduct procedure.

Examples of corroborating evidence likely to be acceptable include:

- A medical note confirming a medical or psychological condition provided at the time when you were suffering from that condition. During term time, Norland would normally expect you to consult or provide evidence from a registered doctor local to your place of study
- A letter from a counsellor, confirming a personal, psychological or emotional circumstances for which you have been receiving counselling. Please note that no student would be able to see a counsellor just in order to obtain EAC evidence – there must be a commitment to engaging with the support available
- An official document such as a police report including a police reference number, court summons or other legal document
- A letter from a solicitor, social worker or other official agency
- An insurance claim document supported by a letter from the insurance company
- Corroboration from staff at Norland which meets the requirements indicated above.

4. CONSIDERING EXCEPTIONAL ASSESSMENT CIRCUMSTANCES CLAIMS

All claims for EACs must be made using this form and include the corroborating evidence, which will then be sent to eac@norland.ac.uk. You will receive an automatic response to confirm your EAC claim has been received.

Every EAC claim will be considered by at least two members from the Exceptional Assessment Circumstances panel, made up of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education and Research), the Pro Vice

Chancellor (Student Experience), the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning & Teaching), the module/unit leader(s) and the Academic Governance Manager. Each EAC claim will be considered individually and all students will be treated fairly and equitably. The decision will take into consideration the nature, timing and severity of the circumstance and the impact it has had on assessment. Please be aware that this individual consideration of students' circumstances means that a claim approved for one student will not necessarily be approved, or lead to the same outcome, as that for another student. Forms are considered as a matter of priority and the majority are considered soon after submission. However, occasionally some forms can take a little longer to assess. You will be informed of the outcome by email (sent to your Norland email address). If the claim is deemed invalid you will receive an explanation for this decision.

5. DECISIONS AND OUTCOMES

This section explains the decisions and outcomes that can be applied if your request meets the criteria. This process will not result in your marks being changed (other than a lateness penalty being removed).

We will consider the information and evidence you have provided and decide if sufficient grounds have been established. This decision will be one of the following:

Decision	**What this means**
Accepted	Sufficient grounds have been established and your EACs will be taken into account. One of six outcomes will be applied.
Rejected	Sufficient grounds have not been established and your EACs will not be taken into account. The original assessment deadline or outcome, if there is one, will stand.
Pending	If we think your case is complex our EAC panel will discuss it. You may need to provide more information, we'll let you know if that's the case.

Outcomes

If your request has been accepted, one of these six outcomes will be applied to claims related to assessments or placement:

1. Removal of lateness penalties

   For late submissions up to 2 working days, your mark is usually capped at 40%. After 2 working days, a mark of 0% will be recorded. If your EAC request is approved, marks are not deducted and your assessment will be marked in the usual way.

2. Provide a new date to attend/submit the assessment

   You will be given the opportunity to attend or submit the affected assessment, with a revised time frame or deadline for submission. This new deadline will be set after considering how much of your assessment preparation time has been affected by the EAC. It is unlikely to exceed 3 further weeks from the deadline.

3. Provide a new date to attend/submit an alternative assessment

   You will be given the opportunity to attend or submit an alternative assessment if the original assessment is no longer available or suitable. The new deadline will be set after

considering how much of your assessment preparation time has been affected by the EAC. It is unlikely to exceed 3 further weeks from the deadline.

4. Disregard first attempt and provide a new date to submit the assessment

This outcome will only be applied to requests against either of these criteria:

- You were taken ill during a scheduled assessment, such as examination or presentation
- You attended the assessment or submitted on time but you can provide medical evidence to support that you were incapable of determining whether or not you were able to undertake the assessment at the time of doing so

Your partial attempt at the assessment will be disregarded and you will be offered to sit or submit the affected assessment, with a revised estimated time frame or deadline for submission. This new deadline will be set after considering how much of your assessment preparation time has been affected by the EAC. It is unlikely to exceed 3 further weeks from the deadline.

5. Disregard first attempt and provide a new date to submit an alternative assessment

This outcome will only be applied to requests against either of these criteria:

- You were taken ill during a scheduled assessment, such as examination or presentation
- You attended the assessment or submitted on time but you can provide medical evidence to support that you were incapable of determining whether or not you were able to undertake the assessment at the time of doing so

Your partial attempt at the assessment will be disregarded and you will be offered to sit or submit an alternative assessment, if the original assessment is no longer available or suitable. This new deadline will be set after considering how much of your assessment preparation time has been affected by the EAC. It is unlikely to exceed 3 further weeks from the deadline.

6. Note that the assessment was affected and carry the EAC request forward to the Assessment Board of Examiners, for the purpose of any borderline considerations.

Where EACs are granted for placements, the deadline will be in almost all cases the 31st August of the current academic year. EACs will not be rolled over to the next academic year without the most exceptional of circumstances, and may only be approved by the Pro Vice Chancellor (Learning & Teaching).

For accepted claims related to attendance and/or engagement in learning and teaching activities, the absence will be authorised and the learning and teaching activity will be rescheduled if possible. If it is not possible to reschedule the learning and teaching activity, the student will be offered the opportunity to attend the missed sessions when they are next run, or to have a 1:1 with the module/unit leader(s) to support them to catch up with anything they have missed.

Fitness for Study

Where your EAC or health prevents you from making academic progress, the Award/Progression Board of Examiners may require you to interrupt or withdraw from the programme of study.

6. LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS

Long term health conditions can be described as conditions which:

- are persistent, typically lasting for more than three months and often life-long
- cannot be resolved in a short time, or which will recur regardless of action, or which need to be managed on a long-term basis
- are a long-term or permanent illness that often results in some type of disability and which may require you to seek help with various activities
- can be managed but can 'flare-up'

Conditions which fall into this category may include, for example, respiratory conditions or mental health conditions.

If you have a long-term health condition, you should discuss any support needs with the Student Support team before or soon after commencing your programme of study. It is hoped that the condition can be managed and/ or you can be supported sufficiently.

However, there may be times when unexpected difficulties or flare-ups arise. On these occasions, you are required to claim EACs affecting specific assessments. However, if the claim is as a result of a long-term condition that is already known to Norland and for which evidence has already been provided, you will not need to re-submit evidence each time. To clarify, you will need to submit the claim form but not the evidence.

7. APPEAL AGAINST AN EXCEPTIONAL ASSESSMENT CIRCUMSTANCES DECISION

You have the right to appeal against the decision made by Norland to reject an EAC claim. Such appeals must be submitted within ten working days of the outcome of the EAC claim being communicated to you and may be made only on the following grounds:

- A material and demonstrable procedural irregularity has occurred in the EAC process
- Evidence that Norland did not consider all of the information available to it at the time of its consideration of the claim.

Appeals will not be considered on the following grounds:

- Dissatisfaction with the reasonable judgment of Norland in its consideration of the EAC claim,
- Late submission of an application for EACs or late submission of evidence to support an application where there are no compelling grounds for why the application or evidence was submitted late.

Appeals will be considered through the Norland's Academic Appeals policy, available on the Document Hub.

The outcome of any appeal in relation to EACs is final and will not be considered subsequently as an appeal against the decision of the Award Board of Examiners.

Figure 1: Flowchart of EAC process

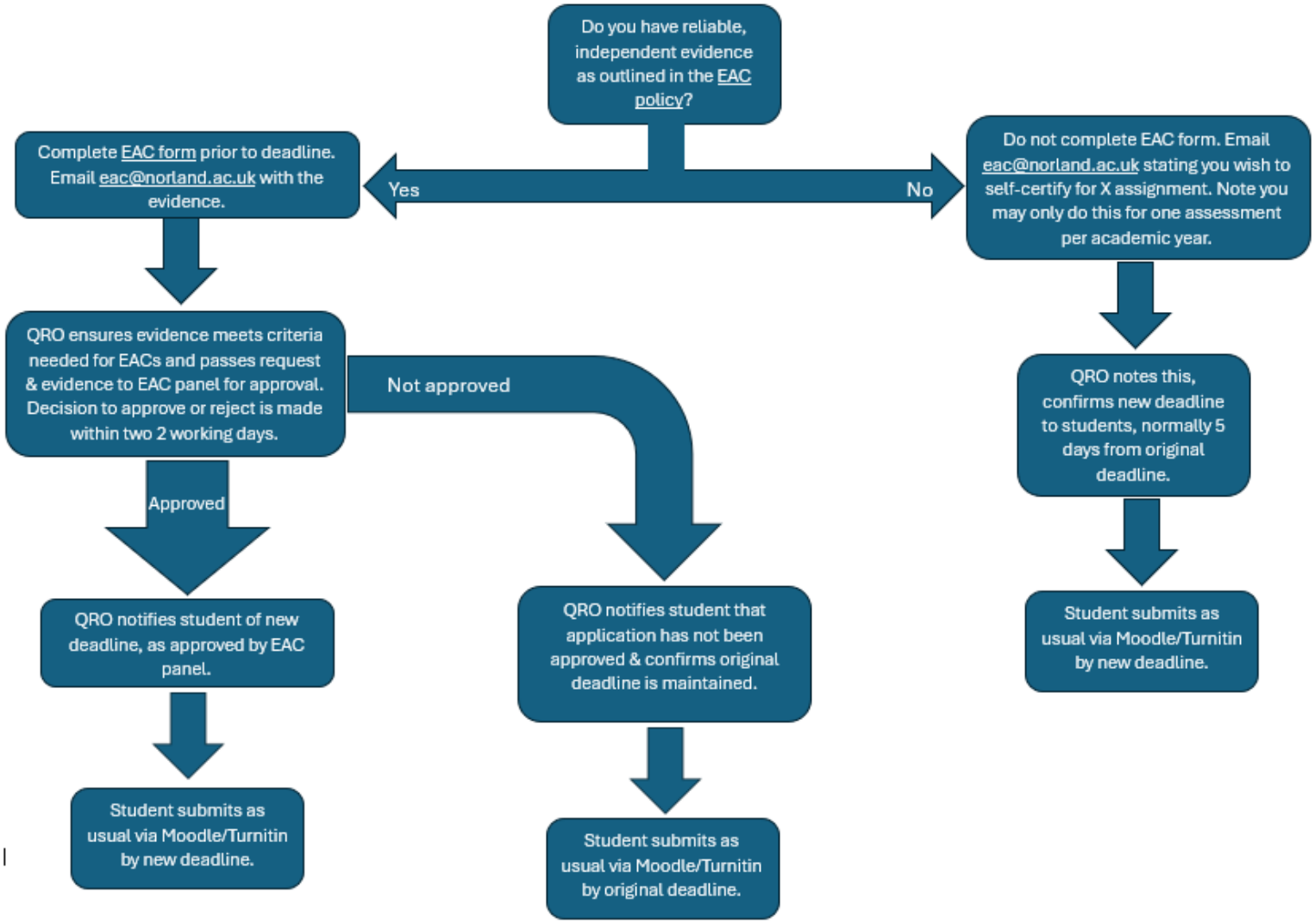
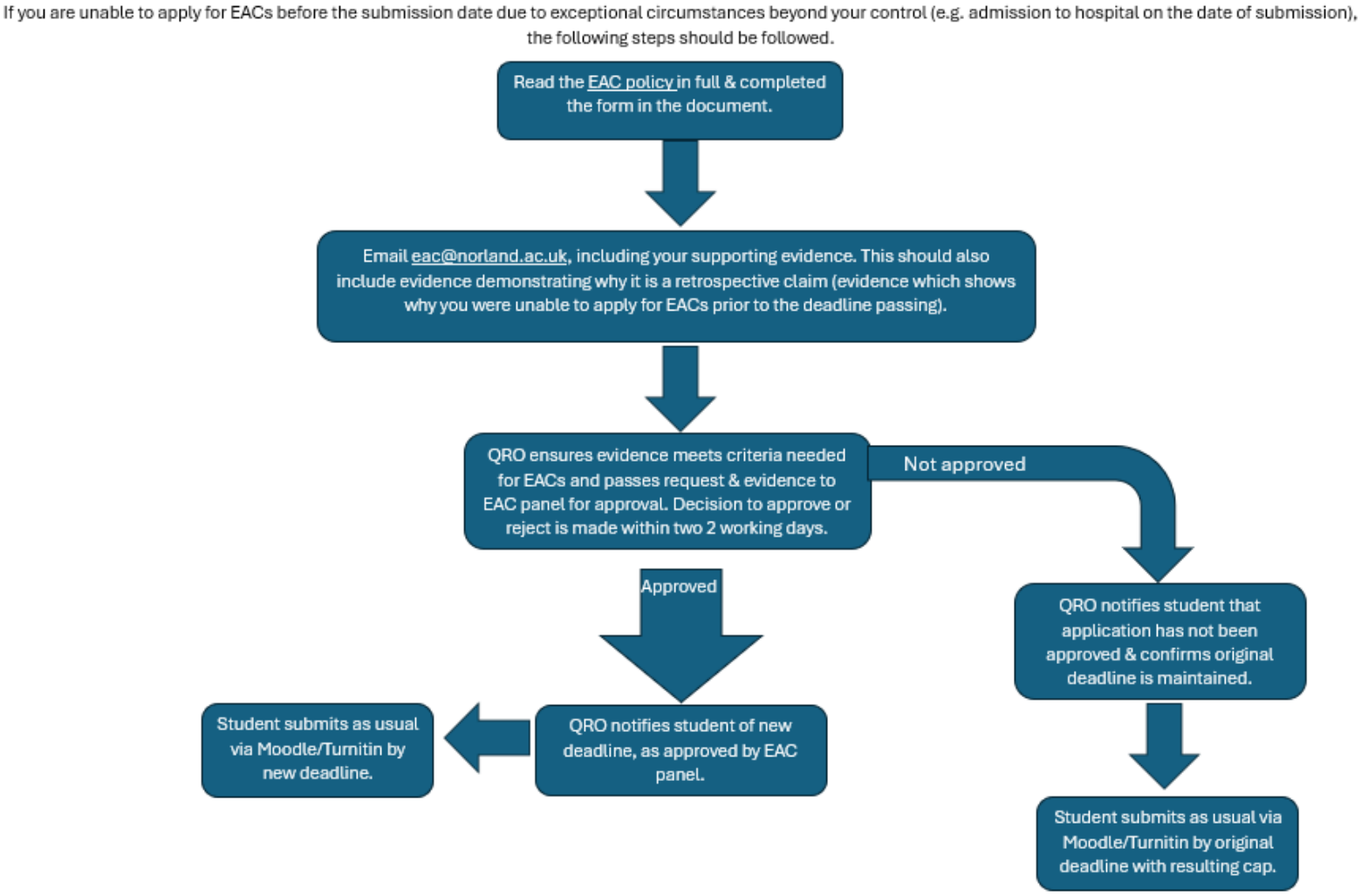


Figure 2: Retrospective EACs



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