ECVN Extenuating Personal Circumstances (EPC) Procedure

1. Definition of Extenuating Personal Circumstances (EPC)

During training or as a Diplomate, individuals may encounter significant personal circumstances that are outside their control. Such circumstances do not affect the individual's ability to function as a specialist but may impact their ability to undertake certain required activities (hereafter referred to as “activities”), including:

1. Performance in examinations
2. Progression during residency training, including completion of credential requirements for certification
3. The generation of new knowledge or the supervision of residents

2. Circumstances in which EPC may be considered

For circumstances to be considered as Extenuating Personal Circumstances (EPC), they must meet the following criteria:

- they are outside the individual’s control
- they have a demonstrably negative impact on the individual’s ability to study or undertake an activity
- they are temporally related to the relevant activity

Circumstances will not be considered as EPC where they fundamentally impair the individual’s ability to function as a veterinary specialist in their field.

Examples of circumstances that may be considered as EPC include, but are not limited to:

- long-term medical conditions or disabilities
- caring responsibilities, including parental leave
- acute medical conditions (minor illnesses not requiring medical treatment will normally not be considered relevant). Acute examination-related anxiety will not normally be considered as EPC unless supported by evidence of a diagnosed medical condition or significant acute episode requiring medical intervention.
- bereavement
- religious observance (for example fasting)

3. EPC Committee (EPCC)

Extenuating Personal Circumstances (EPC) claims shall be considered by the ECVN EPC Committee (EPCC), which is established as a standing committee of the College.

The EPCC shall consist of five members:

- the Vice-President of the ECVN, who shall serve as Chair
- the Chairpersons of the Education Committee, Examination Committee, Credentials Committee, and Liaison Committee.

The Chair shall oversee the review process and hold a casting vote in the event of a tied decision. The quorum for decisions of the EPCC shall be three members, including the Chair. Decisions shall be taken by a simple majority of the participating members.

The EPCC may conduct its deliberations in person or by electronic means, including email or online meetings, where timely consideration of a claim is required.

Where necessary, the EPCC may seek additional advice or expertise, including from Diplomates of other EBVS-recognised colleges or individuals with relevant experience in higher education processes.

Members must declare any conflict of interest in relation to a case under consideration and must recuse themselves from the discussion and decision-making process where such a conflict exists.

Where a member is recused, a temporary replacement from the same committee may be appointed by the Executive Committee to ensure that the EPCC maintains the appropriate composition and expertise for the evaluation of the claim.

All deliberations of the EPCC shall remain strictly confidential, and only the outcome of the decision and any approved reasonable adjustments shall be communicated to the relevant ECVN committees.

4. Submission, assessment and management of EPC claims: responsibilities of Residents and Diplomates

Residents and Diplomates must notify the College of any Extenuating Personal Circumstances (EPC) at the earliest possible opportunity.

Evidence of the circumstance, including evidence of its impact on the relevant activity, must be submitted with the EPC claim.

EPC claims should be submitted as soon as reasonably possible to the Secretary of the ECVN.

If supporting evidence is not available at the time of submission (for example in cases of recently diagnosed conditions or where EPC arise shortly before an examination or other activity), the claim may be submitted without evidence. In such cases, the supporting evidence must be provided as soon as reasonably possible.

The claim will only be considered once appropriate evidence has been received, as determined by the EPC Committee (EPCC).

The EPCC shall aim to review claims and communicate a decision within a reasonable timeframe. In most circumstances, a period of up to 30 days from receipt of the complete submission will be considered appropriate.

5. EPC during the examination period

Candidates who become unwell or experience Extenuating Personal Circumstances during, or within one month prior to, an examination must notify the Examination Committee of their intention to submit an EPC claim as soon as reasonably possible.

Where circumstances arise during an examination period, such notification should normally be submitted within 12 hours of the relevant assessment.

Where practicable, candidates experiencing acute circumstances during an examination should report them promptly to the local Examination Chair, an External Examiner, or an invigilator, so that contemporaneous observations of the circumstances and their apparent impact on the candidate may be documented and, where appropriate, submitted as supporting evidence.

A full EPC claim, including supporting evidence, should normally be submitted within five working days, unless the circumstances themselves prevent this. Where an EPC claim relates to a specific component of a multi-part examination, nullification will normally apply only to the affected component(s). Full examination nullification will only be considered where there is clear evidence that the circumstances had a material impact on the candidate's overall performance across all components. EPC claims must specify the timing and nature of the impact. Claims relating to performance concerns rather than objectively evidenced circumstances will not be considered.

6. Types of evidence

All EPC claims must be supported by appropriate evidence.

For medical conditions, evidence from a licensed medical professional will normally be required.

Where an acute medical condition arises during, or immediately before, an examination or other relevant activity, and obtaining contemporaneous medical evidence was not reasonably practicable, the EPCC may consider other independent supporting evidence.

Such evidence may include a contemporaneous statement from the local Examination Chair, an External Examiner, an invigilator, or another appropriate person who directly observed the candidate's condition or its apparent impact on the relevant activity.

The EPCC shall determine the weight to be given to such evidence, taking into account its contemporaneous nature, the independence of the person providing it, and whether the evidence directly supports the timing and impact of the circumstances claimed.

A retrospective medical statement based solely on information reported by the applicant after the circumstances have resolved will not necessarily be given greater evidential weight than contemporaneous independent evidence.

For learning disabilities or similar conditions, evidence from a suitably qualified educational practitioner is required. This may include documentation from the disability support service of the institution hosting the residency.

Any costs associated with obtaining supporting evidence are the responsibility of the applicant.

For other circumstances, appropriate evidence should be provided and may include a supporting statement from:

- the resident's supervisor (for residents)
- a senior colleague or institutional supervisor (for Diplomates)

Claims submitted without appropriate supporting evidence will normally be rejected.

A new claim may be submitted at the next relevant submission deadline with appropriate evidence, but such claims will not be applied retrospectively.

Where EPC affect the completion of residency credentials, the candidate must also submit evidence demonstrating that the outstanding component of the credential had been planned prior to the occurrence of the EPC.

7. Retrospective claims

Long-term conditions will normally not be considered retrospectively in relation to a deadline or assessment if they were known to the individual in advance and no prior notification was made.

EPC claims that are submitted after the release of examination results will not ordinarily be considered. Retrospective claims may only be considered where the individual can demonstrate that the circumstances themselves prevented earlier notification of the EPC

8. Reasonable adjustments

Where EPC claims are upheld, the EPC Committee (EPCC) shall consider appropriate reasonable adjustments while preserving the integrity of the College and the standards required for certification.

Reasonable adjustments do not imply a lowering of the standards required to practice as a specialist in the discipline.

Where the EPCC has concerns that the circumstances may affect the individual's ability to function as a veterinary specialist, the committee may seek external expert advice and/or the opinion of the Executive Committee.

Reasonable adjustments are determined on a case-by-case basis and are decided solely by the EPCC.

Decisions made in individual cases do not establish precedent for other cases unless the circumstances are identical.

The EPCC is not bound by the recommendations of professionals who provide supporting evidence.

Reasonable adjustments must not include any modification of examination marks, pass marks, or core progression requirements.

No candidate may become a Diplomate without completing all credential and certification requirements established by the College.

Most reasonable adjustments will involve modification of timelines or deadlines. Examples of such adjustments are provided below; this list is illustrative and not exhaustive.

- *Extension of residency duration*

- *Extension of certification time limits*

- *Additional time or breaks during examinations*

- *Temporary suspension of training*

- *Nullification of an examination attempt or one of its parts*

Where an examination attempt is nullified following an approved EPC claim:

- the attempt will not count towards the maximum number of attempts or certification time limits
- no examination result, score, or feedback will be released to the candidate
- Where an EPC claim relates to a specific component of a multi-part examination, nullification will normally apply only to the affected component(s). Full examination nullification will only be considered where there is clear evidence that the circumstances had a material impact on the candidate’s overall performance across all components. EPC claims must specify the timing and nature of the impact. Claims relating to performance concerns rather than objectively evidenced circumstances will not be considered.
- A proportion of the examination fee may be credited towards a future attempt. This proportion will be determined by the College to reflect costs already incurred, including examiner travel and organisational expenses

For Diplomates, extension of the recertification period might be considered.

The following reasonable adjustments will not be considered:

- extension of **annual credential submission deadlines**
- extension of the **examination registration deadline**
- modification or rescheduling of the **examination date**
- reduction of the **minimum required duration of residency training**

These requirements are considered essential components of the training and certification process and cannot be modified through EPC procedures.

In all cases, any deadline extension granted through EPC procedures will usually not exceed one year per approved EPC claim, unless exceptional circumstances justify a longer period.

9. Confidentiality and data protection

All EPC claims and supporting documentation shall be treated as strictly confidential.

Information relating to EPC claims will be processed and stored in accordance with applicable data protection legislation, including GDPR.

Only the outcome of the decision and any approved reasonable adjustments will be communicated to the relevant ECVN committees.

10. Reporting

The College shall maintain records of EPC claims and their outcomes.

Summary information on the number of claims received, approved, and rejected may be included in the annual report submitted to EBVS, in accordance with EBVS reporting requirements.