



POLICY

Special Circumstances Policy	
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Purpose	The University should respond in an equitable and consistent way to requests from students for special circumstances to be taken into consideration for progression and award decisions made by Boards of Examiners.
Overview	The policy provides a definition of what constitutes special circumstances, sets out the guiding principles for the consideration of special circumstances, the role of the Special Circumstances Committee and the role of a Board of Examiners in dealing with special circumstances.
Scope	The policy applies to undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, and to the taught components undertaken by research postgraduate students. The policy applies to all assessments relating to courses which run from 16 September 2013 onwards.

Special Circumstances Policy

1. Definition

- 1.1 Special circumstances are circumstances which are beyond a student's control and for which there is sufficient documentary evidence to show that they had a significant adverse impact on the student's performance in an assessment or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for a scheduled assessment.
- 1.2 Examples of circumstances that might have a significant impact include:
- physical illness or injury;
 - mental ill-health or similar illness;
 - bereavement or serious illness of a person with whom the student has a close relationship;
 - a long-term relationship breakdown, such as a marriage.
- 1.3 Examples of circumstances that are unlikely to be accepted include:
- pressure of academic work;
 - employment commitments;
 - a short-term, self-certificated illness, such as a common cold.

2. Guiding principles

- 2.1 The University should respond in an equitable and consistent way to requests from students for special circumstances to be taken into consideration for progression and award decisions made by Boards of Examiners.
- 2.2 It is the **responsibility of students** to raise their request for consideration of Special Circumstances with the Special Circumstances Committee, within the time limits specified in the relevant regulations. Students should complete a Special Circumstances form in consultation with their Personal Tutor, Student Support Team or Research Supervisor,

ensuring that they provide sufficient supporting documentation from independent professionals, ideally obtained at the time of the circumstances.

- 2.3 Where disabled students have received support via a learning adjustment related to an assessment, they cannot then claim special circumstances which relate to this existing support, unless there has been a significant change in circumstances.
- 2.4 Where there has been a significant change in the nature of the disability since the original Learning Profile was agreed and where evidence of adverse impact is available, consideration of special circumstances may apply. In this context special circumstances may only be considered for the current assessment(s) and cannot be applied retrospectively.
- 2.5 Having considered the evidence provided a Special Circumstances Committee will firstly decide whether special circumstances exist or not. The Special Circumstances Committee will subsequently decide whether the special circumstances submitted by a student are likely to have had an adverse impact on an assessment.
- 2.6 The decisions made by a Special Circumstances Committee are **binding** on a Board of Examiners.
- 2.7 Marks/grades **cannot** be adjusted by either a Special Circumstances Committee or a Board of Examiners as a consequence of special circumstances.
- 2.8 Where marks/grades for specific components of assessment are missing or deemed unreliable, and sufficient evidence of attainment of the Learning Outcomes in other components of a **course** exist, then a Board of Examiners **can** derive an overall mark/grade for the course from the existing assessed work.

3. Special Circumstances Committee

- 3.1 Membership of a Special Circumstances Committee will consist of a Convener along with at least two other members of staff.
- 3.2 Special Circumstances Committees will meet before the relevant Board of Examiners meetings take place.
- 3.3 Special Circumstances Committee meetings will be minuted and **all** decisions recorded in the minutes.
- 3.4 The Special Circumstances Committee will make a decision on what **impact**, if any, the submitted special circumstances have had on a student's performance in an assessment, taking into account all the information made available to it.
- 3.5 **Course Boards:** Where the Special Circumstances Committee has agreed that the special circumstances submitted by a student have had an adverse impact on their performance in a course, it can decide on the following actions:
 - a) No further action;
 - b) No further action, fully compensated through previous adjustments;
 - c) Disregard penalties for late submission of coursework;
 - d) Disregard missing component and derive overall mark/grade from completed work;
 - e) Disregard unreliable component and derive overall mark from completed work if to the student's benefit;
 - f) Submit missing assessment if course is failed;
 - g) Re-submit assessment if course is failed;
 - h) Sit alternative assessment if course is failed;
 - i) Null sit if course is failed;
 - j) Borderline, award pass.

3.6 The Special Circumstances Committee will report its decision to the relevant Board of Examiners.

4. Board of Examiners

4.1 Boards of Examiners with responsibility for individual **courses** are **required** to adhere to the decision of the Special Circumstances Committee when making a final assessment decision.

4.2 Boards of Examiners with responsibility for **programmes** are **required** to adhere to the decision of the Special Circumstances Committee(s) when making decisions on progression, degree award and classification.

4.3 **Exceptionally**, a Board of Examiners with responsibility for programmes may require a different course of action to be followed as opposed to the one recommended by a Special Circumstances Committee when this is in the best academic interest of the student, without advantage or disadvantage in relation to their peers. On the rare occasion where this is the case, the rationale for taking this course of action **must** be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

4.4 In all cases, assessment, progression and award decisions deriving from the consideration of special circumstances should be drawn to the attention of the relevant external examiner(s).

4.5 **Programme Boards:** Where the Special Circumstances Committee has agreed that the special circumstances submitted by a student have had an adverse impact on an assessment(s), in addition to implementing the special circumstances decisions, the following options are available to a Board of Examiners:

- a) No further action;
- b) Student is given the opportunity of re-assessment without academic penalty;
- c) Special Circumstances are taken into account for degree classification and/or award for Borderline candidates;
- d) Where a mark for a course is missing or deemed unreliable, the Board of Examiners will follow Taught Assessment Regulation 59 (“Failure to complete assessment of a degree programme adequately”)

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/TaughtAssessmentRegulations2013-14.PDF>

4.6 In coming to a decision where special circumstances are considered, decisions should be made in the best academic interest of the student without disadvantage or advantage in relation to their peers.

4.7 The final decision made by the Board of Examiners will be reported back to each individual student.

DOCUMENT CONTROL	
Date approved	29 August 2013
Approving authority	Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC)
Consultation undertaken	Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC)
Impact assessment	30 August 2013
Date of commencement	16 September 2013
Amendment dates	

Date for next review	2016-17 for full review, cross reference to assessment regulations is done on an annual basis
Section responsible for policy maintenance & review	Registry Academic Services
Related Policies, Procedures Guidelines & Regulations	<p>Taught Assessment Regulations, Postgraduate Assessment Regulations for Research Degrees: http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment</p> <p>Guidance on policy, principle and operation of Boards of Examiners: http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/assessment/boards-examiners</p> <p>Degree Regulations & Programmes of Study: http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/</p>
Policies superseded by this Policy	Special Circumstances Policy approved on 30 April 2008
Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk or telephone 0131 650 2138.
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