

# Special Considerations Guidance for Staff

(This applies for special considerations for students on all taught programmes and taught assessed components of research degrees)

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The [Regulations Governing Special Considerations \(including Deadline Extension Requests\) for all Taught Programmes and Taught Assessed Components of Research Degrees](#) (referred to throughout this guidance as 'the Regulations') set out the policy and procedure to be followed when students apply for special consideration. This guidance supports staff in working with the Regulations to make fair and equitable decisions in individual cases.

## 2. What is meant by Special Considerations?

- 2.1. Special considerations are exceptional circumstances outside of a student's control, that have or will have a negative effect on their performance in a recent or upcoming assessment (including an exam) or on their ability to meet a deadline for submission of an assessment or to sit an exam (see para section A para 2.1 of the Regulations).
- 2.2. A student enrolled on:
- a credit-bearing taught course,
  - a pre-sessional course,
  - the taught component of a research degree with a taught component
- may apply for Special Considerations under these regulations.

## Examples of acceptable circumstances

2.3. Below are some examples commonly accepted as within the definition in A 2 of the Regulations.

Bereavement: Death of close relative/friend/significant other (of a nature which, in employment, would have led to an absence under the compassionate leave policy)
Short-term illness or accident, where this has impacted a student's academic ability and performance. (Of a nature which, in employment, would have led to absence on sick leave)
Significant adverse personal/family circumstances
Significant disruption of an examination
Extreme weather conditions
A significant failure of due process by the University

## Examples of circumstances that are not acceptable

2.4. The Regulations do not apply to situations which students can or could have foreseen and/or taken reasonable steps either to avoid or to mitigate impact on their performance.

2.5. Below are some examples commonly regarded as falling outside the definition in A 2.1:

Pressures created by commitments to paid or voluntary work. However, where placements are required as part of teaching and learning, unexpected demands of an employer may be considered.
Holidays
Failure of non-University IT equipment and/or services
Poor practice e.g., no back-up of electronic documents
Claims that students were unaware of submission dates or examination times
Poor time management

2.6. Long term issues, such as on-going personal/financial issues, which affect a student's ability to study or to perform generally do not count as exceptional circumstances.

## Long term health conditions

2.7. The Special Considerations process is not designed to offer support to students with long-term health conditions. Students should seek support and reasonable adjustments of this nature via Student Disability and Inclusion.

This does not mean that because a student's circumstances relate to a long-term condition their special considerations application should automatically be rejected. They may have had a recent diagnosis or have experienced a worsening of the condition in a period which affects an assessment. In this case the School should take account of information from Student Disability and Inclusion to establish whether the student is receiving appropriate support for their condition and/or worsening of their condition.

2.8. If the student is not receiving support, then a referral should be made to Student Disability and Inclusion. Should the student choose not to take up an appointment or support offered, this should be taken in to account if they make a future special consideration request on the same basis.

2.9. It may not always be reasonable or appropriate for students experiencing a temporary worsening or acute episode of a long-term condition to be expected to seek additional medical supporting information in support of their SC request. Students in this position

have the option to use the self-certification process for periods of five working days or less (see para 3.11). Schools are however encouraged to monitor the number of occasions a student uses this process, so that they can be steered towards additional support where this may be needed.

### 3. When and how do students apply?

#### Requests for deadline extensions

- 3.1. The advice to students is to submit requests as soon as possible before the submission deadline(s). Extensions cannot be accepted after the deadline has passed. After the deadline has passed, students should use the special considerations process to request the removal of the late penalty (where appropriate).

#### Requests for special considerations

- 3.2. The advice to students is to submit requests as soon as possible, and usually no longer than **five working days** after the assessment or deadline affected by exceptional circumstances.
- 3.3. Requests received outside of this timescale should only be considered if students can demonstrate exceptional reasons for the delay – *for example, confirmation of hospitalisation, or grief due to the death of a close family member. Reasons that would not be acceptable include a lack of knowledge of the process or the deadline for submission.*
- 3.4. Applications which are submitted too late to be considered by the Semester 1 Board should not be automatically rejected. The School should take into account whether there are reasons for the late application (as explained in para 3.3 above)
- 3.5. Students needing to make a request after the publication of ratified results should be referred instead to the Regulations Governing Academic Appeals by Students.

#### Process for application

- 3.6. Students must submit their requests using the Special Considerations request online form.

#### Supporting information

- 3.7. **Supporting information is required in all cases, but this does not need to be submitted at the point of application.**
- 3.8. To make sure they can meet the submission deadline students may submit their request before they have the necessary supporting information. They should declare on the form that they are doing so and must provide the supporting information as soon possible, normally **within 2 weeks** of submitting the form. Students are advised in the student guidance that this window to submit supporting information will reduce as we approach the Boards. A&A staff will chase students for supporting information as required.
- 3.9. If a student is having difficulty meeting the deadline for submitting information, they should keep their School informed. If supporting information is not provided within two weeks of the form being submitted, the case should be assessed as not valid within the regulations (see para 5.2.1 below), in line with para 1.3 of the Procedure. **A positive decision on a request cannot be made in the absence of supporting information.**
- 3.10. The advice to students is that the supporting information they provide should:
  - cover the period when they were affected by the exceptional circumstances.

- have been obtained around the time the assessment was taking place (information obtained a significant period after the circumstance is unlikely to be acceptable).
- Ideally relate explicitly to the impact the circumstances have had on them and on their performance.

3.11. Below are examples information that students may use to support a request:

<p>Letter/email of support/explanation from a support service in the university</p> <p>Support services will only provide such information if the student has already been receiving support for the circumstances described before they request a letter/email of support.</p>
<p>Letter/email of support/explanation from third party</p> <p>For example, a GP, consultant, other healthcare professional</p>
<p>Other Medical Information</p> <p>For example, signed fit note, hospital discharge papers, screenshot from the NHS app or GP portal, Prescriptions/medication packets showing student's name and date of issue.</p> <p>Students are advised in the student guidance that other types of photos, such as x-rays, ultrasound scans or photographs of body parts will not be accepted.</p> <p>Information and additional guidance about types of medial supporting evidence is provided for students in the separate student guidance.</p>
<p>Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) or Senior Tutor letter/email</p> <p>Staff members are not obliged to provide these and should only do so if they are fully aware of the student's circumstances and feel able to support their Special Considerations or Extension request.</p>
<p>Exam invigilator incident report.</p>
<p>Self-certification</p> <p>Self-certification will be accepted for short illnesses of five working days or less and for circumstances for which it is not possible to obtain any other supporting information; it should demonstrate the points in Section A2.1 of the Regulations.</p> <p><b>Note:</b> There is no longer a separate self-certification form. To self-certify, students complete the relevant section of the Special Considerations Request form. Although students are still advised to speak with their PAT when self-certifying, a PAT signature is no longer required. PATS will receive a notification so they can contact the student to follow up any pastoral concerns.</p>

3.12. While a death certificate is obviously definitive proof of bereavement, sensitivity is essential and such a certificate should NOT be requested.

3.13. Students are advised that wherever possible, they should scan the original documents for submission. If required, SCAs may ask students produce the original document, for example if there is any doubt about the authenticity.

3.14. Students should be submitting their supporting information in English. Documents in other languages must be accompanied by a verified translation. Ideally this should be an independent translation by a certified translator, (for example

by a member of the Association of Translation Companies). However, this may be difficult for some students, and therefore Schools should take a pragmatic approach to what translations are accepted. If there are doubts about the authenticity, or other concerns, Schools may seek to verify the accuracy of the translation provided.

## Considering requests within Schools

### 4. Special Considerations Assessors (SCAs)

4.1. All Schools must appoint/designate SCAs in line with the Regulations, para A5.1.4. There is no limit on the number of SCAs a School can have. This may be a specific appointment or SCAs may hold other roles in addition - for example, senior tutor, exams officer or another academic member of the Special Considerations Board (SCB) (but not the Chair).

4.2. The **role of the SCA** is to undertake the initial review of special considerations cases to:

- determine case validity
- make decisions on cases in specified circumstances, or
- make recommendations to the Special Considerations Board (SCB).

4.3. Members of the Student Administration and Assessment (A & A) Team will support the work of the SCAs and will collate the relevant information for SCAs/SCBs.

### 5. Review of Special Considerations cases

#### Information requirements

5.1. For each student requesting special considerations, SCAs should consider the below information. However, not all information is needed for all cases, and not all will be available at the point a student's request is initially received and considered.

Information to be considered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Special Considerations Request Form and the supporting information provided. <i>This is essential for all decisions. A decision on a request cannot be made in the absence of supporting information.</i></li><li>• The student's marks profile, to assist in determining whether their performance has been affected. It is good practice to use the Assessment Grid if available. <i>This is not required for extension requests and requests to remove a late penalty. The full marks profile is unlikely to be available for requests submitted earlier in the semester. However, having an indication of a student's performance, e.g., in the semester in which the special considerations request is submitted, is helpful in establishing the impact of the circumstances.</i></li><li>• Information on previous special considerations requests by the student and the agreed outcomes (which will be collated by the A &amp; A Team). <i>This is important so that a holistic view of the student's performance can be taken e.g., to consider if there is a history of extension requests or late submissions)</i></li><li>• Details of any Student Disability and Inclusion recommendations for reasonable adjustment. <i>This is important to assist in identifying where reasonable adjustments have already been made and whether the student is receiving appropriate support for long term conditions and/or acute episodes of that condition.</i></li></ul>

## Consideration by the SCA

5.2. SCAs should review special considerations requests and supporting information **as they are received during the year**, and:

5.2.1 where appropriate supporting information is available, **decide whether the case is valid in line with the special considerations regulations**. That is,

- whether the circumstances described are exceptional circumstances outside of the student's control that have or will negatively affect their performance in a recent or upcoming assessment (including an exam) or ability to meet a deadline for submission of an assessment or to sit an examination (see Regulations para 2.1 and section 3.1);

and

- whether the information in the student's case and the supporting evidence provided show that the circumstances occurred in the period of (or immediately preceding) the relevant assessment(s).

Where supporting information is awaited or where the SCA considers that further information is required from the student or elsewhere in order to make a decision or recommendation, further consideration should be postponed until this information is available.

It is expected that SCAs (in consultation with another member of the SCB where needed, see para 5.3 below,) will normally be able to make decisions of validity in all cases where the appropriate supporting information is available. Exceptionally, if even after taking advice, an SCA feels unable to make this judgment a decision on validity may be deferred until the full SCB.

5.2.2 **For those cases assessed to be valid**, consider what action should be taken.

Where **granting an extension or removing a late penalty** is the appropriate action, the SCA **may make this decision**.

For other requests, they should **recommend an outcome** to the Special Considerations Board using the codes in the appendix.  
See also para 5.8 below.

Where the SCA(s) feel unable to make a decision or recommendation, they should flag these cases for full consideration by the SCB.

5.3. SCAs may choose to consult with another member of the SCB before making decisions or recommendations.

5.4. If a School has only one SCA and one of their personal tutees makes a request, the SCA should not make any decisions in this case. Instead, they should ask for the case to be reviewed by another member of the SCB.

5.5. SCAs should usually review their initial recommendations on outcomes before the SCB, when full marks profiles are likely to be available and may wish to amend their recommendations accordingly.

## Communication to students

- 5.6. The decision on case validity will be communicated to the student at this stage. Students will be sent an email from the A & A Team on the instruction of the SCA. If exceptionally a decision on validity has been deferred to the SCB the student will also be advised of this.
- 5.7. A decision on the granting of an extension or the removal of a late penalty will be communicated to the student at this stage. Students will be sent an email from the relevant A & A Team.
- 5.8. Where the SCA considers that the case is **straightforward** the recommended outcome may be communicated at this stage to the student, clearly specifying that the recommended outcome is provisional and subject to final approval by the Board of Examiners, and that the final outcome will be specified in their marks outcome email. **This should be done only where the SCAs should have an extremely high level of confidence that the SCB/Board of Examiners will endorse the decision.**

## Special Considerations Boards

- 5.9. Membership, terms of reference and operational arrangements for SCBs are set out in the Regulations.
- 5.10. The decisions made by the SCAs during the semester should be submitted to the Board as a paper for note.
- 5.11. The recommendations made by SCAs will be submitted to and considered by the relevant SCB. The SCB's recommendations will then be submitted to the relevant Board of Examiners.

### Anonymity

- 5.12. Due to the personal and sometimes serious nature of some requests, the SCB should operate anonymously throughout, other than in exceptional cases as authorised by the SCB Chair.
- 5.13. Anonymity should be lifted only where the Chair is of the view that this is of demonstrable benefit to the student whose case is under consideration. A rationale for the decision to lift anonymity should be recorded in the minutes, for clarity in the event of future complaint or appeal.
- 5.14. Methods of operating anonymously include using student ID numbers rather than student names on student mark profiles/assessment grids and special considerations requests and supporting documentation presented to the full SCB.

### Information to be received by the SCB

- 5.15. Whilst the decisions of the SCAs need to be submitted to the Board for note, Board members should review this in advance, and it is not necessary for these cases to be read out and discussed in the Board.
- 5.16. For **cases where the SCAs have made a recommendation**, SCB members should be provided with the summary of cases and recommendations from the SCA(s) and the student mark profile.

It may not be necessary for the SCB to discuss all cases, however other documentation for these cases should be available at the Board in case it is needed for further reference.

5.17. For **cases flagged by the SCAs as needing full consideration at the Board** all members of the SCB should have access to:

- The student's marks profile, to assist in determining whether a student's performance has been affected.
- A summary of the Special Considerations Form and the supporting information provided by the student. This can be verbally delivered by the SCA to support anonymity.
- Information on previous special considerations requests by the student and the agreed outcomes.
- Details of Student Disability and Inclusion recommendations for reasonable adjustment to identify where reasonable adjustments have already been made and whether the student is receiving appropriate support for long term conditions and/or worsening of the condition in a period which affects an assessment.

5.18. Members of SCBs must not participate in any discussion or decision related to requests submitted by their personal tutees and must not vote on the outcome.

## 6. Special Considerations Recommendations

6.1. The SCB cannot invent marks; marks or classifications can only be altered by reassessment or by the setting aside of a module or element of a module when computing a mark or classification. **The full range of recommendations open to the SCB, with further guidance, are set out in Section A6 within the Regulations and the table appended to this guidance.**

6.2. SCBs should always consider allowing a student an additional attempt in preference to disregarding of marks, elements, or modules, making this latter recommendation only when additional attempts are not possible or practical.

6.3. Student will receive confirmation of their special considerations outcomes via the formal marks release email following each formal assessment period. In the case of Semester 1 cases, students are advised that these are provisional until ratified by the Board of Examiners (except for deadline extension requests or removal of a late penalty).

## 7. Minutes of SCBs

7.1. SCB decisions should be recorded using one of the codes set out in the appendix.

7.2. In addition to listing the codes, a reason for the decision should be clearly recorded, particularly if the request is refused, or the student is given an alternative outcome to the one requested. This is to ensure that if a decision is later subject to scrutiny (e.g., as part of an appeal or by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) the University is clearly able to justify its decision,

*For example, an outcome might be RA1 ('Grounds advanced are not accepted as they are not in line with the Special Considerations policy e.g., on holiday, paid work, poor time management, IT issues' so 'no further action') the minutes should include something such as 'circumstances do not apply to relevant assessment period'.*



## **8. The Board of Examiners**

- 8.1. To ensure due regard for student privacy, the Board of Examiners should not consider the personal circumstances of the student which led to the request, as authority has been delegated to the SCB (through the SCAs) to consider whether the request is valid in line with the Regulations.
- 8.2. Special considerations outcomes should be reported to the Board of Examiners and the Chair of the SCB (or nominee) should assure the Board of Examiners that the Regulations and University policy have been followed throughout.

## **9. Special considerations affecting groups of students**

- 9.1. Where a member of staff is aware of exceptional circumstances that were outside of the control of that group/cohort of students that are likely to negatively impact their performance the member of staff may use the Regulations to ask for special considerations for this situation.
- 9.2. The member of staff should advise the relevant Deputy Head of School (Education) of the matter and provide any further information that the Deputy Head of School (Education) requests. The Deputy Head of School (Education) will decide whether to a group application should be made on behalf of the cohort / group. All group / cohort special considerations requests must be considered by the full Special Considerations Board and reported separately to the Board of Examiners.
- 9.3. In these circumstances the relevant students should be notified that they need not make individual requests or, where these have been made already, that this will instead be considered as a group matter.
- 9.4. In no other circumstances should staff members submit special considerations requests on behalf of students. If a staff member is aware that a student is experiencing difficulties that may be grounds for special consideration, they should encourage the student to consider making an application and remind them that they can seek support with the process from the SUSU Advice Centre. <https://www.susu.org/support/advice-centre.html>.

Quality Standards and Accreditation Team  
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