



University of  
Greater  
Manchester



## Special Circumstances

### Regulations and Procedures for the submission and consideration of unforeseen circumstances

**Issued by the Quality Transformation Unit**

**Approved by Senate:** September 2025

Technical updates of this document take place on an annual basis to reflect changes to the University of Greater Manchester's organisational and management structure and to incorporate earlier, approved amendments to related policies, procedures and regulations.

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## **1. Scope and definition**

1.1 The University recognises that there may be times when, through no fault of their own and despite managing learning and assessments appropriately, students may find it impossible to attend an examination or other assessment activity, or to complete a serious and unforeseen event. In such instances the University's intention is to respond sympathetically and deal with the situation and redress the assessment shortfall via the Special Circumstances policy.

**Students may understand this type of consideration to be classed as 'Mitigating Circumstances'. The Change from 'Mitigating Circumstances' to 'Special Circumstances' started at the University in September 2025.**

The following regulations and procedures set out the framework for the submission and consideration of such circumstances.

## **2. What are Special Circumstances?**

2.1 All students have a responsibility to manage their learning, revision and assessment activities throughout the whole duration of each semester or assessment period. It is therefore essential that they carefully plan and manage workloads throughout this time, and do not leave too much coursework, learning, revision or similar activities to be undertaken until too late in the semester or assessment period. Similarly, when examinations or other time-constrained assessment are to be taken at the end of a semester or other period, they should conduct revision throughout the semester or period and not limit it to the period shortly before sitting examinations or other time-constrained assessments.

2.2 It is also essential to recognise that many mild illnesses and routinely difficult or upsetting events do occur in life, and that it is a normal part of life to have to manage these and continue with work or study. Therefore, students must realise that many such difficulties are not normally accepted by the University in mitigation for non-completion or poor performance in assessment activities.

2.3 The term 'Special Circumstances' is used to describe those unforeseen personal difficulties which cause exceptional interference with academic performance, and which are over and above the normal difficulties experienced in life. This means circumstances such as sudden, severe illness (confirmed by medical certificate) or other unforeseen event, close in time to assessment, preventing attendance at an examination or other time constrained assessment, or adversely affecting

performance at such, or preventing work from being submitted by the final deadline set (including any granted extensions).

2.4 Whilst evidence of long-standing, managed conditions or illnesses is not normally considered acceptable mitigation (see below), it is however possible that such conditions or illnesses might sometimes 'flare up' despite continuous treatment, e.g. ongoing, long term, clinically diagnosed mental ill health, and evidence of such temporary changes and their effects might then be admissible in mitigation.

2.5 Circumstances which would not normally be acceptable are those where a student could reasonably have avoided the situation, or acted to limit the impact of the circumstances. Therefore, the following are examples (and not an exhaustive list) of circumstances which would not fall within the University definition of mitigating circumstances:

- a) proximity or number of examinations or other assessments (but see \* below for an explanation of those situations where reasonable adjustments may be made in advance);
- b) completing coursework too late and missing deadlines because of computer difficulties, or transport difficulties;
- c) losing work not backed up on computer disk;
- d) failure to make alternative travel plans when disruptions were known in advance;
- e) normal work commitments on behalf of an employer;
- f) misreading of assignment deadlines or examination timetables;
- g) poor time management;
- h) scheduling of holidays or time abroad.

2.6 It is a student's responsibility to provide the necessary information and evidence about his/her special circumstances and assessment deadlines within the timescales described in paragraphs below. The University will not normally consider special circumstances applications if they are submitted outside these specified timescales particularly if the claim and/or evidence relates, without valid reason found acceptable by the University, to events which occurred an unreasonable length of time in the past. Students are also reminded that to knowingly make false or misleading claims of mitigating circumstances is an offence under both the Student Disciplinary Procedures and under the Academic Misconduct Regulations.

### **3 Medical Circumstances and Certificates**

3.1 The University does not normally consider medical certificates for long standing, managed conditions or illness as mitigation for poor performance. This is because students would normally have had the benefit of experience, medical knowledge or help to manage the condition and would have had the opportunity to register with the University's Disability Service to gain access to appropriate study support and to agree reasonable adjustments enabling them to be assessed without disadvantage.

3.2 The University recognises that, exceptionally, there may be a need for a very small number of students to submit evidence of special circumstances, if experiencing a temporary and serious incapacitating medical condition that may have directly affected the ability to attend or complete an assessment or to perform to the full extent of their ability.

3.3 If a student believes he/she is in the above category, then any medical certificates/letters to support mitigating circumstances must:

- a) relate specifically to the dates and duration of the illness;
- b) be signed by hand on bona fide headed paper from the specialist or doctor's surgery (appointment cards are not sufficient evidence);
- c) contain a clear medical diagnosis or opinion and not merely report a claim that a student felt unwell and/or had reason to believe he/she were ill at some point in the past. It may therefore be difficult to obtain a medical certificate after an illness is over and such evidence is less likely to be considered as valid.

Please note that:

- a) doctors are entitled to charge for any medical certificates or notes they provide;
- b) doctors do not always provide certificates for short periods of illness;
- c) doctors might not provide certificates after illness has ended, because after recovery it might be impossible to know that a student had been ill.

### **4. Personal / Confidential Circumstances**

4.1 In some cases, circumstances may be viewed as unusually delicate or personal nature by a student and a request can be made for these to be viewed by the Chair of the Special Circumstances Panel only.

4.2 It should be noted however that the Chair of the relevant Special Circumstances Panel will always need to see the evidence submitted and that the Chair(s) and External Examiner(s) of the relevant Assessment Boards may need to be informed, in confidence, of the general

nature of the circumstances to be able to assess their impact and thereby help the Assessment Board to arrive at an appropriate course of action.

## **5 Submitting a Special Circumstance Application**

5.1 Students should submit a Special Circumstances Application on the template forms provided by the University with as much detail as possible.

5.2 The Application must be received 'in time', that is in advance of the assessment deadlines for which the student is seeking mitigation for.

5.3 Applications for Special Circumstances must include a clear and honest explanation of the adverse circumstances affecting assessments and provide adequate supporting evidence of these circumstances e.g Medical Certificate. This information must be verifiable and align with the dates of the assessment submission. More information regarding requirements can be seen in section 3.3

5.4 Special Circumstance applications received out of time or with insufficient evidence or not validly submitted will normally not be progressed and the students will be notified and asked for additional information.

## **6 Special Circumstance Review Process**

**6.1 Stage Initial Assessment** On receipt of the Special Circumstance Application, the application will be assessed for its timeliness, the grounds and evidence supplied. An application will not normally be accepted if:

- a) Out of the required timeframe without good reason;
- b) if no valid potential reasons are cited and/or;
- c) if no evidence / incomplete evidence is provided

Without this evidence, the application **may be** automatically declined.

If it is determined that there is a need for additional evidence, this may be requested at this point. Special Circumstance Applications which have sufficient information and grounds and are supported by evidence, will be then moved to the next stage.

**6.2 Assessment by Special Circumstance Review Panel (SCRP)**

- 6.2.1** SCRPs will sit every 5 weeks throughout the academic year for Block delivery and full semester modules and all Special Circumstance Applications will be assessed at the next SCRCP panel after submission and verification of application and supporting documentation.
- 6.2.2** Deadlines for submissions will be published in the Annual Quality Calendar produced by the Quality Transformation Unit (QTU)
- 6.2.3** The Panel for the SCRCP will be held prior to the Module Review Panel (MRP).
- 6.2.4** The Panel will be chaired by The Head of the Quality Transformation Unit (or nominee): a Quality Lead, Head of School (optional), representative from Student Services, ACSS and independent academic will normally form the panel supported by the School Administrator.
- 6.2.5** The Panel will consider the application and supporting evidence and will agree if the Special Circumstance will be accepted and will recommend reasonable adjustments to be made.
- 6.2.6 Outcome**
- 6.2.7** The Programme and Module tutor will be notified of the recommendations made by the panel and a member of ACSS will document the outcome and notify the student. The student will be notified on any additional support requirements that would benefit them moving forward.

Note the following important points:

Only claims made by a student in writing, following the procedures, will be considered. Apart from results profiles, this is all the evidence Panels will have and presentation by tutors of anecdotal, oral evidence will not be permitted. (Only if a student is incapable of making his/her own claim will a written claim made by a third party on his/her behalf be accepted.)

It is important to provide full details in the application.

**7.0** The decision of the panel will then be ratified at the next Module Review Panel/Assessment Board. Special Circumstances Panels only make decisions about coursework assessments and/or examinations requested. Minutes are not taken of the discussions of Special Circumstances Panels – only the decisions are recorded. Panels communicate their decisions to the relevant Module Review Panel/Assessment Boards.

When Special Circumstances are accepted and a student has not passed the affected module, Module Review Panels/ Assessment Boards will normally allow an assessment or module to be retaken without further penalty. When Special Circumstances are accepted and a student

has passed the affected assessments, Module Review Panels/ Assessment Boards will use their academic judgment to take account of the possible effects of the mitigating circumstances in arriving at an appropriate progression or award decision. In all cases a range of outcomes may be possible arising from the exercise of academic judgment and discretion by a Module Review Panels/ Assessment Boards, depending on a student's individual circumstances, their stage of programme and their overall profile of marks and grades.

## Monitoring and Updates

- This section will be updated annually or following changes to legislation or OfS guidance.
- Staff will be notified of any policy revisions.
- Historical versions are retained for reference and transparency.

## Helpful Contacts & Resources

### Support Area

### Contact or Link

Quality Transformation Unit    [qtu@boton.ac.uk](mailto:qtu@boton.ac.uk)

Academic Support Services

<b>Staff Policy – TITLE</b>	
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