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The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England & Wales and a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038302). The Open University is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority in relation to its secondary activity of credit broking.
Summary of policy

- The Special Circumstances Policy is aimed at students who want to make The Open University aware of any matters that may have affected their ability to study, take an exam or submit other forms of assessment. The information and evidence you give us will be presented to the Module Result Panel (MRP) when they meet to agree your result.

- The Policy covers Special Circumstances affecting continuous assessment like tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) and interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs), as well as Special Circumstances affecting the final assessed task, including exams, end-of-module assessments (EMAs) and end-of-module tutor-marked assignments (emTMAs).

- Table 1 in section 4 below summarises all the policy points contained within this document with deadlines and exceptions to the policy (if any).

- If you have any queries or need guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact us.

Policies superseded by this document

This policy previously formed part of the combined Assessment Handbook. For microcredentials, parts of this policy were previously found in the Assessment Handbook (Microcredentials).

Scope

What this policy covers

This policy applies to you if any part of your module study or assessment has been negatively affected due to Special Circumstances, as outlined below in section 1 ‘Policy and related information’. This policy applies to you if you fall into any of the categories below:

- Enquirers (for information only)

- All undergraduate and postgraduate taught students studying a module and/or a qualification, including students studying Access modules
• Students in secure environments
• Apprentices studying a module

What this policy does not cover

This policy does not apply to:

• Postgraduate research students: please contact the Research Degrees Team
• Learners studying a microcredential please contact mc.support@futurelearn.com.
• OpenLearn Learners: please contact the OpenLearn team
• CPD Course learners: please refer to Terms and Conditions: Corporate and Professional Development courses.
• Students studying under partnership agreements: please contact the OUVP Curriculum Partnerships team
• Vocational qualification learners: please contact the vocational qualification team.
• Students studying a non-credit bearing Short Course: please refer to the Conditions of Registration (Short Courses) 2021/22.

Related Documentation

• Academic Regulations and your Qualification Regulations, if applicable (available via StudentHome once you are registered for a qualification, or on the online prospectus).
• Assessment Policies:
  a) TMA and iCMA Policy
  b) End-of-Module Assessment (EMA) Policy
  c) End-of-module tutor-marked assignment (emTMA) Policy
  d) Exam Policy
  e) Postponement Policy
  f) Resit and Resubmission Policy
g) **Module Results Determination Policy**

- Changing Your Study Plans: Deferrals, Withdrawals and Cancellations
- Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure
- Student Privacy Notice
- Equality Act 2010 for England, Scotland and Wales
- Northern Ireland Act 1998
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004

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**The Open University Student Charter Values**

This document specifically aligns with the following [Open University Student Charter](#) Values:

2. We value diversity and challenge inequalities and we are stronger for doing so.

4. We communicate with each other in ways which are clear, relevant, accurate and timely.

7. We act ethically and transparently, providing and making use of fair and open means to deal with our concerns and grievances, learning from them.

9. As students, we share the responsibility for learning and make a commitment to study and research using the resources and support services available, upholding the highest standards of academic integrity.

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**Commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at The Open University**

Policies are inclusive of all Open University Students, Learners, Enquirers and Alumni, regardless of age, civil status, dependency or caring status, care experience, disability, family status, gender, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnerships, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, socio-economic background, sex, sexual orientation or trades union membership status.
Safe Space Reporting

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment in which everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. Safe Space Reporting is available through an online tool through which staff, students, learners and visitors are encouraged to report incidents of assault, bullying, harassment, hate crime, or sexual harassment. It also provides information about what you can do if these incidents happen to you, or to someone you know, and where you can find support.

Introduction

The Open University aims to provide all students with an excellent learning experience that enables them to achieve their study goals. We recognise that sometimes things do not go as planned and this document sets out The Open University’s policy on helping you understand what Special Circumstances mean and what your options are. Further support and individual guidance to help you make appropriate choices is available from your SST or AEST or equivalent contact if you are studying as part of an apprenticeship programme.

Any terminology that may be unfamiliar is explained in a glossary of terms at the end of this document.

For specific guidance on how this policy may relate to your personal circumstances, please contact your Student Support Teams (SSTs) who can advise on the implementation of policy. If you are an Apprentice studying as part of an apprenticeship programme, you should contact the appropriate Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) or equivalent contact, for more information; alternatively, you should request that your employer contacts their named Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM) for further information, see Contacts section below for more information.
Policy and related information

1. Purpose

A Special Circumstance is an exceptional situation outside your control, which you feel affected your performance in any of the assessed tasks. The Open University understands that sometimes special circumstances affect your study or part of your study, for example tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) or interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMAs), an exam, an end-of-module assessment (EMA) or an end-of-module tutor-marked assignment (emTMA). If you think circumstances outside your control have negatively affected your ability to perform well in your assessments, you can ask the Module Result Panel (MRP) to take this into account at the point at which your module result is agreed. The purpose of this document is to outline The Open University policy on Special Circumstances should you experience any circumstance which have negatively impacted upon your performance.

1.1 The objectives of this policy are:

a) To ensure that you as a student are appropriately supported when Special Circumstances are brought to the attention of The Open University in a timely manner.

b) To ensure that all students are treated fairly and equitably in the light of the Special Circumstances.

c) To outline the responsibilities of students in informing The Open University of circumstances which are affecting their performance.

2. Policy principles

2.1 If you think that you have studied your module effectively but that circumstances beyond your control have had a serious effect on your performance in either the continuous assessment (TMA or iCMA) or the final assessed tasks (exam, EMA or emTMA), you may bring information about this to the attention of the Module Result Panel (MRP) when they determine your final module result.
2.2 The University considers the following to be Special Circumstances:

a) Serious and prolonged illness of yourself, a member of your family, or a close friend.

b) Significant personal or family crisis, such as bereavement.

c) The loss, due to circumstances beyond your control, of more than ten minutes of face-to-face exam time (you should also have brought this to the attention of the invigilator so that it is included in the report of events and conditions during the face-to-face exam). In the case of a remote exam, if you encounter problems on the day which significantly impact upon your ability in completing the remote exam.

d) Difficulties caused by a disability or additional requirement, for which you feel that any adjustments made by The Open University were not appropriate.

e) If you feel your studies have been disrupted by The Open University (such as delay in receiving module materials or exceptionally late return of tutor-marked assignments). Any other extenuating circumstances, for example events that result in a serious impact on your ability to engage with academic work during the assessment period.

2.3 The periods of disruption that are recognised by the Open University are as follows:

a) Continuous assessment i.e. TMA and iCMA – if your studies were disrupted for a total period of **four weeks or more**.

b) Final assessed tasks i.e.

   i) During an Exam – exam performance affected by a serious matter that occurred during the exam.

   ii) Exams, EMA and emTMA - exceptional circumstances that affected you in the **three weeks before the exam date or cut-off date of an EMA or emTMA**.

2.4 The Module Result Panel (MRP) will use the information you provide only to your benefit, usually if your result is close to a grade boundary. This does not necessarily guarantee a higher grade.
2.5 Special Circumstances will only be used to consider whether circumstances may have impacted upon your ability to achieve a higher grade, they will not be used to increase your mark for the assessment.

2.6 You should note that Module Result Panels will only consider information that is submitted within the deadlines outlined below in Table 1 section 4 and prior to your module result being determined.

2.7 Unless you have an exceptional case, Special Circumstances will not be considered after your module result has been decided. Please refer to section 5.2 “Non-Disclosure” below to know more about the criteria for exceptional cases.

3. Reporting and submitting Special Circumstances

3.1 You can report Special Circumstances relating to your continuous assessment or final assessed tasks using the Special Circumstances webform.

3.2 You must submit Special Circumstances yourself or through a designated advocate, and not via your tutor. Information submitted by tutors will not be accepted.

3.3 You must complete the online process of reporting your Special Circumstances before midnight (UK local time) four calendar days after the cut-off date for your final piece of assessment. Supporting third-party evidence must then be received by the Open University within 14 calendar days of your Special Circumstances’ submission. Supporting evidence can be submitted electronically or in hardcopy as instructed by the webform. Submissions received outside of these timeframes will not be considered unless you can provide evidence that you were prevented from meeting the deadline by circumstances outside of your control. In order to submit this evidence please contact your SST or AEST or equivalent contact if you are studying as part of an apprenticeship programme.

3.4 The detailed procedure on how to submit the form and what third-party evidence is accepted can be found at Special circumstances - assignments on the Help Centre.
3.5 If you want to submit Special Circumstances relating to continuous assessment, you must ensure that you meet the above deadline, even if you are applying for postponement of an exam, EMA or emTMA. However, your circumstances will not be considered until you complete your final assessed task and your overall module result is determined by the MRP.

3.6 You should only report Special Circumstances in relation to your final assessed task if you have attended the exam or have submitted your EMA or emTMA. The form cannot be used to report absence or to request formal deferral or postponement. For more information about deferral please refer to the Changing Your Study Plans Policy. Apprentices should contact the appropriate AEST team or they should request that their employer contacts their named APDM for further information. For more information about postponement please refer to the Postponement Policy.

3.7 If you have submitted a partially completed exam, EMA or emTMA as a result of your Special Circumstances it is especially important that you tell us about this.

3.8 Exceptionally, if your module does not allow resubmission and there is no threshold on the emTMA, you may submit Special Circumstances even if you have not submitted the emTMA.

3.9 Special Circumstances relating to final assessed tasks must be submitted for each module. If you are subsequently offered a resit or resubmission opportunity and are still affected by similar circumstances, you must submit another special circumstance form for the exam or EMA or emTMA. The information in an exam or EMA or emTMA related Special Circumstances form does not roll over to a resit or resubmission, or to other module exams.

3.10 If you have a disability or additional requirements:

3.10.1 If you think that your medical condition or disability for e.g. specific learning difficulty disadvantaged you in your continuous assessment or EMA or emTMA, it is in your own interest to complete a Special Circumstances form.
3.10.2  If you think that extra time or other arrangements that The Open University have made for your exam have not adequately compensated for your medical condition or disability, you should ensure that you submit a Special Circumstances form explaining this. The Module Result Panel will be informed of any arrangements that have been made for you.

3.10.3  The Module Result Panel (MRP) will only be provided with information about your condition that you submitted during the Special Circumstances process. Any additional information that you have provided to the Open University or your tutor about your condition will not be passed on to the MRP.

3.10.4  The University will process this information in compliance with its obligations under the Equality Act 2010 in England, Scotland and Wales, Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in Northern Ireland, or any other statutory duty or obligation.

3.11  Special Circumstances and your module result

3.11.1  If you submit Special Circumstances at the appropriate time, this will be reported on your result notification. In some cases, especially if you are completing a resit or resubmission, you may receive a pending result as your result may be delayed while your Special Circumstances information is considered. We know it is stressful to receive a pending result, so we try to resolve your result as quickly as possible and will aim to confirm your final result within six weeks.
### 4. Timetable and exceptions to the policy

#### 4.1 Table 1 Timetables for submission of Special Circumstances form and the supporting third party evidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment type that was affected by circumstances</th>
<th>Special Circumstances form submission due date</th>
<th>Supporting third party evidence submission due date</th>
<th>Recognised period of disruption</th>
<th>Exception to the submission due date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous assessment (TMA/iCMA)</td>
<td>Before midnight (UK local time) four calendar days after your final assessed task.</td>
<td>Within 14 calendar days of your Special Circumstances submission.</td>
<td>If your studies were disrupted for a total period of <strong>four weeks or more</strong>.</td>
<td>Unless there is evidence of serious circumstance to justify late submission. See section 5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>Before midnight (UK local time) four calendar days after your exam.</td>
<td>Within 14 calendar days of your Special Circumstances submission.</td>
<td>Exam performance affected by a serious matter that occurred <strong>during the exam or in the 3 weeks immediately before the exam date.</strong></td>
<td>Unless there is evidence of serious circumstance to justify late submission. See section 5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-of-module assessment (EMA)</td>
<td>Before midnight (UK local time) four calendar days after your EMA submission cut-off date.</td>
<td>Within 14 calendar days of your Special Circumstances submission.</td>
<td>Serious circumstances that affected you in the <strong>3 weeks before the EMA cut-off date.</strong></td>
<td>Unless there is evidence of serious circumstance to justify late submission. See section 5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End-of-module TMA (emTMA)</td>
<td>Before midnight (UK local time) four calendar days after your emTMA submission cut-off date.</td>
<td>Within 14 calendar days of your Special Circumstances submission.</td>
<td>Serious circumstances that affected you in the <strong>3 weeks before the emTMA cut-off date.</strong></td>
<td>Unless there is evidence of serious circumstance to justify late submission. See section 5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **Non-Disclosure**

5.1 If you do not tell the Open University about Special Circumstances that have affected your performance, we will not be able to provide you with appropriate assistance, advice and guidance.

5.2 Any [Special Circumstances form](#) submitted outside of the timelines outlined in [Section 4: “Timelines and exceptions to the policy”](#) will not be accepted unless there are serious circumstances to justify late submission. The following example exceptions can be made in certain scenarios:

5.2.1 If serious circumstances (such as hospitalisation) prevent you from reporting your Special Circumstances within the stipulated deadline and/or submitting evidence **within 14 calendar days**, it may be accepted, at The Open University’s discretion, if you provide appropriate evidence of the reasons for the delay.

5.2.2 If an issue you thought was minor at the time of your submission has now been confirmed as more serious and could have affected your studies, your Special Circumstances may also be accepted.

5.3 If your reasons for late submission do not meet the criteria specified above in 5.2 or are not supported by evidence, they will not be accepted and you will be notified of this in writing.

5.4 The Special Circumstances information you provide should be supported by evidence, such as medical evidence or a death certificate, otherwise it may not be considered.

5.5 If you submit evidence by post, you must keep proof of posting. If you submit it electronically you should keep a copy of the email sent.
6. Methods of appeal

If you have a query, or experience a problem with any aspect of The Open University’s application of this policy, please contact us promptly. If you feel that The Open University has not responded appropriately to your policy query or concern, you can raise a formal complaint or appeal using the Students Complaints and Appeals Procedure. You can find out more information about how to do this in The Open University’s Complaints and Appeals procedure webpages on Help Centre.

The Open University also has a specific complaints procedure for complaints relating to Welsh Language Standards. Please refer to Welsh Language Standards, Dealing with Complaints and Comments for more details.”

7.1 Further Information

7.1 If you are considering submitting a Special Circumstances form, you will find detailed information on the StudentHome Help Centre webpages.

7.2 The Open University recommends that you talk to your SST or AEST or equivalent contact if you are studying as part of an apprenticeship programme to ensure you are fully aware of all your options.

8. Contact details for further Information

Student Support Teams (SSTs)
You can contact your Student Support Team (SST) from the Contact us page in the Help Centre or via StudentHome.

For queries related to apprentices/apprenticeships the following learner support contact details are applicable:

AEST (Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team) (for apprentices in England, Scotland and Wales)
Email: apprentice-support@open.ac.uk
Telephone: 0300 3034121
APDM (Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager) (for apprentices in England, Scotland and Wales)

Employers: please contact your named APDM, alternatively please email apprenticeships@open.ac.uk, and your allocated APDM will contact you.

For Apprentices studying Nursing Programmes, Social Work or Advanced Clinical Practice

Email: hsc-support@open.ac.uk
Telephone: 01908 541070

Other

To check the latest postal address and other contact details or if you would like to find out more about our most up-to-date response times for receiving and sending postal correspondence to the Open University, please see Open University Offices.

Glossary of terms

Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST)
The AEST is the first point of contact for Apprentices in line with Apprenticeship Programmes. Please see the contacts section above for their contact details.

Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM)
APDMs support Employers participating in an Apprenticeship Programme. They offer support and advice on recruitment, registration and eligibility; act as the conduit between the Employer and the OU; and provide support to line managers/workplace mentors and Apprentices. APDMs also review, track and respond to Apprentice progression by working with the Employer, the Apprentice and the Faculty to achieve successful completion. They collect and act upon feedback from the Employer and the Apprentice to continually enhance this process.

Capped

Resits and resubmissions are normally capped at the lowest grade of pass. This means your module result following a resit or resubmission will not normally be higher than a bare Pass or Pass 4 grade.
Continuous assessment
This refers to the name given to the set of assignments (TMAs and iCMAs) that you complete during a module. Information about these can be found in the module guide, assignment booklets or module materials.

Deferral
This means withdrawing from the current presentation of your module, and then re-register on a later presentation of that module.

End-of-Module Assessments (EMA)
This means one of the final assessed tasks within a module. On many modules, you have to work independently to produce an extended piece of work rather than sitting a traditional exam at the end of your study. For ease of reference, these essays, projects, portfolios, dissertations, assessments, etc. are referred to collectively as end-of-module assessments (EMAs).

End-of-Module tutor-marked assignments (emTMA)
This means that where a module does not have an exam or EMA, the last TMA on that module will be classed as an emTMA. If this is the case, your assessment strategy will clearly state which assignment is the emTMA. Please note that the 'final TMA' that comes before the exam, EMA or emTMA is not the same as an emTMA.

Exam (examination)
At The Open University there are two types of exams: face-to-face exams and remote exams. Different types of exams are held in exam periods at the end of module presentations.

Final assessed tasks
This means the name given to the assessments that you complete at the end of the module. The types of final assessed tasks that a module can include are exam, end-of-module assessment (EMA) and end-of-module tutor-marked assignment (emTMA).

Interactive computer-marked assignments (iCMA)
This means an interactive form of assessment made up from a series of questions.
Module Result Panel (MRP)

The Module Result Panel (MRP) is responsible for the setting and marking of all controlled assessments for each presentation of a specific module, and for proposing a result for each student on a module presentation to the Cluster Examination and Assessment Board (Cluster EAB).

Postponement

This means if you are unable to complete your final assessed task i.e. exam, end-of-module assessment (EMA) or end-of-module tutor-marked assignment (emTMA), The Open University may give you permission to postpone it to the next available opportunity on a discretionary basis. This is called discretionary postponement.

Resit

This means if you take your exam but do not achieve the required standard for a pass on your module you may be offered a resit opportunity. There is a minimum requirement to qualify for a resit specific to your module/s which is explained in the Assessment section on StudentHome. You can only resit once, and your module result will normally be capped.

Resubmission

This means if you submit your end-of-module assessment (EMA) or end-of-module tutor-marked assignment (emTMA) but do not achieve the required standard for a pass on your module you may be offered a resubmission opportunity. There is a minimum requirement to qualify for a resubmission specific to your module/s which is explained in the Assessment section on StudentHome. You may only resubmit once, and your module result will normally be capped.

Special Circumstances

This means if your performance in any of the assessment on your module has been affected by something beyond your control, you can bring the 'special circumstances' to the attention of the Module Result Panel for consideration when they agree your module result.
**Third-party evidence**

This means evidence obtained from an independent body other than the student himself/herself or their family, friends and acquaintances providing it. The evidence must be from a professional body for e.g. a medical certificate from the GP or the hospital where the treatment has been carried out.

**Threshold**

This means on some modules there is a minimum requirement or score (such as 40%) that you must achieve for an individual piece of work or activity, or for a number of pieces of work combined, in order to achieve a pass result.

**Tutor-marked assignment (TMA)**

This means as part of the teaching methodology on most modules, you have to submit written assignments to your tutor. These are called tutor-marked assignments.

**Further clarification**

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please contact your Student Support Team via StudentHome who are specially trained to advise on the implementation of policy. Alternatively, you can contact your Student Support Team through the ‘Contact Us’ option on the Help Centre if you are a current Open University student.

Apprentices studying as part of an apprenticeship programme should contact the appropriate Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) or equivalent contact, for more information; alternatively, they should request that their employer contacts their named Apprenticeship Programme Delivery Manager (APDM) for further information, see Contacts section above for more information.

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please submit these to SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.
Alternative format

If you require this Special Circumstances Policy document in an alternative format, please contact the Student Support Team via http://www.open.ac.uk/contact/ (phone +44 (0)300 303 5303), or your dedicated Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student.