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Alternative Format

If you require this Special Circumstances Policy document in an alternative format please [Contact Us](#) (visit www.open.ac.uk/contact), telephone us on +44 (0)300 303 5303, or get in touch with your Student Support Team via StudentHome if you are a current Open University student. If you are studying an apprenticeship, please contact the Apprentice Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprentice-support@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121). Welsh-speaking Students and Learners are welcome to speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. Research Degree Students can contact the Graduate School via email graduate-school@open.ac.uk.

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, 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 if you are studying as part of an apprenticeship programme, your AEST](#). See [How to contact us](#) section below for more information.

Any terminology that may be unfamiliar is explained in the [Definitions section](#) at the end of this document. Throughout this document, where you see references to 'we', 'us', or 'our' this means The Open University. 'You' refers to you as our student.

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:

- 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 your [Student Support Team](#).
- OpenLearn Learners: please contact the [OpenLearn team](#).
- 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 \(Short Courses\)](#).

Support and Information

How to contact us

If you have any queries around the content provided within this document and how to interpret it, please [Contact Us](#). To check the contact details for the Open University, please see [OU Offices](#). You can contact your Student Support Team (SST) from the [Contact Us](#) page in the Help Centre or via StudentHome.

SiSE student can contact the National Support team for any queries. Their contact details are available on the [Contact us](#) page.

If you are studying an apprenticeship, please contact the Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST) by email on apprenticeships@open.ac.uk, or telephone (+44 (0) 300 303 4121). Welsh-speaking Students and Learners may speak with a student support adviser in Welsh on +44 (0) 29 2047 1170. Research Degree Students can contact the Research Degrees Office via email research-degrees-office@open.ac.uk.

Help Centre Articles

Help Centre – [What are special circumstances](#)

Reporting Bullying and Harassment

The Open University is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive environment where everyone feels safe and is treated with dignity and respect. Unlawful discrimination of any kind across The Open University will not be tolerated. We encourage staff, students, learners and visitors to report incidents of assault, bullying harassment, hate crime or sexual harassment through [Report + Support](#). This platform also provides information about what you can do if you or someone you know experiences such incidents, and where you can find support.

Policy

1. Purpose

A Special Circumstance is an exceptional situation outside your control which you feel affected your performance in any, or all, of the assessed tasks on your module. We understand 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 make this information available to the Module Result Panel (MRP) when they meet to agree your result. The MRP will consult this information if appropriate.

2. Policy principles

2.1 The University considers Special Circumstances to be situations that are unexpected, and that had a significant impact on the time available to concentrate on study or to complete an assignment. The following are examples of 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) If you encounter problems during a timed remote exam which significantly impacts your ability to complete the exam. Or, in the case of a face-to-face exam, the loss of more than ten minutes exam time (you should 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).
- d) Problems during an Online Invigilated Exam which impact the ability for you to complete the exam under invigilated conditions such as a short interruption to your connection, hardware or software issues.
- e) Difficulties caused by a disability or additional requirement, for which you feel that any adjustments made by us were not appropriate.
- f) 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.
- g) 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.

2.2 The Module Result Panel 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.

- 2.3 Special Circumstances will only be used to consider whether circumstances may have impacted upon your ability to achieve a higher overall module grade, they will not be used to increase your mark for specific assessment(s).
- 2.4 The Module Result Panel will only consider information that is submitted within the deadlines outlined in section 3 below.
- 2.5 Unless you have an exceptional case, Special Circumstances will not be considered after your module result has been determined. Please refer to [section 5 “Late Notification of Special Circumstances”](#) below to see more about the criteria for exceptional cases.
- 2.6 Special Circumstances will only be considered if you have completed the module, which means you have submitted **all** compulsory assessment tasks for your module. If your final assessed task is compulsory, and you do not submit it by the deadline, you cannot use the Special Circumstances process to request a [deferral](#) or [postponement](#) of your final assessed task.

3. Reporting and submitting Special Circumstances

- 3.1 You should report Special Circumstances relating to your continuous assessment or final assessed task using the [Special Circumstances webform](#).
- 3.2 You can submit Special Circumstances yourself, or with the help of a designated advocate. Tutors cannot submit Special Circumstances on your behalf.
- 3.3 To guarantee that your Special Circumstances will be made available to the MRP complete the online process of reporting your Special Circumstances before 23.59 (UK local time) **four** calendar days after the submission date for your final piece of assessment (please note, this deadline of four calendar days from the submission date is from the original deadline, not from the end of any late penalty period that may be applicable).

- 3.4 We may still be able to accept special circumstances forms submitted more than four days after the submission date, but this is not guaranteed. Acceptance of the form will depend on how close it is to the MRP meeting date. Please check if the special circumstances form is available via StudentHome. If it is available, you can still submit special circumstances. After this date, please contact your [SST](#) for advice. If you have already received your module result, we will not normally be able to accept information about special circumstances unless you can show (and provide evidence that) you couldn't submit the information earlier because of circumstances outside your control. This would have to be something serious. Please see [Section 5 'Late notification of Special Circumstances'](#) for more information.
- 3.5 Supporting third-party evidence should be received by The Open University within 14 calendar days of your Special Circumstances' submission. If you are not able to attach evidence at the point you submit your Special Circumstances form, you can submit evidence by email or in hardcopy as instructed by the webform. If you submit evidence to The Open University by post, please keep proof of posting. If you submit it by email keep a copy of the email sent.
- 3.6 You can find guidance and information on how to submit the form and what third-party evidence is accepted in the Help Centre webpage "[What are special circumstances](#)".
- 3.7 If you are applying for a postponement of your exam, EMA or emTMA, but you want to submit Special Circumstances relating to your continuous assessment, you must submit your Special Circumstances form before four days after the submission deadline of the original exam, EMA or emTMA. Do not wait until you submit your postponed exam, EMA or emTMA. Your circumstances will be considered once you complete and submit your final assessed task, and your overall module result is considered by the MRP.
- 3.8 If you are unable to complete your module due to a situation outside of your control you may be able to defer or postpone. For more information about deferral please refer to the [Changing Your Study Plans](#) Policy. Apprentices should contact the [AEST](#) team for further information. For more information about postponement please refer to the [Postponement Policy](#).

- 3.9 If you have submitted a partially completed exam, EMA or emTMA as a result of your Special Circumstances you can use the [Special Circumstances form](#) to report this.
- 3.10 Special Circumstances must be submitted separately for each module that you are studying where your performance has been affected.
- 3.11 If you are offered a resit or resubmission opportunity, any special circumstances that you submitted for your original presentation that relate to continuous assessment will be carried forward to the resit/resubmission presentation. Any special circumstances that related to your original exam, EMA or emTMA submission will not be carried forward. If you are affected by special circumstances when resitting your exam or resubmitting your EMA/emTMA you will need to submit a form specifically detailing those special circumstances.
- 3.12 If you have a disability or additional requirements:
- 3.12.1 If you think that your medical condition or disability, for example specific learning difficulty disadvantaged you in your **continuous assessment or EMA or emTMA**, you can [complete a Special Circumstances form](#).
- 3.12.2 If you think that extra time or other arrangements that we have made for your **exam** have not adequately accommodated your medical condition or disability, you can submit a Special Circumstances form explaining this and the impact it had on you. The Module Result Panel will have access to information about any arrangements that have been made for you.
- 3.12.3 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 us or your tutor about your condition will not be passed on to the MRP.

3.12.4 The University will process this information in compliance with its obligations under the [Equality Act 2010](#) in England, Scotland and Wales, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 for Northern Ireland, and the [Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2004](#), or any other statutory duty or obligation.

4. Special Circumstances and your module result

4.1 If you submit Special Circumstances by the appropriate deadline, your result notification will indicate that Special Circumstances were submitted.

4.2 All Special Circumstances submissions are made available to the Module Result Panel when they meet to determine your module result.

4.3 If you meet the following criteria your Special Circumstances will be reviewed by the Module Result Panel:

4.3.1 Your overall module result falls within five University Scale points below a grade boundary, or;

4.3.2 You are studying a module that has a dual component assessment strategy, and you have a difference of 30 or greater between your overall continuous assessment score and your overall examinable score, or;

4.3.3 You have declared a disability, and you had reasonable adjustments for your exam, EMA or emTMA, and you have submitted Special Circumstances relating to the final assessed task, or;

4.3.4 Your overall score would entitle you to a resit or resubmission result.

4.4 If you do not meet the above criteria, it is not guaranteed that your Special Circumstances will be reviewed by the Module Result Panel. Whether or not your Special Circumstances are reviewed outside of the above criteria depends on the framework within which the Module Result Panel operates. All students on the same module will have to meet the same criteria for their Special Circumstances to be reviewed.

4.5 After looking at a special circumstance's submission, the MRP will make one of the following decisions:

- the circumstances were not relevant to the determination of the module result, for example, it was something that you could have planned for, or the period of time affected by the special circumstances was significantly in advance of any submission deadlines, or a higher score was achieved in the assignment impacted by special circumstances than other assignments not impacted by the special circumstances.
- the circumstances did have an effect, but not to the extent that a higher overall module result was merited, for example, if you performed poorly on the assignment covered by the special circumstances but a better performance would not have led to a higher grade for the module overall.
- the circumstances affected your performance, and a higher module grade should be awarded.
- If you have been awarded a resit or resubmission result, you may be awarded an uncapped resit or resubmission.
- the circumstances affected your performance, but more evidence is needed on your academic ability. In this case you may be asked to complete an additional piece of assessment to provide evidence that the learning outcomes have been met. This is referred to as an [Additional Assessment](#).
- You have not supplied sufficient evidence to support the special circumstances submission and the MRP need the evidence to make a decision. In this case the result will be 'pending', and you will be contacted and asked to supply evidence to support your Special Circumstances submission.

4.6 The academic decisions made by the MRP are confidential to the panel. We can't discuss individual decisions that have been made.

5. Late notification of Special Circumstances

- 5.1 Any reporting of Special Circumstances outside of the timelines outlined in [Section 3](#) will not be accepted unless there are exceptional circumstances to justify late notification, **and** you provide evidence to support late notification. The situations where late reporting/notification of Special Circumstances may be accepted are:
- 5.1.1 If exceptional circumstances (such as hospitalisation) prevented you from reporting your Special Circumstances within the stipulated deadline.
 - 5.1.2 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.
 - 5.1.3 If there is proof of maladministration by the University.
- 5.2 If any of the above apply to you then you can ask the Assessment Exceptions Group (AEG) to consider your case.
- 5.3 If your reasons for late reporting of Special Circumstances do not meet the criteria specified above in 5.1 or are not supported by evidence, they will not be accepted for consideration by the AEG.

6. Non-Disclosure

- 6.1 If you do not tell us about Special Circumstances that have affected your performance, we will not be able to provide you with appropriate assistance, advice and guidance or take this information into consideration for your module result.

7. Methods of appeal

- 7.1 If you have a query or experience a problem with any aspect of our application of this policy, please [contact us](#) promptly. If you feel that we have 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 our [Complaints and Appeals](#) procedure webpages on Help Centre.

7.2 We also have 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.

8. Further information

8.1 If you are considering submitting a [Special Circumstances form](#), you will find detailed information on the StudentHome [Help Centre](#) webpages.

8.2 We recommend that you talk to your [SST or AEST](#) if you are studying as part of an apprenticeship programme to ensure you are fully aware of all your options.

Definitions

Apprenticeship Enrolment and Support Team (AEST)

The AEST is the first point of contact for Apprentices in line with Apprenticeship Programmes. Please see the [Contact Us](#) above for their contact details.

Assessment

The term we use to cover the different ways that the Open University assesses how you are progressing during your module. It covers things like TMAs, iCMAs, exams, emTMAs and EMAs.

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 is to withdraw from the current presentation of your module, and then re-register on a later presentation of that module.

End-of-Module Assessment (EMA)

This is 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)

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)

An exam is a time restricted final assessed task. Exams have a set start time and must be submitted within a specific time frame. The submission deadline is typically between 2-4 hours, but can be up to 24 hours, as specified by the module team. Some exams will be invigilated by an online invigilation provider; you will be told if this applies to your module.

Final assessed tasks

This is 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 is 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

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

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 overall module result will normally be capped at the lowest grade of pass.

Resubmission

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 overall module result will normally be capped at the lowest grade of pass.

Students in Secure Environment (SiSE)

SiSE are made up of three groups of students: prison based, secure unit based and students who are Out on Licence / Probation / Disclosure. There are specialist teams within the Nations to support these students based on their geographical location.

Special Circumstances

If your performance in any of the assessment tasks 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 is 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 example a medical certificate from the GP or the hospital where the treatment has been carried out.

Threshold

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)

As part of the teaching methodology on most modules, you have to submit written assignments to your tutor. These are called Tutor-Marked Assignments.

Related Policies and Legislation

- [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](#)
 - h) [Additional Assessment Policy](#)
 - i) [Online Invigilation Policy](#)

- [Changing Your Study Plans: Deferrals, Withdrawals and Cancellations](#)
- [Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure](#)
- [The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 \(Amendment\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2004](#)
- [Domestic Abuse, Gender Based Violence Policy](#)
- [Equality Act 2010 for England, Scotland and Wales](#)
- [Northern Ireland Act 1998](#)
- [Safeguarding – Ensuring the Safety of Children and Vulnerable/Protected Adults](#)
- [Student Privacy Notice](#)

Give Us Your Feedback

If you have any comments about this policy document and how it might be improved, please share this with us, by emailing SPR-Policy-Team@open.ac.uk.

Our Student Charter Values

The [Student Charter](#) was developed jointly by The Open University and the OU Students Association. It is a declaration of our shared values and the commitments we make to each other. This document has been developed with the Student Charter values as its foundation.

Our commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion

Our commitment to equality and inclusion is embedded in all that we do and reflects our mission to be open to people, places, methods and ideas. We celebrate diversity and the strengths that it brings, whilst challenging under- representation and differences in outcomes within our institution. We promote and manage equality and diversity to meet both our strategic goals and our statutory equality duties. We achieve this in many ways, including the development of inclusive policy.

Welsh language standards

[Yr iaith Gymraeg \(Welsh Language Standards\)](#)

The Open University is one of several universities named in the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011. This means that any students in Wales can expect to receive certain services from the OU in Welsh. These are outlined in what's called the [OU's Welsh language standards](#).

This means that you can speak to our student recruitment and support team in Welsh or contact the university in Welsh. You can find out more about your rights as a Welsh language user on the [OU in Wales website](#).

About this Document

Summary of Significant Changes since last version

There are a number of significant changes from the previous version of this policy (Version 1.4). These are:

1. New policy template has been used so the layout has slightly changed, and wording updated.
2. The wording in some sections has been reviewed and updated to make the information clearer.
3. Glossary terms updated.

Policies Superseded by this Document

This policy replaces version 1.4 of the Special Circumstances Policy dated October 2024.

Document Information

Version number: 1.5

Approved by: Director, Academic Services

Effective from: October 2025

Date for review: September 2026

Charity Statement

The Open University is incorporated by Royal Charter (RC 000391), an exempt charity in England and 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.