

# Individual mitigating circumstances (IMCs) and assessment — Briefing note no. 1



This is the first of a planned series of briefing notes. It is available at [www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/imc-staff-briefings.htm](http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/imc-staff-briefings.htm) alongside the other new guidance material on IMCs and assessment. This note elucidates the decisions to be made about whether an IMC claim should be submitted. Others will include decision-making at meetings of IMCs Panels and of Boards of Examiners for Programmes.

## IMC or not IMC?

One of the aims of the new policy and procedures is to make criteria and processes clearer for everyone — students and staff. It was reportedly common for students to be encouraged to submit claims for anything they felt might have affected their study or assessment, on the grounds that there could be no harm done. This would result in wasted time and effort all round if some claims would simply be dismissed as having had no significant impact on assessments; moreover, without feedback no-one could learn for the future.

That is why there is a new clear description of events that “would be likely to be considered as valid IMCs if the timing were such as to have a significant impact on the student’s assessment(s)” in *What are Individual Mitigating Circumstances?* (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/documents/what-are-imcs.pdf>). Just as importantly, that document shows that some events or circumstances should more properly give rise to “consideration of the need to suspend study”, or recognition that “On-going or longer-term conditions or circumstances are not IMCs, and may be handled by disability support and/or special assessment arrangements: they are likely to give rise to valid IMC claims only if they first come to light or are diagnosed, or become unexpectedly and markedly worse, at assessment time”.

In a key paragraph about equitable treatment, the University now says clearly that:

By definition, the IMCs defined here relate to a student and her/his assessments. They are different not only because individual students might be differently affected by the same event, but also because an event affecting one individual might affect many or few of that student’s assessments. For this reason, there is no *tariff* whereby, for example, injury in a car accident counts as being worse than being ill with influenza: either might have affected one or many assessments for an individual student, so some element of discretion and judgement must be applied.  
(<http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/documents/imca.pdf>, IMCA, para. 14.)

Thus, the IMC report form (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/documents/imca-appendix-04.pdf>) requires a student to list affected units and to give a brief description of the impacts of the IMCs on the relevant assessments. It is this summary that will be considered and evaluated by the IMCs Panel.

So, to take an example that might fall squarely into the middle ground where the *IMC-or-not-IMC?* question could arise: should a student who has ‘flu’ in week 3 of semester 1 submit an IMC claim for all the examinations at the end of that semester? If this is most akin to the “difficulties and problems” of “normal life”, the student will have caught up on the work by the time of the examinations and will suffer no disadvantage — especially compared with all the other similar events that will happen to other people. Perhaps extensions for more immediate coursework deadlines will need to be sought, but those would level the assessment playing-field such that no subsequent consideration would be necessary. Unless there is something exceptional about this case, it will probably not be one for submitting an IMC claim. However, if the same event were to occur during revision week just before all the examinations, or during the examination period such that the student could not attend them, an IMC claim would be fully advisable.

Somewhere in between, there might be more uncertainty about what the appropriate course of action would be. But even then, there has to be a statement about *impact on assessment*. If a student makes a blanket claim of an effect on *all* of the end-of-semester examinations from an event that occurred in mid-semester, it will be likely either that the IMCs Panel will find there is no real *evidence* of this, or that, if there *is* some evidence, it will affect such a large proportion of the student’s assessments that the Board of Examiners for Programmes will be limited in its scope for action. A very significant interruption to study in mid-semester might more appropriately prompt suspension of study and/or deferred assessment arrangements.

None of this is new to the University, but by being clearer about definitions, different courses of action, and limitations in managing uncertainty at Boards of Examiners for Programmes, the policy and process will become clearer and more consistent for all.