

Individual mitigating circumstances (IMCs) and assessment — Briefing note no. 3



This is the third of a planned series of briefing notes. It is available at www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/imc-staff-briefings.htm alongside the other new guidance material on IMCs and assessment. This note addresses decision-making at meetings of Boards of Examiners for Programmes. Two others have elucidated when/whether an IMC claim should be submitted, and the pivotal role of IMCs Panels.

The nature of decision-making at Boards of Examiners for Programmes (BEP)

The increased clarity of the new guidance (especially in *What are Individual Mitigating Circumstances?* (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/documents/what-are-imcs.pdf>) means that fewer inappropriate IMC claims should be received, and those which are accepted by the IMCs Panel will be forwarded to the BEP with “summary descriptions and recommendations” as to the “extent and effects of their impacts on assessments” (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/documents/imca.pdf>, IMCA, paras 33 and 32). In addition, “Boards of Examiners for Programmes and departmental/school IMCs Panels must develop a mechanism for communicating custom and practice as to how the more common cases of IMCs are considered, to ensure consistency of treatment over time” (IMCA, para. 43).

Detailed criteria for the different decision-making moments of a programme (IMCA, Appendices 5–9) mean that there is now consistent guidance for use across the University about how BEPs should manage the uncertainties that are inherent in assessments affected by IMCs. There is still some discretion within the range of actions available: for example, BEPs have to be confident that a student who might benefit from the available relaxation of the requirements for progression will nonetheless be able to progress safely. Where the extent of the uncertainty becomes too great, there are rules to limit the scope of BEPs’ actions.

It is the BEPs that will determine what should happen in respect of the assessments for students affected by valid and significant IMCs. They cannot invent evidence for the student’s performance, so ultimately it might be that the best they can do is require the student to be assessed again as for the first attempt at another time when not be affected by the IMCs. Where the gaps in the evidence of the student’s capabilities are smaller, the Board may be able to allow the student to progress with amounts of supplementary assessment which will be different from normal, or make decisions on progression or awards with slightly adjusted parameters. Overall, while being sensitive to individual mitigating circumstances, Boards must ensure that the submission and acceptance of an IMC claim does not place a student at an advantage compared with other students, and that the standards required for University awards, including those accredited by external bodies, are maintained.

In summary, then, the BEPs should only be considering how to cope with the significant effects of valid IMCs claimed by students and accepted by the IMCs Panel. Designated Essential Units (DEUs) still have to be passed and no unit can be condoned outside the condonable range: beyond these stipulations the Board will consider the extent of the uncertainty based on proportions of failed, condonably-failed, and passed units.

Where units significantly affected by IMCs have been passed, it will be a matter of recording this so that this uncertainty can be taken into account when award calculations are made.

Where units have been failed or condonably failed, there are bands of proportions of affected units that determine how much flexibility the Board has for allowing additional supplementary assessments or disregarding overall stage average (OSA) requirements for progression. Where the programmes fall under the provisions of the New Framework for Assessment, SAMIS will help by identifying the range and proportion of affected units; outside the NFA, equivalent measures can be undertaken manually. In all these cases, it is a matter of using academic judgement within the prescribed scope of the flexibility that is allowed. Beyond this, IMCs can only lead to further opportunities for assessment in the hope that such opportunities will be free from further IMCs.

The detailed decision-making criteria for the various phases of a programme of study are set out in Appendices 6–11 of the IMCA document (<http://www.bath.ac.uk/registry/imc/documents/imca.pdf>).