

Individual Mitigating Circumstances Policy

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Purpose

This Policy outlines the University's principles and assigns responsibilities in regard to Individual Mitigating Circumstances (IMCs).

Scope

This Policy applies to IMCs for students enrolled on courses governed by the Undergraduate Assessment Regulations (UGAR) and Postgraduate Taught Assessment Regulations (PGTAR).

Principles

1. IMCs are unexpected circumstances which temporarily prevent a student from undertaking assessment, or which significantly impair a student's performance in assessment.
2. Where IMCs are present, the normal range of evidence on which to base judgements about the level of a student's achievement is not available. Mitigation is applied according to the extent of any uncertainty about the level of a student's achievement, both in terms of range across units and intensity within a unit.
3. Parameters specified in Assessment Regulations ensure that mitigation does not give a student an unfair advantage and that academic standards are upheld.
4. IMCs are not considered during marking and do not change marks.

Responsibilities

Senate is responsible for approving this Policy and any subsequent changes to it.

Education, Quality & Standards Committee is responsible for reviewing this Policy and recommending changes to Senate.

Boards of Examiners for Courses/Programmes are responsible for:

- Considering the extent and effects of the impact of IMCs on assessments
- Taking account of IMCs and applying mitigation as they deem appropriate when making academic judgements about the overall performance of students (within the parameters specified in Assessment Regulations)
- Ensuring that consistency of treatment is achieved between contemporary IMC claims and over time
- Ensuring confidentiality is observed where a student has requested this for an IMC claim

The Faculties/School are responsible for:

- Considering the extent and effects of the impact of IMCs on assessments
- Accepting IMC claims
- Ensuring that consistency of treatment is achieved between contemporary IMC claims and over time
- Ensuring confidentiality is observed where a student has requested this for an IMC claim

Academic Registry is responsible for providing advice and publishing Guidance on this Policy.

Annex 1: Individual Mitigating Circumstances Procedure

This Procedure outlines the detailed steps in the process for implementing the Individual Mitigating Circumstances Policy.

1. Students submit IMC claims

- Students must submit IMC claims within published timescales.
- Students submit IMC claims to their Director of Studies using the Individual Mitigating Circumstances form.
- Students should also submit appropriate corroborating evidence for their IMC claim.
- Students may request that confidentiality be respected regarding the nature of their claimed IMCs.

2. The Faculties/School consider IMC claims

- The Faculties/School convene IMC Panels to consider IMC claims.
- IMC Panels accept IMC claims which meet the University's definition of IMCs and are supported by appropriate corroborating evidence.
- The Faculties/School ensure that students are notified as to whether their IMC claims have been accepted or refused.
- IMCs Panels prepare summary descriptions and recommendations for each accepted IMC claim for Boards of Examiners for Courses/Programmes.

3. Boards of Examiners for Courses/Programmes take account of IMCs

Boards of Examiners for Courses/Programmes exercise their discretion in taking account of and applying mitigation for accepted IMCs when reaching decisions on progression and conferment of award (within the parameters specified in Assessment Regulations).

Guidance for the Faculties/School: Individual Mitigating Circumstances

Signposting

The Faculties/School should make clear to their students how IMC claims should be submitted to Directors of Studies or an appropriate alternative.

Course handbooks should direct students to the IMCs guidance on the University website.

Course handbooks should also direct students to the guidance on coursework extensions on the University website.

Advice to students

Directors of Studies should be available to advise students who are unsure about where the line might be drawn between the occasional difficulties, problems, and minor illnesses of normal life, and events that would be likely to be accepted as IMCs.

It may be appropriate for students to discuss a suitable way of summarizing the details of their IMCs claims with their Director of Studies.

Detailed guidance for students on submitting IMC claims is published on the University website and support is available from the Students' Union and Disability Service.

Late IMC claims

Directors of Studies should not allow the submission of IMC claims outside published timescales.

Where there exist circumstances affecting the performance of a student, of which the Boards of Examiners have not been made aware and which the candidate could not reasonably have been expected to have disclosed to the Director of Studies within published timescales, Directors of Studies should advise students that they have the option to make an Academic Appeal.

IMC Panels

IMC Panel members should be academic staff of the Faculties/School. Membership of IMC Panels should ensure that the best spread of experience and availability is brought to bear. Support for IMC Panels should be appropriate administrative staff.

IMCs Panels might need to schedule meetings periodically throughout the year, to respond to IMC claims as they arise and particularly just before the meeting of Board(s) of Examiners for Courses/Programmes. Alternatively, in some cases, consultation between members by correspondence might be appropriate.

Considering IMC claims

IMCs are **unexpected** circumstances:

- 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.

- There may be times when a deteriorating on-going or longer-term condition gives rise to an IMC claim beyond the disability support and/or special assessment arrangements that have already been put in place. Departments are expected to ensure that an appropriately balanced set of provisions will be used to assess the student fairly, in a way that neither advantages nor disadvantages the student compared with others.
- The ability to study effectively might also be affected by IMCs, but any on-going or longer-term inability to study should lead to consideration of the need to suspend study.
 - There may be times when a situation suddenly occurs that is serious enough to interrupt a student's study at the point when assessments are about to be undertaken. In such relatively rare cases, the student might apply to suspend their study and to take deferred assessments at the next normal opportunity for those assessments to be taken.
- Some assessments can be adjusted to avoid the need for IMC claims. Coursework submission deadlines can be varied for individual students who, for example, might fall ill shortly beforehand, whereas formal examinations are events which cannot have extensions to run a few days later for individual students. In relation to the submission of coursework, students are expected to seek an extension of the deadline for submission of coursework if affected by conditions or circumstances that would otherwise be likely to lead to the submission of a valid IMC claim after the coursework deadline.

IMCs temporarily prevent a student from undertaking assessment or **significantly** impair the student's performance in assessment:

- The measure of the significance of an IMC is the impact on assessment (not the impact on the student).
- Individual students might be differently affected by the same type of circumstances
- IMCs affecting one student might affect one or more of their assessments.
- 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.
- Normal life throws up difficulties and problems, and minor illnesses, that students must cope with during study in just the same way as everyone does at home or at work: students are expected to take appropriate steps to minimize the impact of these, since such events are unlikely to be accepted as valid IMCs.

IMC claims should only be accepted when supported by **appropriate corroborating evidence**.

Notifying students of accepted/rejected IMC claims

Feedback to students on the acceptance or rejection of IMC claims should be timely.

Where an IMC claim is accepted, the Faculties/School should make it clear to the student that decisions about progression and award are made by Board of Examiners for Courses/Programmes and that the acceptance of an IMC claim does not entitle the student to a particular outcome.

Where a claim is refused, Faculties/the School should explain the reasons for refusal.

Confidentiality

If a student requests that confidentiality be observed in respect of the nature of IMCs, information should be confined to the Director of Studies, the Faculty Assistant Registrar, the Chair of the Board of Examiners for Courses/Programmes, and the External Examiner(s).

Where a student has asked for confidentiality to be maintained, the following should reflect the broad details of the case:

- Minutes of IMCs Panels
- Summaries and recommendations prepared by IMCs Panels
- Minutes of Boards of Examiners for Programmes

For example, “short duration illness immediately before examination” or “a severe traumatic personal experience occurred early in Semester 2 which disrupted the student’s study for about four weeks”.

Ensuring consistency of treatment

Boards of Examiners for Courses/Programmes and IMCs Panels should develop a mechanism for communicating custom and practice as to how the more common cases of mitigating circumstances are considered, to ensure consistency of treatment of contemporary IMCs and over time. They should:

- Record their deliberations for future deliberation
- Make these records available to External Examiners, as appropriate
- Review their own procedures for effectiveness and fairness
- Consult with other colleagues or similar panels in other parts of the University if in need of benchmarking or comparison