



# **Special Circumstances Policy & Procedure**

## Special Circumstances Policy & Procedure

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## 1. SCOPE

- 1.1 This document records the University College of Osteopathy's (UCO) policy and procedure regarding the reporting and documenting of Special Circumstances that students believe have had a significant adverse effect on their continuous academic performance or their performance in specific examinations.
- 1.2 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Examination and In-Course Assessment Regulations and Academic Appeals Policy.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Students are expected to be able to deal with the inevitable ups and downs of life while studying, including minor illnesses and personal issues to ensure they do not affect your studies and your ability to complete assessments. However, sometimes you may experience more serious events that have a significant adverse effect on your ability to complete assessments. These are described as 'Special Circumstances'
- 2.2 This Policy describes how the UCO can support you by taking such circumstances into account

## 3. OFFICE OF THE INDEPENDENT ADJUDICATOR FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

- 3.1 The Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) runs an independent scheme to review student complaints. The University College of Osteopathy is a member of this scheme. If you are unhappy with the outcome, you may be able to ask the OIA to review your appeal. You can find more information about making a complaint to the OIA, what it can and can't look at and what it can do to put things right if something has gone wrong here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/students>.
- 3.2 You normally need to have completed the Special Circumstances procedures as well as our Appeals Procedure before you complain to the OIA. We will send you a letter called a "Completion of Procedures Letter" when you have reached the end of our Academic Appeal processes and there are no further steps you can take internally. If your request and any subsequent appeal is not upheld, we will issue you with a Completion of Procedures Letter automatically. If your request and any subsequent appeal is upheld or partly upheld, you can ask for a Completion of Procedures Letter if you want one. You can find more information about Completion of Procedures Letters and when you should expect to receive one here: <https://www.oiahe.org.uk/providers/completion-of-procedures-letters>.

## 4. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- 4.1 We define 'Special Circumstances' as circumstances that:
  - Have a significant impact on your ability to attend or complete assessments, and;
  - Are exceptional, and;
  - Are out of your control (you could not have prevented them), and;
  - Occurred during or shortly before the assessment in question.

4.2 If you are experiencing such circumstances, these may be taken into account by allowing:

- A slightly later submission date or
- The opportunity to submit the assessment with resit assessments, without penalty or
- Not attend an assessment and take it at the next available opportunity, without penalty

4.3 The UCO operates a 'fit-to-sit' policy for examinations, meaning if you attempt an examination, this is normally taken as your declaration that you are fit to do so. Therefore, if you feel your ability to complete an examination is being affected by Special circumstances you must:

- Not sit the examination
- Complete a Special Circumstances form

4.4 If you do attempt an examination, any subsequent Special Circumstances application would only be considered if accompanied by evidence that you were unable, or for valid reasons unwilling, to divulge information before sitting the assessment.

Only Special Circumstances reported through the proper procedure (see below) may be considered. The OIA give the following examples of circumstances that may or may not be accepted (these lists are not exhaustive):

Examples of circumstances likely to be accepted	Examples of circumstances likely to be excluded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serious short-term illness or injury</li> <li>• Worsening of an ongoing illness or disability, including mental health conditions</li> <li>• Symptoms of an infectious disease that could be harmful if passed on to others</li> <li>• Death or significant illness of a close family member or friend</li> <li>• Unexpected caring responsibilities for a family member or dependant</li> <li>• Significant personal or family crises leading to acute stress</li> <li>• Witnessing or experiencing a traumatic incident</li> <li>• A crime which has had a substantial impact on the student</li> <li>• Accommodation crisis such as eviction or the home becoming uninhabitable</li> <li>• An emergency or crisis that prevents the student from attending an exam or accessing an online assessment</li> <li>• A technical problem that prevents the student from accessing online teaching or assessment</li> <li>• Safeguarding concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holidays, house moves or other events that were planned or could reasonably have been expected</li> <li>• Minor illness such as common colds or hay fever, unless the symptoms are particularly severe</li> <li>• Assessments that are scheduled close together</li> <li>• Misreading the exam timetable</li> <li>• Poor time management</li> <li>• Minor transport disruption</li> <li>• Computer or printer failure where the student should have backed-up their work</li> <li>• Normal exam stress</li> <li>• Minor life events, unless the circumstances have had a disproportionate impact</li> </ul>

- 4.5 Those with long-term health conditions should complete a Confidential Student Health Assessment Form and submit this along with evidence to Student Support, who will discuss and review adjustments through the Occupational Health Committee. This form should be completed once per academic year. Once authorised, you will still need to submit Special Circumstances forms for any examination/assessment you cannot attend or complete, but you will not need to resubmit evidence. A long-term health condition is one that:
- Typically lasts longer than three months
  - Can be managed but may 'flare up'
- 4.6 The decision of the Examination Board regarding whether your Special Circumstances are taken into consideration regarding progression is final.

## 5. PROCEDURE FOR SUBMITTING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- 5.1 To submit Special Circumstances, you must:
- 5.2 Complete form SC1 ([Appendix 1](#)). Read the instructions carefully, complete the form in full and submit the relevant documentary evidence (if required). You will receive a confirmation that the form has been submitted. Please keep this safe for your records.
- 5.3 Special circumstances applications must normally be submitted either prior to or on the date of the examination / coursework submission deadline, although evidence can be submitted after the deadline if there is an unavoidable delay in obtaining this. Approval of special circumstances applications may be provisional pending receipt of supporting evidence.
- 5.4 Special Circumstances applications received after the examination or coursework deadline will not normally be considered, although exceptional circumstances for a delay in submitting an application can be considered. After this time, students will need to appeal their grade using the Academic Appeals Policy.

## 6. EVIDENCE OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

### 6.1 Self-Certification

- 6.1.1 You may self-certify circumstances that have affected you for five working days or fewer. You must complete a Special Circumstances form, stating your circumstances and how they have affected your ability to complete the assessment, but you do not need to provide evidence. Statements that do not demonstrate how your circumstances have affected your ability to complete the assessment may be rejected.
- 6.1.2 To be considered valid, reasons must meet the definition stated above in 4.1. Full details of your circumstances must be included on the form. Claims that do not meet this definition will be considered invalid.
- 6.1.3 Self-certified claims may only be used for coursework assessments and not examinations and will normally result in you being given an extension of five working days (one week).
- 6.1.4 You may submit a maximum of two self-certified special circumstances applications per academic year. If you have already submitted three applications this academic

year, you will be required to submit evidence and follow the process set out in 6.2 below.

6.1.5 Self-certification applications must only be used where absolutely necessary. You are expected to manage minor ailments, such as coughs and colds, yourself.

## **6.2 Evidence for circumstances affecting you for more than five working days**

6.2.1 For circumstances affecting you for five working days or longer, your Special Circumstances form, providing detailed information on the nature of your special circumstances, must be submitted with independent documentary evidence that confirms these (unless a valid Long Term Health Condition form has been received).

6.2.2 Evidence must be:

- Written and signed by an appropriately qualified professional
- On headed paper, signed and dated by the author
- Confirm specifically the circumstances
- In English (any translations should be undertaken by an accredited translator)
- Original (where documents have been scanned and emailed, you may be asked to provide original documents before circumstances can be validated)

6.3 Such evidence could include:

- Doctor's letter or fit note
- Hospital letter
- Crime reference number
- Statement from a counsellor or other appropriate professional
- Eviction notice

6.4 For claims to be considered valid, both the nature of the circumstances and the standard of evidence must meet the standards described in this policy.

6.5 If you submit three Special Circumstances claims in a six-month period, or if the number or pattern of your claims causes concern, will be referred to the Student Support team and may be referred to the Managed Support Plan Policy:

<https://www.uco.ac.uk/about-uco/who-we-are/policies-procedures-and-privacy>

## **7. POSSIBLE OUTCOMES**

### **7.1 Grades**

7.1.1 It is not normally possible to adjust any grading or progression decision, or waive an assessment, because of a decision to permit a special circumstances application. This is because of the requirement for students to demonstrate that they have met the academic standards for the degree. The usual outcome, therefore, will be an extension or deferral of an assessment although, exceptionally, the Board of Examiners may consider other outcomes.

## **7.2 Coursework:**

- 7.2.1 For self-certificated Special circumstances claims, you will normally be given a maximum extension of five working days.
- 7.2.2 For valid, evidenced Special circumstances claims, you will normally be granted an extension of two weeks to four weeks from the original deadline, where marking deadlines permit this. Extensions of more than four weeks will normally need to be agreed in conjunction with the relevant Unit Leader.
- 7.2.3 If you have already submitted your work, any penalty for late submission will be waived.
- 7.2.4 If your circumstances are such that it would not be possible to submit work within the extended deadline, or the marking deadlines preclude an extension in line with section 7.2.2, you may be granted the opportunity to resubmit at the next available opportunity (normally during the summer resit period), without penalty.
- 7.2.5 You will be advised of the outcome of your claim no later than 10 working days from the submission of an application, this is a maximum and in practice decisions will normally be made earlier than this. This decision may be provisional if evidence is still outstanding. If successful, your resubmission deadline will be confirmed in this email. If unsuccessful, students are able to submit one week after the deadline, capped at a marginal pass.

## **7.3 Examinations**

- 7.3.1 For valid, evidenced Special Circumstances claims, you will normally be given the opportunity to take the assessment at the next available opportunity (normally during the resit period), without penalty.
- 7.3.2 You will be advised of the outcome of your claim no later than 10 working days from the submission of an application, this is a maximum and in practice decisions will normally be made earlier than this. This decision may be provisional if evidence is still outstanding. Resit examination schedules will be confirmed after the main Board of Examiners meetings, although the overall summer resit examination period dates will be communicated earlier in the year by SharePoint.

## **8. COMMUNICATING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES TO BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

- 8.1 Boards of Examiners are normally notified that you have submitted Special Circumstances with a note of “SC” next to your name on final results spreadsheets, with your permission (evidenced by your agreement on form SC1). No further details will be given.

## **9. RETAINING SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FORMS & DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE**

- 9.1 Special Circumstances forms and documentary evidence will be kept in a separate confidential file within the Student Services Department for the duration of the academic year plus one year in case of review by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.
- 9.2 You are recommended to keep a copy of all Special Circumstances forms and documentary evidence that you submit.

## 10. APPEAL PROCESS

- 10.1 If your special circumstances have been rejected and you are within seven days of an examination date/assessment deadline, you may submit further evidence for consideration as part of an appeal, having reviewed the grounds for the rejection of your application. Your appeal statement and any further evidence should be submitted to [StudentSupport@uco.ac.uk](mailto:StudentSupport@uco.ac.uk).
- 10.2 After seven days of the examination date/coursework deadline, any appeal against a decision to award a fail or capped grade as a result of the rejection of a Special Circumstances claim will be considered through the Academic Appeals Process, which can be found here.



## Appendix 1: Form SC1 (Special Circumstances Form)

[Note: To be completed on an Electronic Form]

This form should be used only to inform the UCO of serious circumstances that have adversely affected your examination performance/ability to submit an assessment.

Please ensure you have read and understood the Special Circumstances Policy available here (insert policy link) (Tick box)

First Name:

Surname:

Course:

Year of Study:

Assessment(s) Affected & Due Date:

Details of the circumstances which have adversely affected my examination/assessment performance. Please provide a detailed description of your circumstances and how these have affected the affected assessment.

Please attach corroborating documentary evidence (if applicable). Please ensure the dates of your evidence relate to the assessment dates. If your evidence is not immediately available, please explain why in the box above. Forms without evidence will only be considered for self-certificated extensions in line with the Special Circumstances Policy.

I wish to use the information and evidence provided beyond the current academic year:  
Yes/No

What outcome are you hoping to achieve?

Self-certified Extension (1 week) / Extension (2 week)/ Extension (4 week) / Deferral / Other (please detail)

I wish to above information to be made available to the Board of Examiners: Yes/No

You will receive a confirmation of this submission by email. Please keep this for your records.

*The form must arrive no later than seven days after the examination/coursework deadline concerned. Forms that arrive later will not be considered.*

**CORE DOCUMENTATION RECORD PAGE**

## Special Circumstances Policy & Procedure

<b>Version number</b>	<b>Dates produced and approved (include committee)</b>	<b>Reason for production/ revision</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>	<b>Proposed next review date and approval required</b>
V1.0	Aug 2012 Academic Council	Update to Previous Version	Academic Registrar	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Aug 2013
V2.0	Jun 2013 Academic Council	Annual Review Minor Amendments to document the current procedure to underpin existing practice.	Academic Registrar	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Jun 2015
V3.0	Sep 2016 Academic Council	Biennial Review Major Amendment to Include coursework extension and exam deferral details.	Academic Registrar	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	Sep 2018
V4.0	Aug 2017 PRAG Chair	Administrative Amendments to update institution name change from British School of Osteopathy to University College of Osteopathy.	Academic Registrar	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Intranet	2019-2020
V5.0	Jul 2022 Academic Council	Major amendment to incorporate OIA guidance.	Registrar	All master versions will be held in: J:\0 Quality Team - Core Documentation Website	Jul 2025

**Equality Impact**

Positive equality impact (i.e. the policy/procedure/guideline significantly reduces inequalities)

Neutral equality impact (i.e. no significant effect)

Negative equality impact (i.e. increasing inequalities)

X

**If you have any feedback or suggestions for enhancing this policy, please email your comments to: [quality@uco.ac.uk](mailto:quality@uco.ac.uk)**