

Zhejiang University-University of Edinburgh Institute Special Circumstance Policy

Purpose of Policy

The Zhejiang University-University of Edinburgh Institute (ZJU-UoE Institute) should respond in an equitable and consistent way to requests from students for special circumstances to be taken into consideration for course, progression and award decisions made by Boards of Examiners.

Overview

The policy provides a definition of what constitutes special circumstances, sets out the guiding principles for the consideration of special circumstances, the role of the Special Circumstances Committee and the role of a Board of Examiners in dealing with special circumstances. It also provides details of the actions Boards of Examiners may take in response to special circumstances requests. The policy meets the same expectations as the University of Edinburgh Special Circumstances Policy and is derived from that policy. The University of Edinburgh Special Circumstances Policy is approved by the University of Edinburgh Curriculum and Student Progression Committee:

<http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/policies-regulations/learning-and-assessment>

Scope: Mandatory Policy

The policy applies to undergraduate students.

Contact Officer ZJU-UoE Academic Administrator

Document control

Date Approved	Date Starts:	Amendments:	Next review:
15.12.16	September 2016	N/A	June 2018

Section responsible for policy maintenance and review ZJU-UoE Institute Academic Administrator

Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations

ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulations

ZJU-UoE Institute Board of Examiner Guidance

International Campus Detailed Regulations and ZJU-UoE Institute Supplementary Regulations

ZJU-UoE Institute Special Circumstances Form

ZJU-UoE Regulations, Policies and Guidance referred to throughout this document are located at:

<http://zjue.intl.zju.edu.cn/en/policies-regulations>

If you require this document in an alternative format please email ZJU-UoE Institute Academic Administrator (uoec@zju.edu.cn)

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The ZJU-UoE Institute is committed to supporting its students. Special Circumstances Committees (SCCs) will seek to take account of illness, accident or other circumstances beyond students' control that have adversely affected their performance in assessment.

2 Definitions of special circumstances

- 2.1 Special circumstances are circumstances which are exceptional for the individual student, are beyond that student's control and for which there is sufficient evidence to show that they had a significant adverse impact on the student's performance in an assessment, or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for a scheduled assessment.

- 2.2 Examples of circumstances that a SCC is likely to accept include:

- Significant short-term physical illness or injury;
- Significant short-term mental ill-health;
- A long-term or chronic physical health condition, for which the University has not already made a reasonable adjustment;
- A long-term or chronic mental health condition, for which the University has not already made a reasonable adjustment;
- Bereavement or serious illness of a person with whom the student has a close relationship;
- A long-term relationship breakdown, such as a marriage;
- Victim of a crime which is likely to have significant emotional impact; Military conflict, natural disaster, or extreme weather conditions.

- 2.3 Examples of circumstances that a SCC is unlikely to accept include:

- A long-term or chronic health condition (including mental ill-health) for which the University has already made a reasonable adjustment;
- A minor short-term illness or injury (e.g. a common cold), which would not reasonably have had a significant adverse impact on assessment;
- Occasional low mood, stress or anxiety;
- Circumstances which were foreseeable or preventable;
- Holidays;
- Financial issues;
- Pressure of academic work (unless this contributes to ill-health);
- Poor time-management;
- Lack of awareness of dates or times of assessment submission or examination;
- Failure, loss or theft of data, a computer or other equipment;
- Commitments to paid or voluntary employment;
- Death of a pet.

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3 Requesting consideration of special circumstances

- 3.1 It is the responsibility of students to submit their request for consideration of special circumstances to the Convener of the relevant Special Circumstances Committee as soon as possible and not more than a week after the student's final assessment for the semester. SCCs will only consider accepting submissions after this deadline where students provide evidence of exceptional reasons for having been unable to submit on time.
- 3.2 Students should submit the Special Circumstances form in consultation with their Academic Advisor. In the form they should describe the circumstances, state when the circumstances affected them, and all assessments and courses affected. Students should ensure that they provide sufficient documentary evidence (see Section 6 below). The form is available on the ZJU-UoE website.

4 Confidentiality

- 4.1 Schools will treat the information provided by students as confidential, and will only share it with staff and External Examiners who have a legitimate need to access the information in order to consider the student's case or to provide students with support.

5 Evidence to support special circumstances cases

- 5.1 In order for a SCC to support a student's special circumstances case, the SCC must be satisfied that the student has provided sufficient evidence regarding the circumstances and the impact they had on the student's performance in an assessment.
- 5.2 The following can be acceptable forms of evidence, although some will carry greater weight than others:

Greater weight:

- An independent assessment of the student's illness by a medical practitioner, obtained at or immediately after the time of the circumstances;
- Evidence from another professional service, obtained at or immediately after the time of the circumstances;
- Death certificate, order of service, or newspaper death announcement;
- Written accounts from University staff who have directly witnessed the circumstances, e.g. Academic Advisors;
- Written account from an independent third party from outside the University who directly witnessed the circumstances, e.g. notary;
- Documentary evidence from other sources, e.g. police report, legal documents.

Less weight:

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- Written account from University staff in whom the student has confided but who have not directly witnessed the circumstances;
- Medical certification, or evidence from other professional services, which merely restates the student's own account rather than providing an independent assessment of the student's illness;
- Written account from the student's family or friends who have directly witnessed the circumstances;
- Student's own word, where the student provides good reason for not providing corroborating evidence from a third party (only admissible for circumstances lasting up to seven days).

5.3 The following are unlikely to be acceptable forms of evidence:

- Medical certification, or evidence from other professional services, obtained a significant period of time after the circumstances;
- Written accounts from the student's family or friends, if they have not directly witnessed the submitted circumstances.

5.4 Where possible, students should provide corroborating evidence from a third party. In some circumstances, where the student has demonstrated good reason for not providing corroborating evidence from a third party, the student's own account can be sufficient evidence. However, for circumstances lasting more than seven days, students should always provide corroborating evidence.

5.5 In weighing the evidence, the SCC should consider what evidence it was reasonable for the student to have obtained.

5.6 The strength of evidence required to support a student's special circumstances case is proportionate to the volume of assessment affected. So, if the submitted circumstances affected a single component of assessment with a relatively low weighting for a 5 ZJU credit course, the SCC may be satisfied with relatively modest evidence, whereas if the submitted circumstances affected all components of assessment for a 10 ZJU credit course the SCC would require stronger evidence.

5.7 If any supporting documents are submitted in languages other than English, students may be required to provide a certified English translation.

6 Membership and Operation of the Special Circumstances Committee

6.1 The ZJU-UoE Institute must have a Special Circumstances Committee (SCC) to consider requests for consideration of special circumstances and report to its Boards of Examiners in relation to students on its courses and taught programmes. The ZJU-UoE Institute may set up one SCC per Board of Examiners or SCCs which cover a number of Boards of Examiners.

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- 6.2 To be quorate, a SCC will consist of an academic Convener along with at least two other academic members of staff. Schools can include additional members, including professional support staff.
- 6.3 If a Board is very small and wishes to operate as its own SCC, this requires approval from the University of Edinburgh College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine. The Board sets up a SCC as a sub-committee of the Board. The Convener of the Board of Examiners may also convene the SCC but this is not a requirement.
- 6.4 SCCs will meet before the relevant Board of Examiners meetings take place. SCCs can also conduct business by correspondence where it is necessary to consider cases submitted after the scheduled SCC meeting, as long as all decisions are confirmed by a quorate membership (see 6.2).
- 6.5 SCCs will not consider information relating to students' marks when making a decision on Special Circumstances.

7 Roles of Special Circumstances Committees and Boards of Examiners

- 7.1 In relation to each request for consideration of special circumstances, taking into account all information available to it, the Special Circumstances Committee determines:
- Whether there is sufficient evidence regarding the submitted circumstances and their impact on the student's performance in an assessment;
 - Whether the submitted special circumstances were exceptional for the individual student, whether they were beyond the student's control, and whether it is reasonable to conclude that they would have adversely affected the student's performance in an assessment (with reference to Section 2);
 - When the submitted special circumstances happened;
 - Exactly what impact the submitted special circumstances had on the student's performance in an assessment, for example, whether they had an adverse impact on assessment(s) or resulted in non-attendance or a non-submission for relevant scheduled assessment(s).
- 7.2 Having considered these specific issues, the SCC will make a summary decision regarding whether the relevant Board of Examiners should consider taking action regarding the student's course outcome or progression / award decision in the light of the student's special circumstances.
- 7.3 The Special Circumstances Committee will provide a written report of its decisions on these matters to the relevant Board of Examiners. The decisions

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made by a Special Circumstances Committee on these matters are **binding** on a Board of Examiners, and on other bodies (for example, Colleges) that may have to decide on appropriate action in relation to the student's course outcome or progression / award decision.

- 7.4 The Special Circumstances Committee can also make recommendations to the Board of Examiners regarding the appropriate course outcome or progression / award decision to take, in the light of the reported special circumstances. The SCC could either make a specific recommendation or recommend a range of options to the Board of Examiners. These recommendations would not, however, be binding on the Board of Examiners.
- 7.5 When considering special circumstances cases, SCCs should take into account whether students were granted permission for a coursework extension as a result of the same special circumstances (see ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulation 28).

8 Special circumstances: general points about Board of Examiners decisions

- 8.1 In coming to a decision where special circumstances are considered, Boards of Examiners should act in the best academic interest of the student without disadvantage or advantage in relation to their peers.

9 Special circumstances: decisions regarding course outcomes

- 9.1 Where the SCC has concluded that the Board of Examiners should consider taking action in the light of the student's special circumstances, the relevant Board of Examiners decides on one of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the specific determinations of the SCC regarding the case, and any recommendations for action that the SCC may have made.
- 9.2 For certain categories of decision, the Board will need to seek approval for the action from the relevant University of Edinburgh College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine committee. Where this is necessary, this is indicated below.

Action	College approval required?
a) No action – for example, circumstances already addressed through actions already taken	No
b) No action at course level; flag for consideration in relation to progression or award decision	No
c) Disregard penalties for late submission of coursework	No

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d) Disregard missing component(s) and derive overall mark/grade from completed work (see 9.3)	No
e) Disregard unreliable component(s) and derive overall mark from completed work if to the student's benefit (see 9.3)	No
f) For pre-Honours courses, if the student has failed the course, allow further re-assessment attempts in line with ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulation 27	No
g) For pre-Honours courses, record the course as a 'null sit', with the option of allowing the student to be examined at a subsequent diet, and / or to submit missing assessment and / or repeat some or all assessments, on a first sit basis	No
h) For Honours courses, record the course as a 'null sit', with the option of requiring the student to be examined at a subsequent diet, and / or to submit missing assessment and / or repeat some or all assessments, on a first sit basis	No - If in current session (August resits count as the current session) Yes – College approval required if in next session
i) In exceptional cases, permit the student to take specially prepared alternative assessments, including oral assessment	Yes – College approval required
j) If course result is borderline (within 2 percentage points of the pass mark), award pass	No

9.3 Where marks/grades for specific components of assessment are missing or deemed unreliable, a Board of Examiners can only derive an overall mark/grade for the course from the existing assessed work if it is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence of attainment of the Learning Outcomes in other components of the course.

9.4 Boards of Examiners cannot adjust marks / grades as a consequence of special circumstances.

10 Special circumstances: decisions regarding progression and award

10.1 Where the SCC has concluded that the Board of Examiners should consider taking action in the light of the student's special circumstances, the relevant Board of Examiners (including Progression Boards) decides on one of the options set out in the table below, taking into account the specific determinations of the SCC regarding the case, and any recommendations for action that the SCC may have made.

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- 10.2 For certain categories of decision, the Board will need to seek approval for the action from the relevant College committee. For very exceptional actions, the relevant University of Edinburgh College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine committee would need to seek approval for the action from the University of Edinburgh Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee (CSPC).

Action	College or CSPC approval required?
a) No further action – for example, adequate action already taken in relation to the outcome of individual course(s);	No
b) For Honours level year of programme, if the student has satisfied requirements in line with ZJU-UoE Institute Taught Assessment Regulation 52, award credit on aggregate for relevant courses of that year of the degree programme	No
c) For postgraduate taught programmes, if the student has satisfied requirements in line with Taught Assessment Regulation 54, award credit on aggregate for relevant courses	No
d) Where a mark for a course is missing or deemed unreliable, exclude the affected course(s) from the classification calculation	No
e) Take account of special circumstances for progression, degree classification, award of merit/distinction, and/or award	No
f) Exceptionally, to allow a student to graduate without the required number and / or level of credits for the degree	Yes – College and CSPC approval required

- 10.3 For decisions regarding University of Edinburgh *aegrotat* degrees and posthumous degrees, see the relevant International Campus Detailed Regulations: ZJU-UoE Institute Supplementary Regulations.

11 Notifying students of the outcomes of requests for consideration of special circumstances

- 11.1 Within one week of the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners decision, the ZJU-UoE Institute will notify students of the decision regarding their special circumstances request. The ZJU-UoE Institute will also inform the student's Academic Advisor of the decision.

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12 Reporting and maintaining records on requests for consideration of Special Circumstances

- 12.1 The ZJU-UoE Institute will minute SCC meetings (including meetings conducted by correspondence), recording all decisions in the minutes. Where the SCC decides not to support the request for consideration of special circumstances, the ZJU-UoE Institute will minute the reason for this decision.
- 12.2 The SCC will report its decisions and recommendations to the Board of Examiners in as concise a form as is consistent with clarity and the student's interest, where possible maintaining the anonymity of the student.

15 December 2016