

# Special Consideration

## Self-help Resources for dealing with impacts on your studies

Life is unpredictable. Shizz happens - so during your time at uni it is very likely you will encounter an unexpected impact on your studies. You may also have an ongoing impact on your capacity to study which will need to be accommodated.

That's where Special Consideration should come in handy.

Special Consideration is meant to grant a student an assessment adjustment if they have been disadvantaged by their circumstances. It is intended to enable eligible students to continue to successfully progress throughout their degree without compromising the integrity of assessment.

There are two avenues for Special Consideration, either your circumstances are unexpected or your circumstances are ongoing. To be eligible for either of these avenues, your circumstances must be exceptional or extenuating and outside of your control. Documentation is essential in order to verify your circumstances.

On these pages you will find the following information:

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If the issue impacting you is **ongoing** you should consider applying for Special Consideration— Ongoing Support, which is a separate process you can find out about on this webpage.

If you're not sure if Special Consideration is what you should pursue, then we suggest you check out the [Special Consideration or Fee Remission page](#) to check if there are any other avenues available to you.

You can always [contact us](#) to get more detailed advice on your situation.

## Am I eligible for Special Consideration?

To be eligible for Special Consideration you must be able to show that you were impacted by *exceptional* or *extenuating* circumstances and that they were outside of your control. Depending on the type of Special Consideration you are applying for, you must also show either that your situation is ongoing or alternatively, it was unexpected.

The eligibility criteria are set out in the [Assessment and Results Policy](#). Section 4.117 states that Special Consideration is available if a student is genuinely and significantly affected by:

- exceptional and extenuating circumstances outside the student's control, or
- events or circumstances of national or state significance within cultural, sporting, military, emergency service or legal domains which require a student's participation, or
- faculty sanctioned academic activities; for example, presenting at a conference.

The policy goes on to provide a non-exhaustive list of grounds for Special Consideration, including:

- acute illness or serious injury on the day of an examination or during the period immediately leading up to an examination or assessment due date
- bereavement or other serious emotional disturbance, e.g. witnessing or being the victim of a serious crime, sudden loss of accommodation or family violence
- hardship or trauma such as a car accident, sudden loss of income, or severe disruption to domestic arrangements, and/or
- significant religious or cultural reasons which impact a student's ability to undertake or complete assessment on a particular day(s) or at a particular time(s)

If your circumstances do not fall into any of these categories, it does not *necessarily* mean that it is out of scope for Special Consideration. If in doubt, you should [contact us](#) to discuss your situation.

## My circumstances were unexpected

If you had no way of anticipating that you would be affected, you should apply for **Special Consideration – Unexpected Circumstances**. This is to accommodate matters that were unforeseen or sudden in nature. For example, instances where you were on track to complete an assignment but became unwell, or you were going fine and then became sick in the days leading up to your exam and this impacted your ability to study for or sit the exam.

### Timing

University applications for Special Consideration must be made within four working days of the examination date or assessment due date. If you don't apply within this timeframe, then you can submit a late application, but there are a few things you should be aware of with this. You can look at how to [address late applications](#) below.

## My circumstances are ongoing or chronic

If your circumstances will likely exceed six weeks, then you should apply for **Special Consideration – Ongoing Support**. For example, if you have a known medical condition and it is likely to disrupt your ability to complete assessments during semester. There are many reasons why students may need academic adjustments in order to satisfy the subject requirements — perhaps your condition means you need extra time to complete an exam, or you're unable to meet the minimum attendance requirements during semester. Special Consideration — Ongoing Support exists to enable students to fully participate in their education.

### Timing

If you are applying for Special Consideration — Ongoing Support, it is recommended that you apply for this *as soon as possible* in order to have adjustments put in place early. There can be specific deadlines for alternative assessment arrangements. It is best to contact [Student Equity and Disability Support \(SEDS\)](#) as soon as you start your degree, or learn of your ongoing condition, in order to understand what is required with an application in your situation. The later you leave it, the more difficult it may be for the University to put adjustments in place.

## What kind of documentation do I need?

Documentation is necessary in order to verify your circumstances. The University will review the documentation you provide to assess your application and determine whether it meets the criteria set out in the policy. [SEDS](#) are responsible for determining your eligibility for Special Consideration.

The most common reason that we see applications for Special Consideration deemed ineligible by [SEDS](#) is due to a lack of the appropriate supporting documentation to verify your circumstances. Providing adequate documentation can be a rather complex process, and unfortunately, this often leaves genuine applicants frustrated and confused.

There are a few things to note about the documentation you should include in your application:

- your documentation must be formal. This means it must be from a professional and independent source that is relevant to your situation, and in some instances a statutory declaration will be acceptable.
- the documentation needs to clearly state the dates that you were severely impacted or indicate that your condition is ongoing if applicable.
- you do not need to provide any details of your specific circumstances or name your condition or symptoms if you are applying for illness. It is entirely sufficient for your health care professional (or other independent source of relevant documentation) to state that they have objectively assessed you to be severely impacted by the circumstances which forms the basis of your application.
- while you don't need to provide details, the documents do need to specifically outline the impact those circumstances had on your capacity to complete or prepare for assessment. That is, it needs to demonstrate how it impacted your capacity to do the assessment task in question. For instance, if you became unwell in the days before an exam you don't have to say what type of illness you had or the symptoms, but you do need to provide documentation that outlines how you were severely impacted, and to what extent. For example, if you were unable to prepare for your exam due to illness, then this is what should be captured in your documentation.

### **Physical and/or Mental Illness Documentation**

It is important to note that a standard medical certificate will likely be deemed ineligible for Special Consideration. If your circumstances are related to physical or mental health issues, the recommended documentation is an Health Professional Report (HPR) Form. There are two kinds of HPR forms, so make sure you pick the right one for your application (either [Unexpected Circumstances or Ongoing Support](#)). These forms are designed to help your health care practitioner to supply the details required by [SEDS](#) to assess the application as eligible or not.

You will notice the form does not leave much space for your practitioner to detail your illness – that's because they only need to say you are unwell or suffering a condition. The important parts on the form are:

- the date of your consultation or appointment,
- the exact period of impact (using dates), and
- the ways you are impacted in relation to the assessment tasks in question.

The dates need to align with the timing of the affected assessment, and the impacts will determine whether you have been impacted sufficiently to meet the threshold for eligibility.

Generally, a HPR form completed by your health practitioner is the minimum requirement for documentation if you are applying on medical grounds, and if you can obtain additional documentation that expands on your situation (i.e. a letter from your health practitioner on letterhead) then this would help, but is not necessary.

If you are unable provide documentation in the form of a HPR, then you need to make sure the person verifying your incapacity at least addresses the dates of impact, and the ways you are impacted. In most cases a generic medical certificate will not be accepted.

Here's an example:

*Kang has not been himself. He has been very unwell in the lead up to, and during some of the exam period. As a result he an exam on 19 October which he was unable to sit. He goes to his doctor the next day, who examines him and diagnoses an illness which she believes, in her medical opinion, would affect Kang's concentration and capacity to prepare for and attend the exam for the period of the illness. The doctor does not fill out an HPR form, instead she provides a medical certificate.*

*Often health care professionals will write vague things like: "Kang has suffered from a condition this semester and it has impacted on his studies, so I support his application for Special Consideration". This makes it very difficult for SEDS to assess against the criteria for Special Consideration, and they may ultimately deem the application ineligible because it lacks specifics identifying the period of impact and the type of impact.*

*SEDS needs to know when Kang suffered this condition – between what dates was it most severe — and how the condition impact on Kang's assessment.*

*So, a better supporting letter would be phrased: "I examined Kang today on 20 October 2022. I have confirmed that Kang has suffered a medical condition, which significantly impacted him between 16 October through to 20 October. During this time he was unable to concentrate on his studies, and this caused a significant and unexpected disruption to Kang. As a result, Kang was unable to prepare for and sit his exam on 19 October while suffering from this condition.*

## Other forms of documentation

For other circumstances, the documentation you provide is highly specific to the issue at hand. Nevertheless, it must be formal and independent in nature, and display a clear date. For instance, if you suffered a death of a loved one a death certificate or funeral notice are often acceptable.

## A note on statutory declarations

A statutory declaration is a statement that you declare to be true which must be written and signed by you, and witnessed by an authorised witness. A list of who is considered an authorised witness can be found [here](#). Declaring false information in a statutory declaration is a criminal offence. It is also likely to attract an allegation of academic misconduct from the University, for which the most common penalty is expulsion. The University states that statutory declarations are acceptable in some circumstances, however, we have found SEDS will not accept a statutory declaration as the sole form of supporting documentation for an application. If it is not a health-related condition which can be evidenced via the HPR form, then you will need to source some other independent verification. For example, victims of crime can use a police report, students impacted by religious or cultural observance can use a letter from a religious or community leader. Remember that any support letters need to be on letterhead.

## What adjustments are available to students, if successful?

The adjustments available to students with successful Special Consideration applications are highly dependent on the student's circumstances. Adjustments are decided upon in collaboration with the relevant Faculty for the assessment/s in the application, and can be granted for individual assessment tasks, multiple assessments in a teaching block, or for multiple subjects (if you've been granted an academic adjustment plan). It's important to note, *there are no Special Consideration adjustments that grant mark adjustments or remarking.*

Some examples of assessment adjustments include:

- a deferral, extension or resubmission of assessment.
- an approval of alternate arrangements for assessment.
- an additional assessment.
- a re-weighting of the assessment, where this does not affect learning outcomes or academic standards (applies to shorter assessments only).
- an option to recomplete one or more assessment tasks.
- authorisation for late withdrawal from a subject.

## A note on special exams

The results you receive for the special exam will **replace** the prior original exam, regardless of whether you do better or worse in the special. If you accept a special exam offered to you as an

adjustment for Special Consideration, you need to sit that exam or notify SEDS that you have changed your mind *before* the date of the special exam. If you are due to sit it and do not do so, you will get **zero**. The special exam will always be different from the original, so don't rely on the fact that you know what the original exam was like to study (or not study!) for the special. You should study for special exams as though *anything taught during semester* could be in it.

## What is the application process?

Timely applications are those submitted within four business days after the examination or assessment due date. You can lodge timely applications [online](#). If you cannot submit your supporting documentation at the time of your application, you have up to five working days following submission of the application to submit any supporting documents. Once you have submitted an application for Special Consideration, including all supporting documentation, you should receive an outcome within five working days. Hopefully your application will be approved, and an appropriate adjustment will be arranged. However, should your application be deemed ineligible, there are further avenues available to challenge the decision (discussed [below](#)).

## What do I do if I miss the application deadline?

Timely applications are those submitted within four working days of the relevant assessment. A late application is anything after this timeframe. You may still submit a late application, however generally – the later it is – the harder it gets.

Late applications will be considered if there are sufficient grounds to justify lodging an application outside the standard timeframe. To establish this, you must demonstrate how, and to what extent, you were prevented from or unable to apply within the four-day deadline. You must show this *in addition* to your substantive application for the relevant assessment. For example, if you were too unwell to sit your exam and continued to be too unwell to apply for Special Consideration for six days after the exam, you could put in a late application with formal documentation showing you were sick over the assessment period and during the Special Consideration application timeframe.

Put simply, to make a late application you need to address three things, you must:

1. show that you understand the 'ideal path' for a timely submission is within four working days,
2. clearly indicate how your situation demonstrates sufficient extenuating circumstances in relation to this particular assessment to demonstrate your eligibility under the criteria for Special Consideration, and
3. address the gap between the due date for the assessment and your attempt at seeking Special Consideration for it.

Although there is no official distinction, applications **after the finalisation of results** require a very high threshold of extenuating circumstances to be evidenced before they will be accepted. Simply being unaware of the deadlines is insufficient in itself, as all students are considered to have a responsibility to inform themselves of their obligations under relevant University policies.

Late applications can be made via the [online](#) form if they relate to the current semester, or one semester prior. If an application is any later than that, then you will need to email your request directly to SEDS.

To assist you with this process, we have a template for your draft request [here](#). This includes the email address of where to send your late application if the online form is not available. Please [contact us](#) if you require any assistance framing your late application.

## What if my application is unsuccessful?

If your application for Special Consideration is unsuccessful, you can potentially request a Review of the initial decision. You can only request a review once. You must request the Review within five working days of the outcome notification.

To request a Review, you must make an argument for why a review is needed based on the reasons that your application was initially rejected. To do this you must first read your outcome email carefully. The most common reasons for an application being rejected are:

- insufficient impact.
- late application not accepted.
- dates of impact do not correlate with the timing of the assessment task.
- supporting documentation does not adequately verify your circumstances.
- your circumstances are deemed to be “ongoing”, rather than “unexpected” or “short term”.
- application submitted after the release of results.

You may only request a Review if you have a legitimate belief that:

- a decision was made without appropriate consideration of facts, evidence or circumstances, or
- there was failure to adhere to appropriate or relevant published policies and procedures, or
- a penalty applied to you which you deemed to be inappropriate, or
- you experienced unfair treatment, prejudice or bias.

If any of these grounds for a review apply to your situation, you can proceed with a Review. You will have to indicate the grounds on which you are basing your request, provide reasons why the initial decision should be overturned, and provide new or further supporting

documentation which addresses your circumstances.

Within five working days, you will get one of the following outcomes:

- successful review (original decision overturned): your application for review was successful and your assessment options will be reconsidered by your Faculty. Huzzah!

Or...

- unsuccessful review (original decision upheld): your application for review was not successful and your original Special Consideration outcome is unchanged. Dang...

## What if my application review is unsuccessful?

If your request for a review is unsuccessful, and you still believe you have a legitimate claim for Special Consideration, you can escalate the matter to a formal Grievance in accordance with the [Student Complaints and Grievances Policy](#).

Generally, a very clear new support letter or HPR form will be required to address the reasons the application has been assessed as ineligible. We can advise you on any ways that you may be able to strengthen your Grievance letter before submission. We have a [Special Consideration Grievance template](#). Once you have used our template to draft a Grievance letter, it would be a really good idea to send it to us for [feedback](#) (along with copies of all the previous documentation relating to the application).

You can find out more about the Grievance process [here](#).

## Are there any other avenues to pursue this if my Grievance is not successful?

And finally, if your Grievance is not upheld, you can potentially Appeal to the Academic Board.

We can advise on your prospects for an appeal, the grounds upon which it could be based, and the best way to convey your arguments. You can get some guidance to make a start yourself on our [Appeals to the Academic Board page](#), before you [contact us](#) for advice.

## Helpful resources and relevant University policy

- [Contact UMSU Advocacy Service](#)
- [Late Special Consideration template](#)
- [Special Consideration Grievance template](#)
- [Our short guide to Special Consideration](#)
- [Assessment and Results Policy](#)
- [Student Complaints and Grievances Policy](#)
- [Student Appeals Policy](#)