



University of  
St Andrews

## Assessment policies and procedures

<b>Document type</b>	<b>Policy</b>
<b>Scope (applies to)</b>	UG and PGT students
<b>Applicability date</b>	29/09/2013
<b>Review / Expiry date</b>	31/07/2023
<b>Approved date</b>	14/08/2020
<b>Approver</b>	Academic Council
<b>Document owner</b>	Administrative Officer
<b>School / unit</b>	Office of the Principal
<b>Document status</b>	Published
<b>Information classification</b>	Public
<b>Equality impact assessment</b>	None
<b>Key terms</b>	Academic policies/Assessment, examination and award
<b>Purpose</b>	This policy relates to the process of assessment and role of external examiners, assessment irregularities, deferred assessment, S Coding and the procedure for students requesting academic adjustments due to exceptional circumstances.

<b>Version number</b>	<b>Purpose / changes</b>	<b>Document status</b>	<b>Author of changes, role and school / unit</b>	<b>Date</b>
01	Updates made to policy	Updated	-	Dec 2015
02	Addition of wording to confirm that any formal decisions made within Schools relating to a student's progression must be followed up in writing and via a formal communication	Updated	-	July 2016

03	Updates to S-Coding in Semester 2 of AY 2019/20	Updated	Kevin McNamara	April 2020
04	Additional paragraph inserted in Section 1.1 relating to deadlines for assessed coursework.	-	Kevin McNamara	June 2020

**[UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS  
ASSESSMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

**1. PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT AND ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

- Setting Assessments
- Marking Examination Scripts and other Assessment
- Module Boards
- Role of External Examiners at Module Boards
- External Examiners and Dissertations/Projects
- Presence of External Examiners at Module and Degree Classification Boards
- Reassessment Diet
- Viva Voce Examinations
- Reporting Procedure for External Examiners, and Procedures for Response
- Security of the Assessment Process
- Incomplete Assessment Results
- Role of External Examiners in Taught Postgraduate Programmes
- Notification of circumstances affecting Academic Performance
- Reporting of Absences from Examinations

**2. ASSESSMENT IRREGULARITIES**

**3. DEFERRED ASSESSMENT**

**4. 'S' CODING**

- General Information
- Confidentiality in relation to S-coding
- Module Boards
- Retrospective S-coding

**5. PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS REQUESTING ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS DUE TO EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

- Flowchart: Process for students unable to complete or attend a compulsory element

**UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS**  
**ASSESSMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

**1. PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT AND ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

**1.1 Setting Assessments**

**Details of assessment are required in the submission of every new module**, and major changes to assessment have to be notified to the relevant Dean, which will scrutinise these for consistency within a School, and broad consistency across the Faculty.

Because all **new module submissions must be reviewed by an External Examiner**, it follows that External Examiners should be involved in agreeing that the proposed scheme of assessment is appropriate to the learning outcomes of the module.

**External Examiners should normally see and approve the final versions of all end-of-module examination question papers** before they are submitted to Registry. Where an External Examiner makes suggestions for substantive change to examination questions, a written response should be made by the appropriate School Officer to the External Examiner to indicate either the acceptance of the suggestion, or any compelling reasons for varying or declining the suggestion and kept on file. Substantive changes to examination papers will not normally be permitted after submission to Registry, but exceptional requests for such changes must be approved by the relevant Dean as well as the External Examiner.

The Head of School has ultimate responsibility to ensure that end-of-module examination papers are submitted to Registry no later than the date indicated by Registry each year.

The **nature, description and timing of assessed coursework (“continuous assessment”)** should be set out in **module handbooks** at the start of the module so that they comprise part of the initial module information made available to students and so that appropriate short loan lists can be in place. It is desirable for students to have a good understanding of the totality of what is expected of them on entry to the module. Such information also enables students to begin work early in the module, manage workloads, acquire necessary resources and obtain advice in good time, as well as enabling them to make appropriate choices of modules in the first place.

In order to ensure that no student is disadvantaged by preparation for the exam diet, **deadlines for assessed coursework** should not be set during the revision period. Only exceptionally will permissions may be granted on a module-by-module basis for assessment to take place during the revision weeks, either when the module is initially approved or subsequently by the Proctor.

**External Examiners should be given regular opportunities to review the totality of the set assessment for a module** (examinations and coursework) and to advise on the appropriate balance of different forms of assessment, potential overlaps between the content of assessments, and the degree to which the total of assessed work corresponds to the complete set of learning outcomes for the module (including generic or transferable skills). Each module should be subject to such a review at least once every four years.

The University has fora within which **discussion of best practice in setting assessments** occurs. These include the Learning & Teaching Committee, LTC Open Fora and workshops run by CAPOD.

## 1.2 Marking Examination Scripts and other Assessment

When marking any piece of assessment, the marker should always strive to use the full range of marks available to them e.g. 0-20 on the common reporting scale. A student should be given the top mark when they produce the highest quality of work possibly expected of a student at their level. By corollary, students producing work that bears no resemblance to university-level material should be given the lowest mark.

Schools are expected to **produce and publish grade/mark descriptors for each level of study and type of assessment** (where appropriate), which conform to the SCQF guidelines for that level (eg 1000-level modules map onto SCQF level 7, 2000-level modules onto SCQF level 8, etc.). Grade/mark descriptors should be sufficiently relevant to the assessment for which they are used to provide meaningful feedback to students about their performance. Additional comments on assessment should amplify further the judgements made, highlighting areas for improvement as well as justifying the award of the mark.

The descriptors will have been notified to the External Examiner as part of an initial briefing, on which an External Examiner may comment.

**External Examiners should see samples of both examinations and continuous assessment** and should agree in advance the nature of the sampling with the School. The nature of the sample may be different for Honours and sub-Honours work, but it is expected that a sufficient sample of work at all significant borderlines should be scrutinised, particularly at Honours level and potentially in modules that are critical for Honours entry.

Individual marks are not normally liable to change by an External Examiner, but **comments by an External Examiner on consistency and standards are of the highest importance** and should be answered by action within the School. Any comments on these issues will be raised at the Academic Monitoring Group.

The University has accepted the use of **oral presentations** as a legitimate part of assessment. Where oral assessments form part of the module result, some evidence should be placed on record and made available to the External Examiner as to the criteria used and the reasons for the particular marks and/or grades awarded. Unless there is good reason to select another format, it is expected that this evidence will take the form of sound recordings. Any other format should be approved by the External Examiner.

The University requires **anonymisation** by matriculation number at all levels for assessed written coursework and examinations where practicable. For coursework, once the marking (and moderating or second marking, where applicable) has been anonymously completed, it is permissible to record marks against the student's name and provide formative feedback to the student on an individual basis. For end-of-module examinations, only the School Examinations Officer or other administrator nominated by the Head of School has the right to break the examination script seal, for the purpose of entering or confirming the mark against the student's name on results sheets, and this transcription should be checked by a second individual. The breaking of anonymisation, once marking has been completed, may occur either before or after Module Boards have sat.

Schools vary in practice with regard to **marking strategies**. Marking strategies should be appropriate both for the form of assessment and for the subject disciplines, and they should be in

accordance with best practice in that discipline. Whatever the School's conventions, the University's minimum expectations regarding second marking and moderation should be respected; and the **External Examiner should be briefed about the School practices** and has the right to comment.

A student's final module grade should not normally be awarded on the basis of a single individual's assessment of all elements, and in extraordinary cases where this does occur, this should be notified clearly to the External Examiner and to the relevant Dean(s).

The identification of markers and moderators is the responsibility of the Head of School (or other delegate). A marker may be appointed outwith the School or University, if necessary, for example when an appropriate specialist is not available in the University.

Where **(student) peer assessment** is employed for summative assessment, it must be appropriately monitored by the module coordinator, and a record must be kept of the process and outcomes. In such cases it should not normally constitute more than 25% of the work of the module. Schools should also consider carefully the extent of peer assessment that is employed for summative assessment across modules in a programme. Procedures for its use should be explicitly discussed with and approved by the relevant External Examiner, who should take into account the balance of assessment methods across the module and programme of study.

### 1.3 Module Boards

The results of every module should be considered at an individual Module Board. **Module Boards should consist of the module coordinator, the relevant External Examiner and the signatory designated by the Head of School**, who is responsible for reporting results. Schools can choose to include other staff (other members of the assessment team, Examination Officers, Directors of Teaching, etc) at Module Boards if they wish. Where the External Examiner is not present for a diet, his/her views on the module must be presented formally by a member of the Module Board, and minuted. In exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Head of School (or delegate), a member of the assessment team for that module may deputise for the module coordinator or if no such alternative exists, another competent member of academic staff.

Degree Classification Boards are formally separate from Module Boards; the decisions of a Module Board may not be reopened subsequently.

Every **Module Board should keep a written minute of its decisions**, including the rationale for all key decisions. Schools are encouraged to make best use of the time of the External Examiner by presenting well-prepared information.

### 1.4 Role of External Examiners at Module Boards

The **functions of an External Examiner** in this regard can be defined as follows:-

- advice on particular problematic cases that cannot be resolved within the School;
- external monitoring of marking standards and procedures;
- benchmarking standards in modules and programme development.

Procedure as regards the first function designated above is straightforward. In these particular cases marks and/or grades are necessarily open to change in the light of the External Examiner's advice. Schools should, however, make every effort to resolve discrepancies in

marking prior to referral to the External Examiner.

The **monitoring and benchmarking functions of the External Examiner should be carried out through selective sampling of scripts and assessed work**. It is therefore not normally appropriate that an External Examiner should be used as first or second marker, or asked to mark a large batch of scripts in its entirety. An External Examiner should be substantially concerned with sample monitoring.

It follows that the **External Examiner's role in changing grades should be defined carefully**. The External Examiner may be consulted on specific problem cases. It would never be appropriate, however, to change grades of individual students simply on the basis of a sampling exercise. If serious issues arise about the standard of marking (consistently too high, consistently too low, or too bunched), an External Examiner has a duty to note this, and it may result in an adjustment of grades at the time of the Module Board. A Module Board may shift *all* grades in line with the External Examiner's recommendations, or revisit the assignment of marks to grades without altering the rank position of individuals within the module.

As noted above, it follows that all continuous assessment **grades should be considered as technically provisional until approved by the Module Board**, though the number of instances where wholesale changes of the nature mentioned above will occur is expected to be small, especially if Schools follow best practices of checking standards of question setting and marking across modules. This is particularly appropriate for team-marked modules where some central monitoring of marking by the module co-ordinator is expected. All examination grades, or final project/dissertation grades, should be considered as open to revision in the light of an External Examiner's recommendations. As before, where sampling of examination scripts results in consistent upward or downward movement at one or more levels, all similar grades should be shifted in line with the External Examiner's recommendations, and where a wider grade distribution is called for, the rank order of students should be retained.

In order to address issues of workload or expertise, Schools may request the **appointment of several External Examiners**, including specific External Examiners for sub-Honours modules, for reassessment diets or for postgraduate-level modules. Where multiple External Examiners exist for a single programme, at least one should provide feedback for the programme as a whole as well as for modules.

### **1.5 External Examiners and Dissertations/Projects**

Schools should decide, in consultation with the External Examiner, how **dissertations and projects** are to be assessed. Arrangements will depend on the number and nature of projects involved, and their weighting in the degree programme. However, it is the University's expectation that in most cases a) second marking will be employed; and b) External Examiners will not act as second markers, but rather will continue their function as reviewers of assessment.

### **1.6 Presence of External Examiners at Module Boards and Degree Classification Boards**

The basis of the modular system is that a numerical grade based upon a qualitative judgment of the student's performance is assigned for each module and the aggregation of these grades (weighted according to the credit value of each module) determines the final degree outcome.

**The essential input of the External Examiner as monitor and benchmarker of standards must therefore take place at the modular level**. Attendance of an External Examiner at all the Module Boards in his/her assigned subject area, preferably at the end of both semesters but as a minimum at the end of Semester 2, is indispensable.

For degree classification meetings the situation is somewhat different. The logic of the modular structure makes degree classification a largely automatic and uncontroversial process, all the more so with the universal adoption of the agreed formula for calculation. It will often be practical, and desirable, that External Examiners be present at Degree Classification Boards; it is one possible occasion for External Examiners to present their views on the degree programme as a whole and other issues of quality assurance or enhancement, and it may give rise to reflection as to the spread of degree results. **It must be stressed, however, that the process of classifying degrees in the University of St Andrews is an algorithmic process based on a universally applied formula, and the work of the External Examiner, and indeed of all Examiners, must be focused on the Module Boards.**

**School-based Degree Classification Boards** shall be constituted by at least five members of the full-time academic staff of the School, normally including the Head of School as convener. The responsibility for the composition of the School-based Degree Classification Board and of the School Special Circumstances Board lies with the Head of School.

### 1.7 Reassessment Diet

The **reassessment diet** takes place late in the summer. Because of the tight turnaround for reporting results, Schools may choose to have dedicated External Examiners for this process; they will have to negotiate the presence of an External in St Andrews. Alternatively, if their External Examiner is unable to attend the relevant Boards, then they must agree in advance the processes by which the External Examiner will be enabled to perform his/her function.

### 1.8 Viva Voce Examinations

The University recognises that the **viva is a legitimate assessment method** for particular modules, especially at postgraduate level. Where vivas are used, however, they must apply to all students in a module. Vivas must not be used in the degree classification process.

### 1.9 Reporting Procedure for External Examiners, and Procedures for Response

Formal **feedback from External Examiners** happens normally at four points:-

- scrutiny of new module and programme proposals;
- scrutiny of assessment actually set in a module;
- verbal or written feedback at the time of Module Boards and Degree Classification Boards, where appropriate;
- written end-of-session report, which is required by the University before the fee is paid.

As regards **module and programme proposals**, where an External Examiner makes suggestions for substantive change in proposals, a written response should be sent by the appropriate School officer to indicate the School's response to the suggestions made, with a view to reaching an agreed position. Exchanges of messages should be retained as evidence.

As regards **feedback at Module Boards**, it is essential that, at the conclusion of each diet of Module Board meetings, time be allocated for the External Examiner(s) to offer feedback on the outcomes and procedures involved and on wider issues of quality assurance and enhancement encompassing programmes as a whole. If External Examiners are present at **Degree Classification Boards**, this may provide another opportunity for such feedback. This feedback must be minuted by an Examinations Officer or other nominee, and a copy sent to the External Examiner(s) subsequently, for the record. Where matters are raised by an External Examiner for



consideration or action by the School or the University, a written response must be sent by an appropriate School officer to the External within the time specified in the documents referred to below, and kept on file for the purposes of monitoring and review. Where University procedures are involved, the minute and any correspondence must be copied to the relevant Dean.

### 1.10 Security of the Assessment Process

The Head of School is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the School has processes in place to protect the **security of examination questions and of assessment results** prior to reporting to Registry. In particular:-

**All Assessments:** Marking of assessed work should be carried out in an appropriately private environment. Assessment results must be logged centrally in the School as soon as the marks are assigned (not solely at the end of the semester). Heads of School, in conjunction with their Head Secretary or School Administrator, must ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to guarantee the secure storage of assessment papers and results, to which records the Head of School must have access at any time.

**Coursework Retention:** Only samples of coursework (appropriate to the discipline) need to be kept for a period of two years (for the purposes of internal monitoring reviews).

**Examinations: Setting:** At the time of setting, modifying and obtaining External approval for examination questions, secure processes must be employed both in electronic and hard-copy communications.

**Examinations: Storage:** Heads of School, in conjunction with their Head Secretary or School Administrator, must ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to guarantee the secure storage of examination papers, to which documents the Head of School must have access at any time.

**Examinations: Transport:** Heads of School shall ensure there is safe and secure transport of examination papers when they are in the care of the School.

**Examinations: Retention of Marked Scripts:** Marked examination scripts should be retained in a secure location for one year following the reporting of the results for sub-honours modules and for one year following the year of graduation for all modules leading to the classification of a degree award.

**Retention of Evidence of Academic Misconduct:** Coursework or examinations that have been the subject of a case of proven academic misconduct (either minor or major in terms of the Good Academic Practice Policy) must be kept for a period of two years from the date of the Module Board(s) that awarded a grade for the relevant module(s).

### 1.11 Incomplete Assessment Results

When there is an **incomplete set of assessment results** for cohorts of students as a result of a significant disruption of the assessment process, the University's policy is that the outstanding module assessments must be completed and marked before module grades can be assigned. This is required in order to preserve the integrity and quality of the grades that the University awards.

Similarly, the University's policy is that **all module grades must be duly reported before a qualification or degree classification can be assigned**. The University will not award qualifications or assign degree classifications on the basis of partial or incomplete results.

If necessary, where a full set of results is not available for a student due to no fault of the student, a lesser qualification may be awarded on a temporary or permanent basis on condition that the full requirements of the lesser qualification have been satisfied.

In particular circumstances where there are incomplete sets of assessments results for a cohort of students as a result of a significant disruption of the assessment process, the University may waive normal requirements for progression within a programme. Such decisions require the approval of the relevant Dean.

In circumstances where student results are incomplete or delayed due to no fault of the student, the Head of School must ensure that the School can and will provide timely supporting references and documentation about work completed upon request.

### Incomplete Module Assessment

On completion of the module the Module Board shall consider cases where the assessment of the module is incomplete due to extenuating circumstances in the following way:-

- The Module Co-ordinator must declare in the Module Booklet or the School student handbook the minimum proportion (or elements) of assessment that must be completed for credit to be awarded for the module. This requirement must be defined by the School and can constitute 100% but must be no less than 75% of the total assessment.
- Where the evidence supplied indicates a valid reason for incomplete assessment and the minimum requirement (as defined by the School, but no less than 75%) has been achieved then the Module Board can elect to award the grade calculated using the marks completed that are provided.
- Where less than the minimum requirement has been achieved and the documented evidence supplied indicates valid reason then the Module Board should advise a deferred assessment (OD) to the Registry and the School should provide alternative assessment or extensions for continuous assessment elements and/or deferred examinations.
- 'Valid reason' could be established by a sub-committee of at least three members (mixed gender) of academic staff prior to the Module Board. This sub-committee can request documentary evidence. This task can be performed by the existing S-code committee, if preferred.
- Where the student has not submitted a Self-Certificate of Absence or not presented satisfactory documentary evidence when requested or not given valid reason AND completed less than the minimum requirement then 0 X should be reported.
- Where the student has not submitted Self-Certificates of Absence for missing elements and the minimum requirement has been completed then the student can be awarded credit for the module but the grade must be calculated on the basis of being awarded zero for the missing elements of assessment.

### **1.12 Role of External Examiners in Taught Postgraduate Programmes**

The duties of the External Examiner in relation to **taught postgraduate programmes** are similar in principle to those in undergraduate programmes, and some External Examiners may operate in both areas. Taught postgraduate module results must normally be reported on the same deadline and in the same way as undergraduate module results. For a definition of specific duties regarding dissertations, see Policy for Supervisors and Students in Taught Postgraduate

Programmes.

### 1.13 Notification of circumstances affecting Academic Performance

Students are responsible for bringing to the attention of their examiners any evidence of exceptional circumstances (personal, medical or otherwise) that may affect or have affected their academic performance.

It is their responsibility to ensure that all such evidence is communicated to the Module Co-ordinator or Director of Teaching. Notification should be submitted **prior** to the examination diet or before the final determination of grades in the relevant modules or subjects. Any circumstances reported in this way will be considered by the relevant Examination Board(s). In the case of Junior/Senior Honours and taught Postgraduate students an S-Code may be applied to the affected modules if this is **requested by the student**.

Failure to notify circumstances affecting academic performance in advance of the final determination of grades may affect a student's ability subsequently to submit an academic appeal. In order to establish grounds for an appeal a student must demonstrate the existence of extenuating personal circumstances materially affecting academic performance **of which the University was unaware** when the academic decision was taken, and **which could not reasonably have been disclosed by the student (an explanation for earlier non-disclosure is always required)**.

Where the University has been notified of circumstances affecting academic performance, in advance of the final determination of grades, the same circumstances may not be used as grounds for academic appeal as due account of them will already have been taken in determining the final result.

### 1.14 Reporting of Absences from Examinations

Students must report absence from an examination due to illness or other exceptional circumstances by submitting a Self-Certificate of Absence as soon as the candidate is able to do so, preferably before the examination is due to take place and in any case no later than 3 days after the examination.

Students must contact the School responsible for the module being examined in order to request alternative arrangements, which are at the discretion of the School. (Students are only required to notify the Examinations Officer if there is a problem submitting a Self-Certificate).

Medical or other relevant supporting evidence may be required by the School in support of the student's request for alternative arrangements.

In the case of any long-term illness or impairment, students are recommended to contact Student Services for advice and support.

If a student has missed an examination for whatever reason, the above reporting procedure also applies.

## 2. ASSESSMENT IRREGULARITIES

There are a number of policies which provide information on how to deal with cases of **assessment irregularity**. The Dean of Arts/Divinity and Dean of Science are available to provide guidance and advice on any of these matters.

**Academic Misconduct:** When academic misconduct is suspected during the examination process, the procedures to be followed are set out in the Policy on Good Academic Practice.

**Degree Examination Regulations:** The Rules for Candidates when sitting examinations are published on the website. Advice can also be sought from the University Examinations Officer.

**Appeals and Complaints:** For advice and information see the Policy on Student Academic Appeals or contact the Senate Office.

### **3. DEFERRED ASSESSMENT**

Deferred assessment refers to the submission and marking of a piece of work or examination beyond the date of the module board thus making it impossible to report a module grade at that meeting.

Deferred assessment is not a right and permission will be granted only when the School judges that admissible grounds for deferral exist.

Requests for deferred assessment must be made to the relevant School Officer in advance of or as soon as practically possible after the published completion or examination date.

In each School the Director of Teaching (or named delegate) is responsible for authorizing deferred assessment requests.

The deferral of assessments is not appropriate for minor ailments or permanent or long-term conditions that are under medical control. Students with prolonged chronic illnesses or disabilities should instead contact Student Services for advice in advance of any assessment submission date or published examination dates.

All requests for deferred assessments must be submitted to the relevant School. Requests for deferred assessments should be supported by appropriate written evidence such as a letter from Student Services, letter from the police or evidence from a member of staff who was alerted to the circumstances at the time. Self-certificates alone for examinations and class tests will not be accepted. Schools can choose to accept the reasons given by the student for missing an examination or class test, or can refer the student to the Advice and Support Centre who will in turn advise the School accordingly. The School that was initially informed of the request for deferred assessment should inform all other relevant Schools. Schools can also liaise directly with Student Services for assistance. The primary reasons for granting deferrals are medical conditions that affect students for a substantial proportion of the time that would be expected to be expended on completion of the assessment. Deferred assessment on non-medical grounds will be approved only for serious personal reasons such as bereavement of a close relative or illness of dependents. Attendance at interviews or assessment centres and travel arrangements are not normally sufficient grounds for deferral of an examination or test.

Students who have not requested a deferred assessment in advance of the published completion date or examination date without good reason will not have the request approved.

At the time that a request for a deferral is made, the deadline for completion will be determined by the School. For work that is due during normal semester time, this will not extend beyond the

academic year within which the piece of work or examination was due to be completed, ie the August resit diet. For work that is due to be submitted in the summer period, this may be extended at the discretion of the School for up to a maximum of 12 months.

Extensions to deferral deadlines are not permitted. Students who do not complete the deferral by the agreed deadline will normally be awarded a mark of 0 (which may affect the final degree classification or the progression of studies). If deferred deadlines are not met, the School must refer the student to Student Services, the Registry Officer (Student Support), or the appropriate Pro Dean where options such as leave of absence, S-coding, decanal discretion etc. can be discussed.

Once granted a deferred assessment by the School, the student cannot then retract the request.

Deferred assessments will be in the same format and length as the original scheduled assessments unless otherwise approved by the relevant Dean.

Alternative examinations for students who were unable to take an examination at the normal time may be scheduled within the same diet if possible. (Time at the end of each examination diet is kept free for this type of eventuality). If this cannot be accommodated, then the examination becomes a deferred examination and must be taken at the next resit or full examination diet. Alternative examinations are subject to the same conditions referred to elsewhere in the policy.

Students who fail a deferred examination will be permitted to continue their studies pending achievement of any missing credits at the next examination diet provided that all other conditions for progression have been met.

Deferred examinations and class tests will always comprise different questions from those used in the original diet or test.

Exceptions to policy on deferred assessment must have the approval of the relevant Dean.

## 4. S' CODING

### 4.1 General Information

**Before an S-code is awarded, every effort should be made to exploit opportunities for deferred and/or alternative assessment** leading to a secure grade for the module.

The outcome of a request for S-coding, including the rationale, may be communicated verbally in the first instance, but this must be followed up formally and in writing within 10 working days of the decision.

A module grade may be reported with an S-code where most or the whole of the student's work for the module has been affected by **special circumstances**; where there is clear written evidence of these; and where it has not been possible to compensate by means of deferred and/or alternative assessment. Special circumstances can include, *inter alia*, medical problems, bereavement, personal or family concerns of significance.

In order for a module to be deemed affected by special circumstances and S-coded, **a student must make a formal written request for application of the S-code**, addressed to the Head of School (or a delegate). Written evidence of the special circumstances must also be presented and should normally accompany the request to the Head of School. However the University recognizes that it may distress a student to give repeated explanations of special circumstances. Where evidence of special circumstances is held by Student Services or another Unit of the University,

therefore, it is permissible for the student to address a simple request for S-coding to the Head of School, and to ask that further information be provided by the other Unit. No matter where the contact over special circumstances takes place, it remains the individual student's responsibility to report in writing any circumstances affecting academic performance as early as possible, and at all events in advance of the relevant Module Board.

When a student requests that an S-code be applied to the grade of a module, the student must also indicate on each such application what other modules that semester are receiving requests for S-codes. If fewer than all modules of the semester are the subject of S-code requests, then the student must explain clearly why not all modules have been affected.

The **S-code should not be applied without the request of a student**. Students should understand that the S-code will appear on their academic transcript. S-codes, once applied, are not normally withdrawn.

**S-coding applies to 3000, 4000 and 5000 level module results only**: students encountering problems at first or second level should discuss them through other appropriate means. Any concerns that affect academic performance can be discussed with the student's Academic Adviser, amongst others.

Normally **no more than 25% of an undergraduate student's total accumulation of 3000 and 4000 level credits (and 5000 level credits on Integrated Masters programmes) can carry an S-code**. Where a student is so badly affected by adverse circumstances that more than 25% of credits are likely to be affected, there should be consultation with the Pro Deans who will be able to consider options such as leave of absence. For Joint Honours students, the two Schools involved should consult in order to avoid exceeding the 25% quota.

In a truly exceptional case where a **School wishes to accept a request to S-code credits on top of the 25% of a student's Honours modules already allowed** (eg sudden adverse circumstances affecting a final semester Senior Honours examination), the case must be referred to the Dean and a detailed argument advanced for S-coding any extra credits.

Students on a taught postgraduate Masters programme taking 5000 level modules may have modules S-coded, with the exception of the Dissertation. **The proportion of S-coded credits at Masters level should never exceed 50% of the taught component**. Where a taught Postgraduate student is affected by adverse circumstances, there should be an early consultation with the Pro Dean who will be able to consider options such as leave of absence.

Module Boards should be aware of the powers they have to form judgements about grades when not all of the material has been completed due to mitigating personal circumstances, or where only a small fraction of assessment is affected by special circumstances. **Where some complete pieces of the module assessment are missing or qualitatively affected by special circumstances, it is for the Module Board to judge whether the remaining assessed elements which are unaffected are of sufficient weight and compass to serve as the basis for the award of an overall grade**. If so, the issue can be resolved at the Module Board. It is expected that only minor elements of assessment will be disregarded in this way.

**S-codes can be applied both to modules that have been passed and those that have been failed**. Where a failed module has been S-coded, the student has the right to reassessment for the module as if for the first time, ie the grade obtained at reassessment should not be capped at 7 as is usually the case, and the School may choose not to apply the S-code to the module if the reassessment is unaffected by special circumstances. If a reassessment is failed but S-coded, the

student will have the right to one further reassessment, but the pass grade will be capped at 7. A second fail at reassessment must be recorded as a Fail and may not be S-coded.

**Student Services may support student requests for S-coding, but will not initiate requests.** Students in need of assistance and support should be referred to the Academic Liaison and Systems Manager (within Student Services) and Schools may ask the Academic Liaison and Systems Manager to provide further information about a student's circumstances. However, the best way of establishing details of an individual case will usually be a common-sense discussion between a member of the School and the student concerned.

There is guidance for students regarding **sickness reporting** <https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/policy/Academic-policies-Student-progression-student-absence/student-absence.pdf>. Students unable to sit an examination because of illness at the time of the examination should be allowed deferred assessment; this is not alone a cause for applying an S-code.

## 4.2 Confidentiality in relation to S-coding

Students must accept that, whilst confidentiality will be respected as far as possible, members of the School will have to be made aware in general terms of any special circumstances in order to make a decision, and that some details will remain on file in order to assist in the event of the case being referred to the Dean for a decision on degree classification.

Sensitive matters concerning individual students should not be discussed by a large number of staff at a Module Board. **Schools will establish a small S-code Committee** of relevant office holders (for example, Examinations Officer, Director of Teaching, Year Tutor, Honours Adviser) for confidential discussion of cases relating to S-coding, the detail of which need not be released to the full Module Board. All relevant material relating to students will be handled by this one School committee, obviating the possibility of differential treatment across modules within a single programme. All decisions taken by the committee should be minuted. Where a decision is taken in favour of S-coding, the appropriate Module Board will be informed and will apply the S-code. The special committee will also take responsibility for the secure handling and storage of documentation (material submitted by students, minutes of decisions, etc.).

The **School S-code Committee** will make decisions based only on the evidence of special circumstances. If arrangements have been made to take full account of special circumstances (for example, extended deadlines; deferred assessment) the S-code should not normally be applied in addition. It is not appropriate to take account of the student's likely module or Degree results at this stage.

In exceptionally sensitive circumstances, and where a student has requested a special degree of confidentiality, Schools will respect these wishes. A recommendation may be based on information released only to the Head of School (or a delegate) in such circumstances.

## 4.3 Module Boards

The S-code should be applied when the module result is first reported. A minute should be kept of every decision concerning the potential application of an S-code, at each stage of the process. The detailed **confidential minute** recording decisions and rationale will be generated by the School S-coding committee; the Module Board will then record where appropriate that it received and applied an instruction to S-code.

No Module Board should decide whether to apply an S-code on the basis of comparison with the student's results in another module. Module Boards should treat each module as an individual entity.

## 4.4 Retrospective S-coding

**An S-code will be applied retrospectively only in exceptional circumstances.**

Students who wish to request **retrospective S-coding** must submit a formal written request addressed to the Head of School in which the Student must demonstrate:

- (i) the existence of special circumstances (extenuating personal circumstances) which have materially affected academic performance;
- (ii) that the University was unaware of these circumstances when the academic decision was taken; and
- (iii) that these circumstances could not reasonably have been disclosed by the student.

Written evidence of the special circumstances alleged must accompany the application along with an explanation as to why these circumstances were not previously disclosed to the University. An explanation for earlier non-disclosure is always required as students are generally instructed to bring evidence of extenuating personal circumstances to the attention of the examiners or other relevant person prior to the assessment of their overall performance in relation to the relevant module or programme. A student requesting retrospective S-coding must provide a valid reason for not complying with this instruction, and, given the exceptional nature of retrospective S-coding, demonstrate that this reason is both compelling and substantiated. Schools must pay particular attention to the need for students to have provided this in cases where there is a request for a retrospective special circumstance to be taken into account.

Once the request is received, the Head of School will in turn write to the Dean indicating whether or not there is support for the request. If the Dean upholds the request, then the School will be notified, and the Dean will confirm the S-coded grades to Registry.

For students who request retrospective S-coding just prior to their graduation, Registry will run the degree classifier again (following graduation) for the students concerned and Schools will reconvene School Classification Boards to consider whether or not any cases need to be referred to the Dean for consideration. Students will not be able to graduate until a decision has been taken by the appropriate Dean.

Where a student remains dissatisfied with the outcome of the request for retrospective S-coding and can clearly demonstrate permissible grounds, the student may have a further and final route of appeal through by making a submission to the Court & Senate Office. Please see the [Student Academic Appeals Policy](#) (Stage 2 appeal (Senate level)) for more information.

**4.5 Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate students who have completed 3000-, 4000- or 5000-level modules (including taught and dissertation/project-based modules, and year-long modules) that are reported in Semester 2 of Academic Year 2019/20 only will be given the option to request that these modules be S-coded in accordance with the above policy, with the following adjustments:**

- Students will be able to retrospectively request S-coding code by application to the Dean of their Faculty within 5 working days of the module grades being released.
- Evidence of the special circumstances will not need to accompany this request.
- These S-coded modules will not count against the existing maximum percentage of credits that can be S-coded.
- Students will be able to graduate following a retrospective S-code request.
- Taught Postgraduate students cannot S-code their final 60 credit module.



## 5. PROCEDURE FOR STUDENTS REQUESTING ACADEMIC ADJUSTMENTS DUE TO EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

This procedure should be used when a student is unable to complete or attend a compulsory element of their degree course. This includes attendance at an exam, class test, or compulsory oral exam/presentation, or ability to submit a coursework assignment. The guidance recognises that:

- *Students are responsible for informing the University if exceptional circumstances (personal, medical or otherwise) may affect or have affected their academic performance, and they may approach various different staff for initial advice;*
- *Student Services will collate information relating to the student's circumstances; and*
- *Schools make the final decision regarding whether academic adjustments will be given, and what type of adjustment is most appropriate.*

When a student experiences circumstances beyond their control resulting in their inability to complete or attend a compulsory element, they must **submit a Self-Certificate of Absence**;

AND

a) Contact their **School**

If the student contacts the School first, they will be directed to the relevant member of staff to consider the request. School staff have the discretion to accept the initial request and make the appropriate adjustment/referral. If the School does not accept the initial request, the student will be required to provide supporting information. The School may ask in person that the student visits the ASC, or the School will email the student (copying in the ASC) requesting that they contact the ASC. The ASC will refer the student to a Support Adviser within 24 hours of the contact from the student or School.

OR

b) Contact the **Advice and Support Centre (ASC)**

If the student contacts the ASC first, the ASC will encourage the student to approach the School in order to determine whether the School requires supporting information.\* The ASC will alert a Support Adviser to the student's case, who will in turn contact the School to offer to coordinate supporting information if required. The School will consider the request for academic adjustment and will confirm with the Support Adviser whether supporting information is required.

Where supporting information is required, the Support Adviser will make contact with the student either in person or by phone within 48 hours of the case being referred to them in order to establish what information is available. The Support Adviser will also consult:

- existing Student Services records for the student
- Wardens, where the student is living in a University residence
- self-certificates of Absence submitted by the student

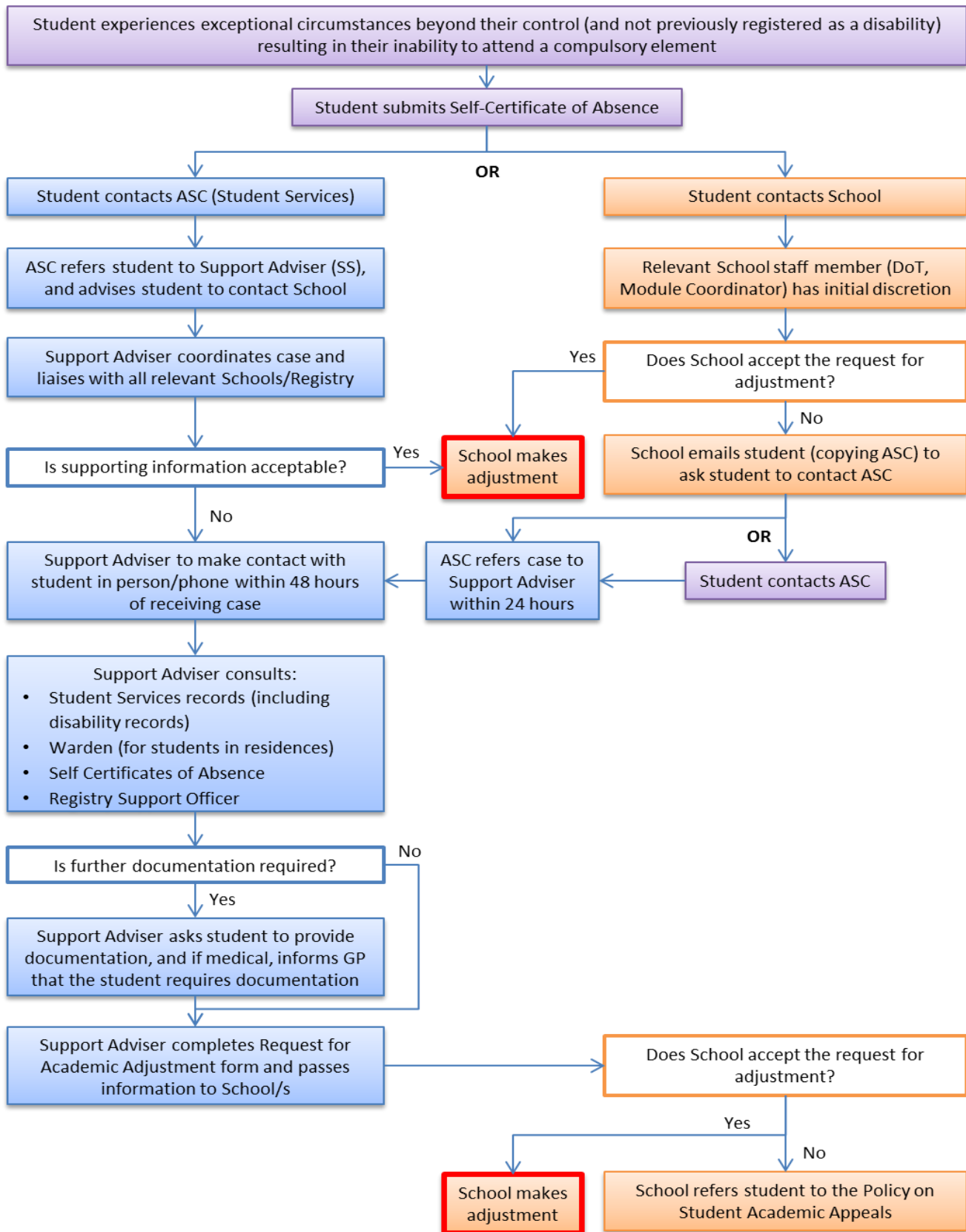
In some cases, it may be necessary to ask the student to provide documentation to support their circumstances. It is the responsibility of the student to source and cover any associated charges

for this documentation. If medical documentation is required, the Support Adviser will inform the medical professional that the student requires the documentation.

When all available information has been collated, the Support Adviser will complete the 'Request for Academic Adjustment' form, and pass this to the School. The School will use this information to determine whether to provide academic adjustment, and if accepted make the appropriate academic adjustment. If the School does not accept the request, they will refer the student to the Policy on Student Academic Appeals.

\*In particularly sensitive circumstances, ASC staff may contact the School on the student's behalf.

## Process for students unable to complete or attend a compulsory element



<b>Version number</b>	<b>Purpose / changes</b>	<b>Document status</b>	<b>Author of changes, role and school / unit</b>	<b>Date</b>