Exceptional Circumstances Guidance Note: Sabbatical election candidates and students involved in defined media activities

Purpose

This note is intended to clarify the basis upon which exceptional circumstances adjustments should be granted where a claim is based on engagement in York Student Union (YorkSU) sabbatical elections or defined media activities as specified under EC 3.1.2 and EC 3.3.8 of the Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Assessment - Policy and Procedure. The general principles in relation to wider student social and extra-curricular activities are touched upon.

Context

In order to address the acute pressures on YorkSU election candidates and encourage participation of candidates from less represented backgrounds, University Education Committee (UEC), on the recommendation of the Standing Committee on Assessment (SCA) agreed measures embedded in the Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Assessment - Policy and Procedure to allow candidates in YorkSU sabbatical elections to apply for exceptional circumstances (EC) on the grounds of their election campaigning. This policy has reduced anxiety for candidates, resulting in a more diverse cohort standing, and improving the quality of the election.

The policy has also been expanded to apply to two further situations: students undertaking defined media activities to support those Students' Union elections and students undertaking defined and identifiable media activities to support the University of York/University of Lancaster annual 'Roses' tournament.

A small proportion of student media work over 40 hours a week during these key media times (both union elections and Roses). In elections, print media (Vision and Nouse) have one week to interview, photograph, and publish on every candidate in their digital and print candidate supplement, attend, and cover Results Night. University Radio York (URY) set up and run Candidate Interview Night, lead on contacting candidates and scheduling interviews, and their events can run upwards of 6 hours (not including set-up). They also host the Results Night, which lasts nine hours (including set-up), and provide hosts for Debate Night. York Student Television (YSTV) are responsible for the filming, production and editing of 60-second manifestos, taking approximately 13 hours (2023/24), livestreaming and interviews during Debate Night (which lasts nine hours, not including set-up), and Results Night coverage and livestreaming (approximately 11 hours). At Roses, the Roses Live Committee (32 members in 2022/23) coordinated all media groups in livestreaming, reporting, commentating, and printing around all 140+ fixtures at the event. Some students were working from 9am till past midnight during this period.

Scope of the policy

SCA endorses the general principle that extra-curricular activities, including membership and leadership of student societies, should not generally be prioritised by students over their learning, their preparation for assessments and their completion of those assessments. Therefore membership of student societies and activities in relation to them are not generally approved as an exceptional circumstance. Students with unusual, unpredictable and sufficiently impactful demands on their time arising from their extracurricular activities (for example being invited to represent their country in an international sporting event or something else sufficiently significant and inflexible) might be able to rely on the ground relating to

'unavoidable commitments and obligations' (EC 3.3.7), but SCA clearly affirms the principle that students should not generally be able to seek EC adjustments on the basis of time commitments and other demands due to social or sporting activity.

SCA , however, recognises the particular significance for the University's governance reputation and institutional culture of both sabbatical elections and the Roses tournament and endorses the principle that adjustment should be made for students engaged in certain aspects of these activities. Not all Roses activities and participation is subject to these exceptions - only support of media activities. Students participating as competitors at Roses do not face the same demands on their time as those conducting media activities and so may manage any learning or assessment commitments more effectively during this period.

Application - situations to which this policy applies

The ground set out in EC3.1.2 and EC3.3.8 of the EC policy applies to the three following groups of students:

- Candidates standing for election to YorkSU roles. It does not apply to those helping those candidates campaign. Candidates may apply for adjustments to summative assessments affected by the period during which they are campaigning for election. YorkSU will identify candidates and the campaign period on an annual basis.
- Defined members of York student media groups (Vision, Nouse, Technical Theatre Society, University Radio York, York Student Television) who are identified by YorkSU as participating in extensive coverage of sabbatical elections. Again, these students and the campaign period will be identified by YorkSU on an annual basis.
- Members of the Roses Live Committee responsible for the media coverage of the Roses tournament. Again, members of the committee and the period of the Roses tournament will be identified by YorkSU annually.

YorkSU will identify candidates and also identify those members of media groups (including the Live Committee) whose involvement is equivalent to a full time commitment. They will define the relevant periods for which this will be the case, typically the two week election campaigning period or the period of the actual Roses tournament as the case may be. Schools and departments must treat the evidence from YorkSU as sufficient evidence of such students' involvement and the impact on them.

Application - which adjustments are appropriate

The adjustment should be such as will allow students to be assessed fairly in any particular assessment taking into account the full-time commitments to the activities in which they are involved during the period in question. Adjustment options may include allowing extensions to assessments due on, or soon after, the campaigning period or the Roses period, or allowing such students opportunities to take assessments due to be completed during the specified period 'as if for the first time' as a later opportunity (and this may, therefore, give such students the chance to defer such assessments as they are not able to complete).

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