

LTC11D089

**Title:** Concession Requests  
**Author:** Director of Taught Programmes (Professor Adam Longcroft)  
**Circulation:** Learning and Teaching Committee – 27 June 2012  
**Agenda:** LTC11A006  
**Status:** Open  
**Version:** Final

---

## Report on TPPG to University LTC (27 June) from the Towards a Panel-based Procedure for Dealing with Complex Concessions

In a paper titled 'Delegated Powers to Approve Concessions against the Regulations & Appoint Boards of Examiners (Taught Programmes)' (updated in Aug 2011) the University sets-out what kinds of concessions exist, and who approves them.

The delegated powers and authority to sign-off concession falls within seven main areas:

- Appointment of External Examiners
- Admissions
- Course Transfers
- Amendments to modules/courses in Year
- Amendments to module enrolments/course profiles
- Repeat periods of study
- Extensions
- Intercalations
- Assessment

In less complex cases approval is granted by the relevant Faculty Associate Dean. More complex cases (e.g. most kinds of course transfer, all repeat periods of study, most intercalations and all cases relating to assessment (e.g. Good Cause)) go to the ADTP for a decision.

There are a number of problems associated with our existing systems for dealing with concession requests. These include:

- Decisions are being made by a single, isolated individual. In some cases ADs and ADTP might be advised by LTS staff, but the decision rests with an individual. Decisions made by individuals are high risk – it is difficult to ensure that prejudice/bias etc do not influence decisions in individual cases.
- The individuals making the decisions are not specifically trained to carry-out their duties, and to consider/weigh the evidence relating to complex cases.
- The decisions made often have massive implications for students, in terms of their final classification or their progression, or their completion of their degrees, but this isn't reflected in the robustness of the decision-making process.
- The emphasis on decisions by individuals is out of step with recent changes to the regulations and procedures relating to the treatment of Extenuating Circumstances and consideration of Appeals within the University. The new processes are panel-based, with separate Faculty panels dealing with ECs on the one hand, and academic appeals/complaints

on the other. Panels involve collective decision-making, they are more transparent and involve shared responsibility. Decisions are thus normally free of any possible accusation of bias, they are 'safer' and more reliable/consistent.

- Requiring individual members of staff to make decisions of this kind leaves them vulnerable. Let me paint a 'scenario' to illustrate what could happen:

*A student with complex ECs is awarded a number of concessions (repeats of year, intercalations etc) and finds themselves reaching the 7 year regulatory limit for their MBBS programme. During their final year they experience more upsetting ECs and apply for an intercalation of 1 year. The ADTP, mindful of his responsibility to safe-guard the academic integrity of the University's awards and to safeguard the public, rejects the intercalation request because to do otherwise would result in the student taking 8 years to complete their award. The ECs the student experienced lead to a worsening of their mental health and on receipt of the letter from the ADTP telling the student that he has been withdrawn from the course, the student's world implodes, he loses all sense of proportion and reacts in an extreme way. The result is a physical attack on the ADTP, which could result in GBH or something even more serious. The question of whether the ADTP is a male or female is irrelevant – they are equally vulnerable.*

At first glance I appreciate that this scenario might sound implausible, even alarmist – but recent experience, if it teaches us anything, teaches us that in extreme situations when people's lives seem to be imploding, they often lash-out at those they believe are responsible....

As ADTP I think the time has come when the University needs to re-think the way it deals with the most complex concession requests - especially those which might result in an extreme 'outcome' for the student – e.g. enforced withdrawal from their course.

The Panel which has undertaken the Review of Academic Appeals and Complaints has promoted a new panel-based approach to decisions around ECs and Appeals and this should influence the solutions we explore for dealing with complex concessions.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. LTC task Jon Sharp and the ADTP with developing new guidance and regulations relating to the consideration of complex concession requests.
2. JS and ADTP should bring initial proposals/revised regulations to TPPG to consider at its January 2013 meeting with a view to LTC approving in Feb/March 2013
3. The new guidance and regulations should:
  - Require and facilitate decisions by panels of suitably experienced and qualified staff.
  - Clearly describe the criteria (triggers) which would determine whether a concession request was sufficiently 'complex' to justify a panel being convened (i.e. the process should incorporate a risk-based approach).
  - Set-out a clear procedure for informing panels, providing them with the evidence they need, recording panel outcomes and informing students accordingly. The latter process needs to draw on best practice in the sector in order to ensure transparency and fairness (i.e. students must understand the basis on which decisions are made).

Dr Adam Longcroft  
Academic Director for Taught Programmes