Special Case requests - what are the Special Cases Committee (SCC) looking for in an application?

Advice for staff and students -
Research Student Administration (RSA)
First: An example - Extension to Submission Deadline requests

101 extension requests were considered by SCC in 2016-17:

- Extension to Submission Deadline (92)
- Extension to Re-submission Deadline (2)
- Extension to Minor (2)
- Corrections Deadline (7)
Extension to Submission Deadline requests (cont.)

Of those 101 extension requests considered by SCC in 2016-17 the outcomes were:

- Approved fully at first attempt (74)
- Approved at first attempt but did not get full amount (9)
- Not approved at first attempt (18)
Extension to Submission Deadline requests (Cont.)

Of the 18 which were **not approved** first time:

- Approved at a subsequent meeting (10)
- Not approved and the students did not submit any further information (6)
- Submitted further information but was still not approved at a second meeting (1)
- Approved following an SCC hearing (1)
So:

- 18% of extension requests submitted to SCC in 2016-17 were **not approved** at first attempt
- 9% did **not** get the full amount requested
- 7% were **not approved at all**

Why?
The main reasons for a request being rejected at SCC are:

- Lack of any information in the supporting statement
  It is very important that SCC are aware of the full facts surrounding the grounds for a request. Simply stating ‘Medical reasons’, even if the student has provided medical evidence, does not always give the Committee an indication of the impact of the condition on their everyday life and ability to study.

- Lack of information regarding the actual circumstances of / or background to the grounds for the request (i.e. has the student told us everything they can?)
  As above - however this can also mean giving SCC information which the student thinks may not be pertinent to their request but actually, it helps the Committee to get a full picture of the issues at hand. For example, a student stating that they are currently the main carer for their young children may be an unusual circumstance for the student (given their usual circumstances when things are working well) however on the face of it, it would appear to the Committee to be a normal family circumstance which they manage on an ongoing basis, and does not give the Committee any information about any other caregivers or support available to the student (or if there is no other support at all), which in turn makes it very difficult to assess the level of impact on the student’s ability to carry out their studies.

- Lack of sufficient and timely evidence (impact and duration)
  For example, a student asking for a six month extension to their submission deadline, must ensure that the Committee can fully justify those six months on the grounds of the evidence presented. I.e. a doctor’s letter would need to state that the student had been unwell for the last month and their recovery would likely take a further five months. Specific dates and likely recovery time are very helpful. Similarly, if the student has exceptional circumstances which are less easy to evidence from a third, independent party (i.e. unexpected caring responsibilities) then the student should ensure that they give a genuine picture of the impact upon them and an estimate of the time they feel they have lost to the unexpected circumstances.
The main reasons for a request being rejected at SCC are:

- Lack of information regarding stated historical events whereby, on the face of it, it would have been reasonable to have taken LOA at the time (e.g. extensions)

  If a student is requesting an Extension to Submission Deadline request on the grounds of something which happened to them during their period of study (i.e. they were unwell for a period of weeks or months in their second year of study) but they did not request a formal Leave of Absence at the time, then the Committee would need to understand why they (on the face of it) chose not to do so. An explanation, and perhaps evidence if applicable, should be submitted. The University’s Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Assessment policy makes it clear that if a student has exceptional circumstances affecting their ability to study, it is the student’s responsibility to raise these issues with their department at the time. Sometimes there can be a genuine reason for the decision not to take time out of their studies at that particular point in time but the Committee needs to know what they are.

- Lack of clarity on the exceptional circumstances for consideration (e.g. for extensions and / or requests to take the student over the normal maximum duration for an LOA etc)

  The Policy on Research Degrees (7.11) states that a Leave of Absence (LOA) will ‘..normally be granted for a maximum of one year at a time and a maximum of two years in total’ (this does not include parental leave) and (7.15) that ‘An extension of submission will normally be limited to six months, unless a compelling case is made for a longer period of up to a maximum of one year. The total period of extension that may normally be approved is a maximum of two years (except in the case of MA/MSc by Research, where the total period of extension that may normally be approved is a maximum of one year’). In some very exceptional cases, the Committee will consider requests above those normal maximums however if this applies to a student, they must ensure that their request makes it very clear to the Committee as to why they should consider approving above the normal maximum in that particular case.
Sensitive information:

Whilst it is encouraged that students share as much as they can with their department wherever possible, sometimes a student will not want to make their particular personal circumstances known to their department.

If this is the case then the student should submit their request in the normal way (i.e. submitting the form to their supervisor for approval and then the departmental Graduate Chair) but declare in their statement that they have submitted a separate statement and evidence directly to the Special Cases Officer in Research Student Administration.

Sensitive information should be sent directly via email to research-student-admin@york.ac.uk
Further information and advice:

- Students (and staff) should ensure that they are aware of the Policy on Research Degrees guidelines relating to Special Cases requests [https://www.york.ac.uk/research/graduate-school/support/policies-documents/research-degree-policy/] and the guidance on the YGRS ‘Change of Plan’ webpages: [https://www.york.ac.uk/research/graduate-school/academic/change/]

- Please always ensure that, where relevant, appropriate evidence is attached to the request (and also ensure that an independent translation is also submitted if not English)