

School of GeoSciences Postgraduate Special Circumstances policy 2014/2015

The purpose of this document is to outline the procedures in relation to postgraduate taught student Special Circumstances in the School of GeoSciences. All special circumstances forms should be raised by the MSc Programme Secretary or the Postgraduate (Taught) Team leader who ensure the completion of the documentation with the Programme Director/Personal Tutor and secure the appropriate evidence. A single Postgraduate Special Circumstance committee will meet to consider all cases prior to the progression and final Board of Examiners. The Programme Director/Personal Tutor will be advised of the special circumstance and the outcome which will be recorded by confidential note in EUCLID. More details of special circumstances, including the Common Sense guide can be found at: http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.101829!/fileManager/SCGuidance_May12.pdf

1. Roles

1.1 Course Organiser: when approached by a student with special circumstances, should direct the student to the relevant MSc Programme Secretary or the Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader. Course Organisers should not agree any course of action with the student regarding special circumstances without referring them to the MSc Programme Secretary or the Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader. Any extensions to coursework deadlines should be granted by the Course Organiser and recorded by the appropriate MSc Programme Secretary who will adjust the student's record accordingly.

NOTE: Zero-weighting an assessed component of a course is a Special Circumstance and should be treated as such. Any decision to zero-weight work because the student has been adversely affected by a circumstance out with their control is that of the Special Circumstance Committee and not of the Course Organiser.

1.2 Programme Director/Personal Tutor: The role of the Programme Director/Personal Tutor in relation to special circumstances is to discuss their circumstances and refer the student the MSc Programme Secretary to begin the process of applying for special circumstances.

1.3 Postgraduate Special Circumstances Committee: considers all Special Circumstances cases and to make appropriate recommendations (in accordance with the University and College guidelines) to the relevant Exam Board. The recommendations made by the Special Circumstances Committee are **binding**, and the Board of Examiners must follow them in all but exceptional cases.

1.4 Convener of the Exam Board¹: It is the responsibility of the Convener to present the Special Circumstances Committee outcomes as binding at the Exam Board following discussion of each course. The Chair ensures there is no further discussion of the special circumstance.

¹ <http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Staff/ExamBoard/Convener.pdf>

- 1.5 Convener of the Special Circumstances Committee: The convener of the Special Circumstances committee is delegated responsibility for ensuring that a summary report (produced by committee secretary) containing all the recommendations for all cases considered by that committee is transmitted to the Convener of the Exam Board in time for the meeting of the Board. The report should include all cases considered by the Special Circumstances Committee, regardless of level of severity or likely impact on the student's performance. The report must be in as concise a form as possible as is consistent with clarity, and should preferably retain the anonymity of the students.
- 1.6 Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader: The role of Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leaders is to act as committee secretary who will oversee the submission of all special circumstance cases and draft the outcome report for all relevant Board of Examiner Committees.
- 1.7 Academic Members of Special Circumstances Committee: The role of the academic representatives made up of Board of Examiner Chairs on the Special Circumstances Committee is to aid the convener in considering the cases and in making the appropriate recommendations. This is to ensure diversity of opinion and quality assurance.
- 1.8 MSc Programme Secretary: The role of the MSc Programme Secretary is to assist Programme Directors/Personal Tutors and students complete the special circumstance form and secure the required supporting documentation.

2 Special Circumstance form process

- 2.1 Students will receive emails from Academic Services and the School twice a semester in regards to the special circumstance policy.
- 2.2 Programme Directors/Personal Tutors and MSc Programme Secretaries will assist students in the completion of the form and ensure relevant evidence is secured.
- 2.3 All completed forms will be submitted to the Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader in preparation for the Postgraduate Special Circumstance Committee. A confidential note will be added to the student's record to indicate special circumstances have been recorded.
- 2.4 Copies of forms for other Schools or for other parts of the School of GeoSciences are to be forwarded to the relevant departments as soon as they are completed or in compliance with a School's submission procedures.
- 2.5 Forms must be signed by PD/PT AND the student. If the student is unavailable to sign the form, they should provide a written statement (email) stating they are happy for the form to be raised on their behalf.
- 2.6 Copies of any medical certificates should be kept with ALL copies of SC forms (electronic and paper copies). The Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader will be responsible for the storage of all material.
- 2.7 Other Schools will be asked to send SC forms to the Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader.
- 2.8 No retrospective SC's will be considered. SC forms must be submitted before the deadline given, unless there are unforeseen circumstances which have prevented the form from being raised/sent.
- 2.9 The outcome will be recorded in a confidential record on the student's record.

2.10 The Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader and the Chair will be responsible for ensuring the relevant Board of Examiners Committee are informed of outcomes to ensure course and degree records are correct.

3 Special Circumstance Committees

3.1.1 The Postgraduate Special Circumstance Committee will consist of:

Director of Postgraduate Teaching/Postgraduate Senior Personal Tutor
 All Postgraduate Convenors of the Board of Examiner Committee (5)
 Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader
 One Student Support Coordinator

4 Special Circumstance Committee recommendations²

4.1 Course Boards

In most cases, where the Special Circumstances Committee has agreed that the special circumstances submitted by a student have had an adverse impact on their performance in a course, it can decide on the following actions:

Actions	Guidance on when the SCC would apply the actions
a) No further action	This option would normally be applied where the PD/PT did not feel that the Special Circumstance had had an adverse effect on the students' performance, or where the PD/PT does not feel that the case constitutes a special circumstance.
b) No further action, fully compensated through previous adjustments	When a student has been affected by the special circumstance but action has already been taken to compensate the student (i.e. an in-course extension to a deadline or where a learning adjustment is set later in the year following submission of a special circumstance form)
c) Disregard penalties for late submission of coursework	Where a student has been unable to submit a component of assessed work by the designated deadline due to a special circumstance and has been penalised with a late penalty, as per University regulations, the PD/PT can recommend that any late penalties are waived, so as not to adversely affect the final course mark.
d) Disregard missing component and derive overall mark/grade from completed work	Where a student has been unable to submit a component of assessed work due to a special circumstance, the PD/PT can recommend that the missed component is disregarded (zero-weighted), so as not to adversely affect the final course mark.
e) Disregard unreliable component and derive overall mark from completed work if to the student's benefit	Where a student has submitted a component of assessed work, but does not appear to have performed to the best of their ability due to a special circumstance, the PD/PT can recommend that the affected component is disregarded (zero-weighted), so as not to adversely affect the final course mark.

² http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special_Circumstances.pdf

f) Submit missing assessment if course is failed	If a student has not submitted a component of assessed work due to special circumstances, which has resulted in the student failing a course, the PD/PT can recommend that the missing component be resubmitted and counted towards the final course mark.
g) Null sit if course is failed	Where a student has been adversely affected by special circumstances so that the final mark for the course is not considered a reasonable indicator of attainment of the learning outcomes, a Null Sit can be recommended by the PD/PT. A Null Sit is where the assessment attempt is set aside by the Board of Examiners. No result is returned to Registry for the affected course and the credits for that course are not included in any calculation of the average mark for the year of study. Null sits do not count toward the maximum number of permitted attempts.
h) Borderline, award pass	A Board of Examiners can choose to award a pass to a student who has failed a course due to being adversely affected by special circumstances and where the fail mark is considered "borderline". A mark between 38 and 39.9% constitutes a borderline fail.

The Postgraduate (Taught) Team Leader may find it helpful to categorise each special circumstance case as a **Minor**, **Moderate** or **Major** special circumstance, relating to what extent the student has been adversely affected. The table below is a guideline on which of the above actions fall in to which category.

Minor	Moderate	Major
a) No further action b) No further action, fully compensated through previous adjustments c) Disregard penalties for late submission of coursework	c) Disregard penalties for late coursework submission d) Disregard missing component and derive overall mark/grade from completed work e) Disregard unreliable component and derive overall mark from completed work if to the student's benefit	f) Sit alternative assessment if course is failed g) Null sit if course is failed h) Borderline, award pass

Note: This table is a guideline only and should not be considered University policy. Each special circumstance case should be dealt with on a case by case basis.

4.2 Programme Boards

Where the Special Circumstances Committee has agreed that the special circumstances submitted by a student have had an adverse impact on an assessment(s), in addition to implementing the special circumstances decisions to an individual course(s), the following options are available to a Board of Examiners when determining an overall mark/grade for the student affected:

- a) No further action;
- c) Special Circumstances are taken into account for degree classification and/or award for Borderline candidates;
- d) Where a mark for a course is missing or deemed unreliable, the Board of Examiners will follow Taught Assessment Regulation 59³ (“Failure to complete assessment of a degree programme adequately”)

5 Regulations Consulted:

Common Sense Guidelines:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.95860!/fileManager/SCGuidance_May12.pdf

University Special Circumstances Policy:

http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special_Circumstances.pdf

University Operational Guidance on role of Convener of Board of Examiners:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Staff/ExamBoard/Convener.pdf>

University Taught Assessment Regulations:

<http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/TaughtAssessmentRegulations.PDF>

³ <http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/TaughtAssessmentRegulations.pdf>