

**School of GeoSciences**  
**Teaching Organisation**  
**Special Circumstances policy**  
**2013/2014**

The purpose of this document is to detail a new and robust procedure in dealing with student Special Circumstances in the School of GeoSciences. The introduction of the Personal Tutor (PT) system and the creation of the Student Support Coordinator roles have changed the demographic of Special Circumstance Committees and the process of awarding special circumstances to students whose studies have been affected adversely and should be updated to reflect the changes in staff responsibilities.

## **1. Roles**

1.1 Course Organiser: when approached by a student with special circumstances, should direct the student to the relevant Student Support Coordinator. All special circumstances forms should be raised by the Student Support Coordinator with the consideration of the Personal Tutor. Course Organisers SHOULD NOT agree any course of action with the student regarding special circumstances without referring them to the Student Support Coordinator. Any extensions to coursework deadlines should not be granted by the Course Organiser. All extensions are to be arranged the student with the Student Support Coordinator.

**NOTE: Zero-weighting an assessed component of a course is a Special Circumstance and should be treated as so. 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 Personal Tutor: The role of the personal tutor in relation to special circumstances is to refer the student to the Student Support Coordinator to discuss their circumstances. The Student Support Coordinator then liaises with personal tutor so as they are aware that a form has been raised.

1.3 Special Circumstances committees (pre-honours and honours): is to consider the 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 Board<sup>1</sup>: The convener of the Board of Examiners is responsible for deciding the composition of the Special Circumstances committee, and is expected to chair it or delegate the role. If the convener is not present at the meeting, s/he should receive a report from the committee with summary recommendations. It is the responsibility of the Convener to present the Special Circumstances at the Exam Board following discussion of each course, unless this responsibility is delegated to the Convener of the Special Circumstances Committee (if different from the Convener of the Exam Board).

1.5 Convener of the Special Circumstances Committee (if different from Convener of Exam Board):<sup>2</sup> The convener of the Special Circumstances committee is responsible for ensuring that a summary report (produced by

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

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Staff/ExamBoard/Convener.pdf>

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 Student Support Coordinator: The role of the Student Support Coordinator is to act as first point of contact to students, advising them on Special Circumstances, helping them to complete the form and gather the appropriate evidence. The SSC will attend each relevant Committee meeting to present the Special Circumstances cases, to advocate for the student, and to aid the convener and the academic members of the committee in making recommendations.
- 1.7 Academic Members of Special Circumstances Committee: The role of the academic representatives 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 Teaching Organisation Deputy Manager (pre-honours SC only): for the pre-honours Special Circumstances Committee only, to act as committee secretary, collecting and collating all the cases and ensuring that where appropriate, evidence has been submitted; preparing an anonymised summary to be distributed to committee members; taking minutes and recording the recommendations; and ensuring that the recommendations are communicated to the appropriate UG secretaries in time for the Exam Boards.
- 1.9 UG Secretary (honours SC only): for the Honours Special Circumstances Committee only, to act as committee secretary, collecting and collating all the cases and ensuring that where appropriate, evidence has been submitted; preparing an anonymised summary to be distributed to committee members; taking minutes and recording the recommendations; and ensuring that the recommendations are ready in time for the Exam Boards.

## **2. Special Circumstance form process**

- 2.1 The Student Support Coordinator (SSC) will initiate the process of raising the forms.
- 2.2 Personal Tutors AND Course Organisers (CO) will be advised to direct students to the SSC to raise a special circumstances form.
- 2.3 Once the SSC has raised the form, they will contact the relevant PT for input on the PT comments section.
- 2.4 No forms are to be raised by academic members of staff.
- 2.5 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.
- 2.6 Forms must be signed by PT/SSC 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.
- 2.7 Copies of any medical certificates should be kept with ALL copies of SC forms (electronic and paper copies).
- 2.8 Other Schools will be asked to send SC forms to the relevant SSC.
- 2.9 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.

### **3. Special Circumstance Committees**

#### **3.1 Pre-honours**

3.1.1 The pre-honours committee will consist of:

Senior Personal Tutor (chair)  
Deputy Senior Personal Tutor  
Student Support Coordinator (Geography)  
Student Support Coordinator (Earth Science and Ecological & Environmental Science)  
Teaching Organisation Deputy Manager  
Academic representatives from Earth Science, Ecological Sciences and Geography (1 each)\*

\* This will be on a biannual rota basis.

#### **3.2 Honours**

Special Circumstances Committees meet 3 times in the academic year where necessary, prior to the Board of Examiners meetings in January, May and August.

3.2.1 The Earth Science committee will consist of:

Convenor of the Board of Examiners\*  
Chair of the Special Circumstances Committee\*  
Student Support Coordinator for Earth Sciences  
Earth Science honours Course Secretary  
1 x academic representative for each degree stream within the Earth Sciences (4 in total)

3.2.2 The Ecological and Environmental Sciences committee consists of:

Convenor of the Board of Examiners  
Chair of the Special Circumstances committee  
EES Examinations Officer  
Student Support Coordinator for EES  
EES Course Secretary  
1 x academic representative from EES

3.2.3 Geography honours SC committee was streamlined from previous years and will forthwith consist of:

Deputy Senior Personal Tutor/Chair of the Special Circumstances committee  
Convenor of the Board of Examiners  
Geography Student Support Coordinator  
Geography Course Secretary  
4 x Geography academic staff (2 Physical Geography + 2 Human Geography)

### 3.2.4 The Meteorology committee will consist of:

- Convenor of the Board of Examiners
- Chair of the Special Circumstances committee/Meteorology Co-ordinator
- Student Support Coordinator for Earth Sciences
- Meteorology Course Secretary
- 1 x academic representative from Meteorology

\*The Convenor of the BoE and Chair of the SCC on Earth Sciences will also act as representative of their specific degree programme.

## 4. Special Circumstance Committee recommendations<sup>3</sup>

### 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 SCC did not feel that the Special Circumstance had had an adverse effect on the students' performance
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 SCC 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 SCC 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 SCC can recommend that the affected component is disregarded (zero-weighted), so as not to adversely affect the final course mark.
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 SCC can recommend that the missing component be resubmitted and counted towards the final course mark.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special\\_Circumstances.pdf](http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special_Circumstances.pdf)

g) Re-submit assessment if course is failed	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, and, as a result, they have failed the course, the SCC can recommend that the affected component be resubmitted and counted towards the final course mark.
h) Sit alternative assessment if course is failed	Where a student has underperformed or failed to submit a component of assessed work due to being affected by special circumstances and the SCC feel that they are unable to take any of the actions c) – g), a further or alternative assessment can be recommended. This would normally be in the form of a resit exam or resit in-course assessment. Resit methods need not be the same as those used to assess the learning outcomes at the first attempt, but all relevant learning outcomes must be assessed.
i) 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 SCC. 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.
j) Borderline, award pass	A Board of Examiners can choose to award a pass to a student who has marginally failed a course due to being adversely affected by special circumstances.

The SCC 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.

<b>Minor</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Major</b>
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 submission of coursework 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) Submit missing assessment if course is failed g) Re-submit assessment if course is failed h) Sit alternative assessment if course is failed i) Null sit if course is failed j) 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;
- b) Student is given the opportunity of re-assessment without academic penalty;
- 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 59<sup>4</sup> (“Failure to complete assessment of a degree programme adequately”)

## 5. Administration

- 5.1 Pre-honours Special Circumstances cases will be administered by the Deputy Manager of the TO, who is responsible for gathering and summarising pre-honours cases for the pre-honours special circumstances committee meeting. The relevant course secretary will administer SC case for the Honours courses that they are responsible for. The course secretary should also collate and summarise the cases for the relevant meeting. Summaries should not include the names of the students affected in order that the SCC can come to a decision without any knowledge of the student jeopardising any decision that the Committee makes.
- 5.2 Each special circumstance case is assigned a number in order that the SC case is recognisable on all marks sheets presented at Boards of Examiners meetings. Each number will be included in a ‘Notes’ column in the sheets presented at the BoE alongside an acronym describing the recommendation of the SC committee. An appendix showing a recommended list of acronyms can be found at the end of this document [Appendix 1]. Each subject area in the School will follow its own numbering system, as follows:

Earth Sciences – SCES01, SCES02...

Ecological and Environmental Sciences – SCEC01, SCEC02...

Geography – SCGE01, SCGE02...

Pre-honours courses – SCPR01, SCPR02...

The allocated number will remain with the student through the remainder of their (undergraduate) academic career.

- 5.3 The Student Support Coordinator raising the SC form and the Deputy Manager of the Teaching Organisation will be responsible for ensuring each form is numbered appropriately. Pre-honours students’ SC numbers will remain with them throughout the term of their pre-honours studies. Students’ progressing to honours years will be given a new SC number on the first occasion that they raise Special Circumstances in either their 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> year of study. This number will remain with them for the duration of their honours study. A spreadsheet with details of each students’ SC number will be maintained by the Student Support Coordinators and the Deputy manager of the TO.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/TaughtAssessmentRegulations.pdf>

- 5.4 It is recommended that the Student Support Coordinator, or whoever is creating the Special Circumstance form, should ensure that they check the Meetings/Notes tab on the Student's EUCLID record for any information relating to the Special Circumstance case.
- 5.5 Details of recommendations will be reported in the form of a spreadsheet by Course Secretaries and the Deputy Manager of the TO to the Chair of the SCC and the Convenor of the BoE. A record of these will be kept within the TO for a period of at least 5 years (although actual SC forms need not be retained for longer than 1 year). Secretaries will then update each course/programme marks sheet with SC numbers and recommendation acronyms for the Board of Examiners meeting. In order for the recommendation spreadsheet to remain consistent across the School, all admin staff responsible for updating these will use the same format [Appendix 2]. Special Circumstance convenors will report the recommendations of the SC committee at the Board of Examiners meetings on a course by course basis.
- 5.6 Information and guidance on Special Circumstances will be posted online on the Teaching Organisation web pages. There should be two distinct special circumstance pages – one for staff and one for students. The staff page will include details of the members of each Special Circumstances Committee and dates of meetings, as well as guidance on procedures at School, College and University level. Student SC pages should include student-focussed guidance on special circumstances, including school, college and university guidance on what constitutes a special circumstance and details of how to raise a special circumstance case and who to approach to do so.
- 5.7 Student Support Coordinators and/or Course Secretaries should notify students and appropriate staff (including staff from other Schools/Institutions), prior to each exam diet, of a deadline date for submission of Special Circumstance forms. The deadline should be at least 3 working days before the relevant Board of Examiners meeting to allow for the necessary administration to be completed.

## **6. Regulations Consulted:**

University Special Circumstances Policy:

[http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special\\_Circumstances.pdf](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>

## Appendix 1

A list of Special Circumstance recommendation acronyms to be used on course and programme marks sheets which are presented at Board of Examiners meetings

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Acronym</b>
Zero-weight affected component	ZWCO
Zero-weight entire coursework component	ZWCW
Zero-weight entire exam component	ZWEX
Waive late penalties	LP
Submit missing component	MCO
Re-submit unreliable component	UCO
Further Replacement Assessment/Resit as a First Attempt	RFA
Null sit	NULL
In-course extension already granted	ICEXT
Borderline mark, pass awarded	BL
SC Noted/No further action	NFA

These acronyms will all be pre-fixed with the individual SC number as per guidelines above.