

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 Co-Ordinator 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. Special Circumstance form process

- 1.1 The student support co-ordinator (SSC) will initiate the process of raising the forms.
- 1.2 Personal Tutors AND Course Organisers (CO) will be advised to direct students to the SSC to raise a special circumstances form.
- 1.3 Once the SSC has raised the form, they will contact the relevant PT for input on the PT comments section.
- 1.4 No forms are to be raised by academic members of staff.
- 1.5 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.
- 1.6 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.
- 1.7 Copies of any medical certificates should be kept with ALL copies of SC forms (electronic and paper copies).
- 1.8 Other Schools will be asked to send SC forms to the relevant SSC.
- 1.9 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.

2. Special Circumstance Committees

2.1 Pre-honours

- 2.1.1 The pre-honours committee will consist of:

Senior Personal Tutor (chair)
Deputy Senior Personal Tutor
Student Support Co-Ordinator (Geography)
Student Support Co-Ordinator (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.

2.2 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.

2.2.1 The Earth Science committee will consist of:

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

2.2.2 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 Co-ordinator for EES
EES Course Secretary
1 x academic representative from EES

2.2.3 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 Co-ordinator
Geography Course Secretary
4 x Geography academic staff (2 Physical Geography + 2 Human Geography)

2.2.4 The Meteorology committee will consist of:

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

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

3. Roles

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 Convener of the Exam Board¹: 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).
- 3.3 Convener of the Special Circumstances Committee (if different from Convener of Exam Board):² The convener of the Special Circumstances committee is responsible 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.
- 3.4 Student Support Co-Ordinator: The role of the Student Support Co-Ordinator 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.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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.

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

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

4. Special Circumstance Committee recommendations³

In most cases, the outcomes of Special Circumstances for pre-honours students will be treated differently to those of Honours students. Below is a summary of recommendations that can be suggested to a Board of Examiners by Special Circumstances Committees for both Pre-Honours and Honours students:

4.1 Pre-honours

4.1.1 Null Sit

There are various options that could be considered as a recommendation for a Null Sit award:

- Further Replacement Assessment or Resit as a First Attempt
 - this option can be used where a mark is not available for the affected component or where the mark available is not considered to be a reliable indicator of attainment. A student given the recommendation 'Resit as First Attempt' still has the option of re-sitting an assessment if a pass mark had been obtained.⁴ The student will be allowed to choose the better of the two marks following the resit.
- Zero-weight adversely affected components
 - where this is applicable, the SC committee can choose to recommend zero-weighting certain components adversely affected. This can only be recommended by the SC committee, NOT by Course Organisers or similar.

4.1.2 SC Noted

This option should only be recommended where the SC committee feel that the student was not adversely affected by the special circumstances lodged and the course learning outcomes were achieved.

4.1.3 Waive Late Penalties

Where late penalties have been applied, the SC committee can recommend that these are waived so that the student is not punished for handing work in late where special circumstances may have had an effect on the students' ability to submit work on time. This can only be applied by SC committees and not by Course Organisers. All work submitted late should be subject to penalties as per University regulations.

4.1.4 Extension

Where a student has been unable to submit a piece of coursework due to being adversely affected by special circumstances, the SC committee may recommend that the student is granted an extension to submit this piece of work. This is different to an in-course extension, which should be granted by the Student Support Co-ordinator, following discussion with the Course Organiser, at the time of assessment. This action would be used rarely and would normally be addressed by a Further Replacement Assessment.

³ http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special_Circumstances.pdf

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

In the School of GeoSciences, special circumstance cases will be considered as having had a minor, moderate or major impact on the students' ability to perform to the best of their ability. Below are guidelines on which action should be taken, in which order, by Special Circumstance committees in relation to the seriousness of the circumstance presented. These are guidelines for pre-honours only, however, it should be noted that these recommendations were created in direct relation to the University Special Circumstances Policy⁵. The recommendations made by the Special Circumstances Committee are binding, and the Board of Examiners must follow them in all but exceptional cases.

	MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR
1	- Zero-weight affected component - Waive late penalties (if applicable)	- Zero-weight affected component/ entire exam/entire coursework - Waive late penalties (if applicable)	- Zero-weight affected component/ entire exam/entire coursework - Waive late penalties (if applicable)
2	- Further replacement assessment - Extension	- Further Replacement Assessment - Extension	- Further Replacement Assessment - Extension
3	- SC noted		

Disclaimer: The above table is guidance on how SCC's should consider actions on SC cases and is not a recognised University policy. Each SC case should be considered individually on a case by case basis.

4.2 Honours

4.2.1 Null Sit

There are various options that could be considered as a recommendation for a Null Sit award:

- Further Replacement Assessment or Resit as a First Attempt
 - this option should only be recommended for honours students with Special Circumstances where the student will not be able to progress to the senior honours year. This may be due to them having not attained enough credits (80 of 120 taken) or an average score of 40% across the year. All FRA recommendations must be submitted to College in the form of a Concession for the College committee to make the final decision.
- Zero-weight adversely affected components
 - where this is applicable, the SC committee can choose to recommend zero-weighting certain components which have been adversely affected. This can only be recommended by the SC committee, NOT by Course Organisers or similar.
- Credits Awarded on Aggregate (CAA)
 - this should be used where an honours student has failed a course(s) due to special circumstance but has achieved enough credits (80 or more of 120 taken) and a high enough average score (above 40% for the total year) to progress to senior honours. Marks and credits for those courses failed, where a student has special circumstances, will not be used to calculate the students' final year average. This is different to Credits Awarded on Aggregate awarded to students who do NOT have Special Circumstances for the courses they have failed, where their course mark and credits not attained will be included in the total year average calculation.

4.2.2 No Further Action

This option should only be recommended where the SC committee feel that the student was not adversely affected by the special circumstances lodged

⁵ http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Policies/Special_Circumstances.pdf

4.2.3 Waive Late Penalties

Where late penalties have been applied, the SC committee can recommend that these are waived so that the student is not punished for handing work in late where special circumstances may have had an effect on the students' ability to submit work on time. This can only be applied by SC committees and not by Course Organisers. All work submitted late should be subject to penalties as per University regulations.

4.2.4 Extension

Where a student has been unable to submit a piece of coursework due to being adversely affected by special circumstances, the SC committee may recommend that the student is granted an extension to submit this piece of work. This is different to an in-course extension, which should be granted by the Student Support Co-ordinator, following discussion with the Course Organiser, at the time of assessment. This action should be used in extreme circumstances.

The below table is a guideline for Special Circumstance Committees when recommending courses of action to Boards of Examiners for students with Special Circumstances. It is not a recognised University policy and each SC case should be considered individually on a case by case basis. The recommendations made by the Special Circumstances Committee are binding, and the Board of Examiners must follow them in all but exceptional cases.

	MINOR	MODERATE	MAJOR
1	- Zero-weight affected component - Waive late penalties (if applicable)	- Zero-weight affected component/ entire exam/entire coursework - Waive late penalties (if applicable)	- Zero-weight affected component/ entire exam/entire coursework - Waive late penalties (if applicable)
2*	- Null sit: CAA - Further replacement assessment - Extension	- Null sit: CAA - Further Replacement Assessment - Extension	- Null sit: CAA - Further Replacement Assessment - Extension
3	- SC Noted		

*The recommended actions in row 2 are not listed in order. Each should be used in relation to a particular SC case, on a case by case basis.

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...

5.3 The Student Support Co-ordinator 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 3rd, 4th or 5th 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 Co-ordinators and the Deputy manager of the TO.

5.4 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. 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.

5.5 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.

6. Regulations Consulted:

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>