GUILD PAPER ON SPECIAL CONSIDERATION
FEEDBACK (No. 2)

Feedback on the Guild Paper on Special Consideration was compiled by Trudi McGlade on 19 September 2006. Subsequently further feedback has been received and is compiled here.

(i) Faculty of Law

Law’s response to “Special Consideration at UWA: Discussion Paper”
Prepared by Penny Carruthers (Acting Associate Dean) and
James Mitton (Acting FAO)
11th October 2006

Recommendation 1

Law supports the recommendation that a working party be established to review Special Consideration. Given that Special Consideration is a University wide process, there does need to be a certain level of standardisation and this would also be of benefit to students given the number of students enrolled in combined courses. Law also agrees with Jane Emberson in that this working party should include representation from academic staff.

Recommendation 2

Our position on this recommendation is similar to that of ALVA. We are happy for the working party to consider such definitions as part of the review of Special Consideration.

Recommendation 3

Law would strongly support the development of firmer rules on Special Consideration. For instance, we would like to see a deadline instituted for Special Consideration applications in the same manner as for deferred examinations (UGR 1.2.1.24(3)). Further, it would be useful for Faculty staff to have some guidelines to assist in the application of Special Consideration.

Recommendation 4

A natural outcome of the development of University wide rules or policies on Special Consideration would be the process of ensuring that Faculties complied with such rules and as such we support this recommendation.

Recommendation 5

Whilst we are happy for a working party to consider the process of extension requests across the University, we would strongly resist attempts to centralise this process to the level of the Faculty. Law considers it appropriate to leave the discretion for assignment extensions with the relevant unit co-ordinator. We don’t see that it is unreasonable for students to observe different policies in relation to Special Consideration across Faculties as they do with regard to assignment submission, progress statuses, degree rules and so on.

Given the complexity of the current Special Consideration form and the fact that for a number of faculties, extension requests are dealt with by the unit co-ordinator, we would suggest that extension requests be removed from the Special Consideration form. We also agree with ALVA in that many extension requests fall outside of the normal scope of Special Consideration.

Recommendation 6

We accept this recommendation. As has already been pointed out, a review of the form had been mooted by the FAO Group. We certainly do agree that the Guild should be involved in this process.
Recommendation 7

We agree with ALVA that this is a matter outside the scope of a Special Consideration review as it is already being considered separately. In any event we do not consider that this is a matter with which the working party need concern itself. The Special Consideration form deals with a range of matters that may be dealt with by different staff members within the Faculty.

If a student wishes to apply for Special Consideration they should present to the relevant Faculty or Faculties to arrange a time to speak to a relevant officer and they will then be directed appropriately.

Recommendation 8

We support this recommendation and again note that in order to advise students of time limits for applications, we need to have time limits. Templates could be designed for student notification as has been done with the appeals process.

Recommendation 9

We do not object to this recommendation. However, we would require that some discretion be retained in regard to who could be considered an acceptable report provider. The grounds on which students apply for Special Consideration can vary enormously and we would not like to limit the range of acceptable report providers as it is unlikely that a working party could anticipate all likely grounds for Special Consideration and who would be an acceptable report provider.

Recommendation 10

We have no objections with this recommendation. We have no concerns with dealing with an authorised advocate or support person or having this embedded in policy.

Recommendation 11

We question whether the working party has any role in relation to supplementary assessment given the changes to rules for supplementary assessment recently made by Academic Council to take effect from 2008.

The Faculty of Law has serious concerns over marking with discretion especially given that our results are scaled. It seems that any discretionary marking would be fairly arbitrary. As such, we prefer to give students extensions or deferred examinations to allow them to complete their assessments at a later time when the deleterious circumstances have eased (where possible). Having said that, any assistance in determining just what is reasonable adjustment would be appreciated.

Recommendation 12

We do not see that any extra work needs to be done in this area. Records management processes are already very good and just as we are hesitant about mandating who is an acceptable report provider, we also have reservations about codifying what types of evidence are acceptable given the diversity of applications for Special Consideration.

Recommendation 13

We support this recommendation and as has already been stated, we would appreciate the introduction of time limits for all Special Consideration applications. As always, exceptions could be made if exceptional circumstances called for it but there should be a date after which results are seen to be fixed.

Recommendation 14
We support this recommendation and make the following observations:

**Number** – Law encourages students with ongoing issues to manage their situation such that future applications for Special Consideration may not be necessary. However, where a student genuinely requires Special Consideration on an ongoing basis, we do not see that this should be curtailed.

**Adjustments** – in line with our attached policy on Special Consideration in Examinations and Deferred Examinations we do not feel that it is generally desirable to have a mixture of outcomes for students with the exception of supplementary assessment which is considered separately.

**Time limit** – again we believe that time limits do need to be set but that Faculties should retain some discretion where there are exceptional circumstances.

**Recommendation 15**

We support this recommendation. As a side issue, Law’s Acting FAO recently completed the Mental Health First Aid course and one of the co-ordinators mentioned that she would like to see more people in Sub-Dean/Academic Student Advisor positions complete this course.

**Extract from the Law School’s Academic and Teaching and Learning committee’s meeting of 26 October 2006:**

3. **Review of Special Consideration**

The meeting endorsed the response prepared by Penny and James to the discussion paper on Special Consideration.

In particular, it was agreed that extensions for assignments should continue to be dealt with at the unit level. It was also suggested that where a student sought extensions in more than one unit, on the same grounds, the student should inform the relevant unit coordinators of this fact, and the unit coordinators should attempt to provide a consistent response to the applications.

(ii) **Feedback from the Faculty of Life and Physical Sciences’ Teaching and Learning Committee**

**EXTRACT FROM FACULTY OF LIFE & PHYSICAL SCIENCES TEACHING & LEARNING COMMITTEE MEETING 25th SEPTEMBER 2006**

12. **GUILD DISCUSSION PAPER ON SPECIAL CONSIDERATION**

Clare Hannell and Gina Barron from the Guild Student Centre had prepared a discussion paper ‘Special Consideration at UWA’, which made a number of recommendations in relation to how special consideration requests should be processed. This was considered by the Sub-Dean/FAO group on 4 August, who requested that Faculties be given an opportunity to consider the paper. Dr Emberson’s response had been attached to the Agenda.

Comments made during the discussion were as follows:

- It was questioned whether special consideration could be standardised when assessment was done at the individual level.
- Overall, special consideration for the unit needed to take into account a student's performance in other components of a unit.
- Special consideration requests should be finalised before the final Board of Examiners meeting.
Responses on each of the recommendations contained in the paper were as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A practising academic must be included in the membership of the Working Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agreed, but it was noted that it would be difficult to achieve total consistency.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>There would always be differences in ‘student support’ staff positions within Faculties. It would be more appropriate for the responsibilities of staff to clearly be defined and recorded on the University website. Students also need to be informed where this information was located.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Time limit for applications need to be implemented</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Allowing students to apply for special consideration retrospectively must be limited for practical and equity reasons. One-year time limit would be supported.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Agreed</td>
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The response by Dr Jane Emberson referred to above was included in the first feedback paper dated 19 September 2006.)

Email from Professor Don Robertson, Faculty of Life and Physical Sciences:

Dear Trudi

The FLPS T&L committee has considered the recommendations of the working party on special consideration and by now you should have received our feedback. I write to clarify our feedback on the recommendation concerning retrospectivity of special consideration. In our feedback we indicated that a maximum period of 1 year would be acceptable. I wish to make absolutely clear that this view applies only to those rare and special cases where retrospectivity might be allowed and is not intended to indicate a general acceptance of the notion of retrospectivity. Our faculty has conveyed on other occasions our firm belief that requests for special consideration should normally only be accepted before the finalization of marks in a unit at the very latest, by the time of the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners. It has been suggested that for practical purposes, 3 days after an exam is held should be the normal deadline, because students are usually unaware of the dates of Boards of Examiners, and we would support this as a working rule.

I would be grateful if this additional feedback could be included in information sent to the working party.

Regards
Don
Professor Don Robertson
The Auditory Laboratory
Physiology
School of Biomedical and Chemical Sciences
The University of Western Australia

31 October 2006