



SOAS SU Preferenda Manifesto Submission Form

Name	Stella Dixon
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What Preferenda Solution are you submitting a manifesto on behalf of?	Should SOAS SU start an official campaign to reform Mitigating Circumstances?
Facts: What is the issue you're trying to address?	<p>The SOAS Mitigating Circumstances Policy states that "All mitigating circumstances claims must be accompanied by original, contemporaneous, independent third party documentary evidence which must confirm the existence of the mitigating circumstances and state how the circumstances have impacted upon the student."</p> <p>The deadlines for submitting this evidence should "be published by the Registry as part of the annual assessment calendar. These dates should also be published by departments to students. The deadline for the submission of claims is the Friday before the week of the appropriate Mitigating Circumstances Panel and all mitigating circumstances must be submitted by these deadlines. Late claims will be rejected unless a valid reason for the late submission can be provided and in such cases the Chair's Action will be taken." However, this timetable has not been published in an easily accessible location for this academic year, especially since the new website. The link to the 'Key School Dates Calendar' in point 2 of the Assessment Handbook takes you to an error page.</p>

	<p>These requirements are significantly stricter and more opaque than other universities. For example, UCL provides two week extensions for self certification, and Birkbeck does not require any evidence at all for the first claim of an academic year (for any outcome) and clearly explains the process on their website.</p>
<p>Impact: How does the current issue affect students?</p>	<p>The current SOAS Mitigating Circumstances policy is actively harmful to the student body:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mit Circs team routinely rejects requests for extensions and deferrals based on technicalities, such as not submitting an application within the extremely tight window they prescribe, even when individual circumstances make this impossible (such as being in hospital). In addition, these timelines are not easily available to students. 2. The policy demands extensive medical evidence which requires students to gather medical opinions at their own expense during a cost of living crisis, and places extreme administrative burden on the NHS during its own crisis. Students are not believed about their own health and circumstances. 3. The policy excludes students with chronic health issues by demanding that medical evidence is "contemporaneous... [and] supports the difficulties you have been recently facing". When disabled students are having a flare-up, it is often difficult to obtain this evidence. Disabilities alone are not enough to apply for Mit Circs - SOAS considers SIP extensions (only 1 week) to be enough to cover any delays caused by disability even though these are designed to spread out work rather than compensate for health issues, flareups or crises. 4. When applications are inevitably rejected, students face a long wait to have their appeals heard due to an overburdened appeals team, with zero communication in the meantime. There are examples of students who have been waiting over a year for their appeals to be dealt with. 5. Any extensions that students manage to receive (including via self cert) are extremely short, usually one week. 6. All of the above has an extremely negative impact on student wellbeing and mental health, as students who are already facing crisis are forced to prove themselves over and over again while their academic future hangs in the balance for years at a time.

<p>Response: What would you like the students' union to do to address the issue and how can we take it forward?</p>	<p>SOAS SU should start an official campaign to reform Mitigating Circumstances.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We call for the SU to create an official campaign to reform the Mitigating Circumstances policy. 2. This reform should aim to abolish or significantly relax the requirements for providing evidence, allowing a wider range of acceptable reasons to be granted Mitigating Circumstances, significantly extend the periods for submitting evidence and for extensions, and reform the Mit Circs team to focus on compassion and student wellbeing over arbitrary application of procedures. 3. The SU should facilitate a working group with relevant stakeholders, disabled students societies, students with SIPs and other disabled students to discuss the relaxing of requirements, propose something specific around policies and any other additional content which is created to make the process more accessible to ensure that any decision includes those most affected by it. 4. Policies should be rewritten to be easier to read without having to cross-reference several documents and should be easy to find on the SOAS website. This should include making the content more accessible and the creation of other supplementary information to make the process more easy to navigate 5. SOAS should proactively promote Mitigating Circumstances, ensuring that every student is aware of the policy. This should include being promoted within in Freshers Week (events/communication), an email to all students who have declared a disability, via physical communication and within more SOAS and SU webpages 6. The deadlines for applying for Mitigating Circumstances and Study Inclusion Plans (SIP) should be easy to access on the SOAS website as well as opportunities for late submissions. 7. The University should increase capacity of the teams who process Mitigating Circumstances and Appeals. 8. The SU should provide specific information to international students about the available support that is available to them taking into consideration Visa requirements via Mitigating Circumstances and SIPs. The International Students Officer should support this work.
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