

University of Glasgow**Academic Standards Committee - Friday 20 February 2009****Review of Postgraduate Taught Generic Regulation and Compensation Regulations – Report from Academic Regulations Sub-Committee****Mr Tom Guthrie, Convener of Sub-Committee****Introduction**

As agreed by Senate, a review of the taught Masters generic regulation has commenced. The Academic Regulations Sub-Committee (ARSC) of Academic Standards Committee is undertaking the review, and will recommend a revised regulation to ASC before the end of the current session. The generic regulations for Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates are also being considered. In addition, the provisions for compensation at both undergraduate and postgraduate level are being reviewed.

Consultation

ARSC has consulted with faculties by seeking feedback on two consultation documents (see [Annex A](#) and [Annex B](#)) which provided commentary and possible options regarding the following key issues:

- Regulations for Progression to Masters
- Criteria for the Award of Merit and Distinction
- Capping of Reassessment
- Use of Separate regulations for Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates
- Accommodation of differences in Degree programmes
- Compensation at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Faculties were also invited to provide any other suggestions for changes to the PGT generic regulations.

Consultation responses have not provided a consistent or uniform view on the best structure or regulatory arrangements for PGT awards. ARSC has carefully considered the different views and supporting arguments, and as a result presents here the following recommendations:

Proposals for ASC**1 Progression to Masters**

Five options were set out in the consultation:

- a) Leaving the threshold for progression to Masters unchanged. (Average of Grade C in taught courses with no more than 25% of the credits for these courses at Grade E and none below Grade E).

- b) Changing the progression requirement from an average of Grade C in taught courses to an average of Grade D.
- c) Removing the current progression requirement of an average of Grade C in taught courses, while continuing to allow programme documents to specify pre-requisite courses for the dissertation or other substantial independent work.
- d) Adopting either a) or b) and permitting departments discretion to allow progress in individual cases.
- e) Adopting either a) or b) and retaining the possibility of specifying the achievement of specific grades in specific courses as a prerequisite for progress to the dissertation.

There had been very little support for having no progression requirement (option c). ARSC therefore agreed that a progression threshold should be retained.

In terms of what progression threshold to adopt, there had been responses in favour of both options a) and b) with strong views as to why either an average of Grade C or an average of Grade D should be adopted as the threshold for progression to the Masters dissertation.

Persuasive arguments were presented for moving the threshold to an average of Grade D (option b). Proponents considered that this requirement was consistent with both the Code of Assessment and the SCQF. ARSC noted that courses on Masters programmes would all, or mostly, be at SCQF Level 11, and that learning outcomes for these courses would be pitched at Level 11 with the attainment of grade D indicating a satisfactory performance measured against these outcomes at that level. ARSC agreed that if the principle for progression was that students needed to perform satisfactorily in the taught courses preceding the dissertation; then option b) would be logical.

However, the Sub-Committee was persuaded by the argument in support of option a) that the Masters dissertation/substantial independent work was a special element of the degree which required a different set of skills from those required for the taught components, and therefore that the threshold for progression should be based on the principle that a higher than satisfactory level of performance was required in order to select students who would be capable of undertaking the Masters dissertation/substantial independent work.

ARSC acknowledged that this outcome could also be achieved with a combination of options b) and e), as departments could identify particular courses where a higher than satisfactory level of performance was required as preparation for the dissertation. ARSC is aware that in certain cases the imposition of such prerequisites was essential to ensure that students had the capacity to complete the dissertation/substantial independent work. However, there was concern that there could be a high level of additional requirements under e) which would create too much inconsistency in degree requirements, thus undermining the philosophy which had been agreed in support of the introduction of the generic regulation. Consideration will therefore be given as to how the imposition of additional prerequisites will be monitored.

Most responses which favoured retention of the threshold at grade C also favoured retention of discretion to allow a student to progress where, in the judgement of the examiners, it is considered that there is a realistic prospect of the student satisfying the requirements for the award of a degree after reassessment.

Accordingly, **ARSC agreed to recommend to ASC continuation of the current arrangements for progression to Masters in the generic regulation, namely:**

- the threshold for progression to Masters should continue to be the achievement of an average of Grade C in taught courses;
- departments should have discretion to allow progress in individual cases;
- departments should be able to specify the achievement of specific grades in specific courses as a prerequisite for progress to the dissertation.

The Sub-Committee also agreed that use of Schedule A of the Code of Assessment should be continued with grade D being used to describe the satisfactory attainment of learning outcomes for each course being assessed.

In addition, ASC is asked to note:

- It is assumed that for most Masters degrees, students would do preparatory dissertation work prior to progression decisions being made due to the timescales of assessment involved in one year degrees. This means that it is essential that the rules for progress are made clear to students.
- Proposals on the compensation provisions which should apply in calculating achievement of the grade C are discussed below.

2 Criteria for the Award of Merit and Distinction

The three options in the table below were canvassed in the consultation, with A representing the current regulation:

Option	Merit	Distinction
A	Grade C or better in all components and Grade B or above in at least one third of the total credits	Grade B or better in all components and Grade A in at least one third of the total credits
B	Mean overall aggregation score ¹ equivalent to B3 or above	Mean overall aggregation score equivalent to A5 or above
C	Mean overall aggregation score equivalent to B3 or above for taught component + B for dissertation	Mean overall aggregation score equivalent to A5 or above for taught component + A for dissertation

The majority of responses favoured either Option B or Option C. ARSC agreed that Option A should not be adopted as there had been criticisms that the current criteria were too lenient and that the number of Merit awards in particular had risen since the introduction of the generic regulation.

The Sub-Committee noted that again supporters of Option C referred to the importance of the dissertation as the distinguishing feature of the Masters

¹ Calculated using the same procedures as involved in calculation of honours classifications at undergraduate level. This is consistent with the approach instructed by the current generic regulation.

degree which was why they saw the need to specify a level of achievement in this element in order for students to qualify for Merit or Distinction.

It was agreed to recommend Option C which included specific requirements for the dissertation. ARSC agreed that the regulations should stipulate that the criteria needed to be achieved at the first attempt and that Option B would apply to the Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate as there was no dissertation element to these programmes. It was also agreed that for clarity, the aggregation score (15) would be quoted in the regulation.

The Sub-Committee also considered responses to the question of whether any discretion should be permitted in awarding Merit and Distinction (currently with Option A, no discretion is permitted). It was agreed that with the introduction of Option C for Masters regulations, no discretion should be applied to the grade for the dissertation, but it could be applied to the aggregation score for taught courses in a similar way to the current arrangements for applying discretion on Honours aggregation scores.

Therefore, **ARSC agreed to recommend the following to ASC:**

For the postgraduate taught Masters regulation Merit and Distinction would be awarded as follows:

Merit: on the attainment, at the first attempt, of a mean overall aggregation score of 15 (equivalent to B3) or above for the taught component and Grade B3 or above for the dissertation.

Discretion could be applied to the consideration of an award of a Merit if the mean aggregation score for the taught component fell within the range 14.1 to 14.9.

Distinction: on the attainment, at the first attempt, of a mean overall aggregation score of 18 (equivalent to A5) or above for the taught component and Grade A5 or above for the dissertation.

Discretion could be applied to the consideration of an award of a Distinction if the mean aggregation score for the taught component fell within the range 17.1 to 17.9.

For Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates, either as exit awards or self-contained awards, the same criteria, and discretion, would apply except that, of course, the criteria would refer only to the taught component.

3 Capping the Dissertation

The current regulation capped the result for a dissertation at C3 which matched the grade at which taught courses were capped for Masters degrees. It was noted that taught courses were capped at Grade C because of the progression requirement of an average of Grade C. However it had been highlighted previously that the dissertation grade had no bearing on progression and that D3 was the minimum requirement for the award of the Masters degree. The Sub-Committee accepted the view that had been raised which was that students obtaining a D at the first attempt in their dissertation could feel disadvantaged compared to those who obtained less than a D at the first attempt but with the reassessment opportunity went on to achieve a C3. In the consultation responses there was also widespread support for capping resubmitted dissertations at Grade D3, although this was not unanimous as some respondents wished to retain the capping level of C3 and others were against any capping at all.

The Sub-Committee deliberated over the purpose of capping the dissertation. Capping of the taught components of the degree encouraged students to give their best performance in all courses across the programme at the first attempt. However, the dissertation was a piece of work which tended to be undertaken on its own. It was also noted that there were other incentives for students to perform well at the first attempt, particularly as the criteria for merit and distinction were based only on first attempt results. The Sub-Committee also felt that it would be more transparent if student transcripts showed the grade achieved at resit (both for taught courses and the dissertation), while indicating that result was a second attempt. It was therefore suggested that it was not necessary to cap reassessed dissertations.

In considering the capping process at undergraduate level, it was noted that a few years ago, practice had changed so that grades were not capped, but grade points were. Student transcripts therefore showed the actual grade achieved at resit, but the capping process had the effect of deflating the student's Grade Point Average which was used for progression decisions, and also the award of non-honours degrees. (It was also noted that capping of grade points could be waived to allow a student to achieve a non-honours graduating curriculum.)

Although the Sub-Committee agreed that it would be desirable to move away from capping resits for taught courses by grade, capping by grade point was not thought to be appropriate for the following reasons:

- I. Grade points only reflected the primary grades (A to H) and did not offer the granularity equivalent to the secondary bands (A1-A5 etc.) and therefore they could not be mapped onto current grade capping levels which were expressed by primary grade and secondary band;
- II. It was not considered useful to introduce two separate numerical scores into one set of regulations as there was potential for confusion between them. (The 22 point aggregation score was already being used for the calculation of Merit and Distinction.)

ARSC therefore agreed to recommend the following to ASC:

- a) Discontinuation of capping of dissertation reassessments;
- b) Changing capping arrangements for taught courses so that they would not be capped by grade, but would instead be capped by the aggregation score equivalent to C3 which was 12.

The Sub-Committee also recommended a review of the use of Grade Points in undergraduate regulations to consider the possibility of removing this numerical scale and operating with a single numerical scale (the 22 point aggregation score scale) which reflected the granularity of both primary grades and secondary bands.

4 Diploma and Certificate Regulations

In the consultation, faculties were asked for the views on whether the generic postgraduate diploma and certificate regulations should remain separate from the Masters regulation. Although a number of respondents suggested that the regulations could be incorporated into the Masters regulation, the Sub-Committee agreed with the rationale provided by the Faculties of Science that such a move could lead to the impression that these programmes were Masters exit awards, rather than self-contained qualifications which many students undertook as an end in themselves.

In considering possible changes to the generic diploma and certificate regulations, it was noted that a number of responses had drawn attention to the duration of study and had proposed that for part-time study this should be extended beyond two years which would allow more flexibility for CPD and lifelong learning opportunities. It was also suggested that these regulations should have the same criteria for Merit and Distinction as those which applied to taught Masters programmes (as referred to in recommendation 2 above).

ARSC agreed to present the following recommendations to ASC:

- a) separate generic regulations for postgraduate diplomas and certificates should be retained. (Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates which were only available as exit awards on Masters programmes would remain within the generic Masters regulation.);
- b) the maximum duration of study for part-time students should be extended from two to four years of registered study.

5 Differences in Degree Regulations

ARSC considered the question of whether the current Masters regulation should be amended to take account of programmes where the major part of the programme was a dissertation. It was noted that there had been fewer responses to this question, and that all but one had strongly advocated the use of separate regulations for degrees where research was the major component.

The Sub-Committee agreed that as the current regulation allowed flexibility in the amount of credit to be awarded for the dissertation (research) element, with only a minimum (60 credits) being prescribed, there was no need for any amendment. It was also agreed that Research degrees should be governed by separate regulations.

ARSC agreed that ASC should be invited to consider whether a generic regulation for postgraduate research (PGR) Masters degrees should be developed.

6 Review of Compensation

Only six responses had been received in response to the consultation document on compensation provisions. Additional comments from the Faculty of Information and Mathematical Sciences, and the departments of Computing Science and Economics had been received in the feedback on the PGT Generic regulation.

The views provided in the responses were as follows:

For PGT provision:

Most responses did not propose any change to the current arrangements with the following exceptions:

- It was suggested in the response from LBSS that compensation should not be used at all for the PGT regulations as students should use the resit opportunity to make good any poor performance.
- The Faculties of Science proposed that compensation arrangements should require two-thirds of the taught credit to be at Grade D or above, but there should not be a requirement for all courses to be at least at Grade E as this was considered to be restrictive and unfair. This was

based on the observation that there was much more variance in grade profiles in Science compared to Arts and Social Science disciplines where fewer As and F/Hs were awarded. It was also suggested that compensation should not be applied to the dissertation and that a minimum of Grade D should be required for this element of the degree.

- The department of Economics did not agree with the principle of unlimited compensation and recommended an increase in the compensation limits in the PGT regulation. This was based primarily on an argument that Grade C and above indicated an acceptable level of performance at Masters, and therefore current regulations which permitted up to 25% of credit at Grade E, plus further credit at Grade D (with an overall average of Grade C) potentially allowed the award of the degree with too much credit below Grade C. In direct contrast to the view from the Faculties of Science, it was proposed that no credit should be below Grade D and that good performance in one course could only be used to compensate Grade D in one course (not two) with up to a maximum of two good performances being able to compensate poor performance in two courses. The department also proposed a limit to the number of courses which could be reassessed in order to allow qualification for the Masters degree, rather than the Postgraduate Diploma.

For Undergraduate Provision:

The majority of responses supported the current arrangements for honours and ordinary degrees where limits on compensation were applied to ordinary degrees for which students were required to perform satisfactorily across a breadth of study. Much more compensation was permitted in the aggregation process for the honours classification, although there were limits to compensation before honours entry, at levels 1 and 2.

The Faculties of Science reiterated the general view that had been presented during discussion on the development of the undergraduate generic regulation last session, which was that unlimited compensation should be permitted because of different grade distributions across different subject disciplines and different sizes of courses, which meant that larger courses allowed a degree of internal compensation which did not feature in small (e.g. 10 credit) courses.

The Glasgow School of Art supported current compensation arrangements although they raised the issue of reassessment for honours courses and proposed that allowing reassessment for honours courses would be welcomed for their degrees, because under current arrangements there was a limit to compensation between theory and practice and therefore students could fail to achieve an honours degree on the basis of failing to achieve the learning outcomes for a theory course worth 20% of the final assessment without any opportunity for retrieval.

Recommendations for ASC

ARSC noted that no consultation responses had advocated the introduction of a single set of compensation arrangements for all the different types of degree; although the Faculty of IMS had suggested that the proportion of poor credit which could be compensated on the PGT programmes should be brought into line with the proportion of credit which could be compensated for an ordinary degree.

The Sub-Committee agreed that different rules for compensation were appropriate for different types of degree for the following reasons:

- As a general principle, it was agreed that compensation should be permitted where there were no resit opportunities, but for programmes offering reassessment, compensation should be limited.
- It was considered important that some breadth of attainment was required for degree awards, and in the case of honours, it was suggested that account should be taken of the longer length of the degree programme. Honours degrees comprised four years of study and although there was (in many cases) unlimited compensation for the honours level study, compensation was limited in the first two years, thus requiring demonstration of breadth of attainment before entry to honours.
- Furthermore for honours, the element of the degree which could have unlimited compensation was the same part on which the honours classification was calculated, and this provided a more graduated classification system which reflected poorer performance in the award of the lower degree classifications.

The Sub-Committee agreed to recommend that there should not be any change to the compensation for undergraduate degree awards. Members also agreed that limited compensation should continue to be applied to PGT awards, however there was discussion on whether the proposals to (i) limit further, or (ii) relax the limit, from Economics and Science respectively, should be recommended to ASC.

The Sub-Committee was not persuaded by the argument presented by the department of Economics as they considered that Grade D, not Grade C, should be considered to demonstrate a satisfactory level of achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the Masters level courses comprising the PGT programmes. There was also concern at the prospect of allowing more compensation by allowing the degree to be awarded with attainment below Grade E if good performance elsewhere could bring the average performance to the required level. It was felt necessary that a minimum performance level should be stipulated. It was suggested that a review of assessment methods might help both Economics and Science overcome the difficulties they encountered with the compensation arrangements at PGT level.

The Sub-Committee therefore agreed to **recommend to ASC no change to the current compensation arrangements for ordinary, honours and masters degrees.**