

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Monday 22 November 2010

**Report from Meeting of Academic Regulations Sub-Committee –
Monday 1 November 2010**

Professor Tom Guthrie, Convener

1. Principal with Subsidiary degrees

Following on from ASC's approval of a definition of Joint Honours, ARSC was asked to propose a definition of Principal with Subsidiary degrees for inclusion in the Calendar and Glossary of Terms. ARSC noted that this structure was only in use in the College of Social Sciences and applied to Principal subjects that were taken 'with' a Subsidiary language, the latter comprising 60 credits of the overall Honours programme.

It was **agreed to propose the following definition to ASC:**

Principal with Subsidiary Honours: An Honours degree awarded following successful completion of a 480-credit programme. From the total of credits studied on the Honours programme, normally 180 will be in one subject with 60 in another, the weighting in the programme's scheme of assessment reflecting the respective credit values of the two subjects.¹

2. Comments on Code of Assessment in External Examiners' Reports

ARSC considered a digest of extracts from External Examiners' reports 2009-10 which referred to the Code of Assessment. It had been suggested that this was a means of identifying whether there were concerns regarding the application of the Code of Assessment across the University.

Comments on the Code of Assessment had been identified in fourteen reports. This was from 286 reports which had been submitted to date (out of an expected total of 464).

The Committee noted the following:

- Seven External Examiners stated that they found the marking scheme used by Glasgow complicated/confusing/not fit for purpose
- Six raised issues regarding the application of discretion in honours classification
- Two expressed concern regarding the rounding of marks, with the suggestion that in some cases this lead to inappropriate final degree classifications
- Other issues included: the use of orals in borderline cases; the award of credit for courses where a grade of less than D was achieved; and the low proportion of firsts awarded.

The Committee's view was that the number of concerns raised was relatively small and did not indicate a widespread concern about whether the Code was being applied effectively. It was acknowledged that the marking scheme used at Glasgow would be unfamiliar to many new External Examiners but it was felt that the Guide to the Code of Assessment (which was routinely sent to Examiners) did give a clear explanation of it. The group did not favour the idea of producing a 'quick guide' to the Code for fear of

¹ A footnote will be required for the LLB where the overall total of credits will be lower.

missing essential elements. It was noted that the setting up of the short-life working group on honours discretion was timely.

The Committee noted the concerns on rounding of grades (Appendix A) and **agreed that these should be relayed to ASC for a view on whether the issue needed to be reviewed.**

3. Reassessment

Reassessment in Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas

Section 16.6 of the Code of Assessment defined the 'threshold grade', which determined whether students had the right to be reassessed. The threshold grade for taught masters degrees was defined as C, reflecting the fact that the requirement for progression and award was a grade C. No definition was given for the threshold grade in relation to postgraduate certificates and diplomas. The requirement for award on these programmes was a grade D. However, in some cases students who completed a PGCert or PGDip might wish, in due course, to progress to a related Masters programme. In this situation, they would need to have satisfied the relevant progress requirement, which was an average grade equivalent to a grade C. ARSC's view was that it would be appropriate to define the threshold grade for reassessments on PGCerts and PGDips as C (with capping at C3), while noting that the actual requirement for award would remain at D. It was suggested that this should apply even where there was currently no Masters programme associated with the relevant PGCert or PGDip. **It was agreed that ASC should be invited to endorse this position.**

Reassessment opportunities for coursework

The Committee had previously discussed the issue of limits on the opportunities for reassessment of coursework. The view that had been accepted by ASC was that, wherever practicable, reassessment of coursework should be offered and any restrictions needed to be publicised in advance. ARSC's view was that this position could be strengthened further, and agreed to **propose to ASC that the regulations on reassessment should state that students would have the opportunity to be reassessed on their coursework, and that this opportunity should be available in the same session. Where, exceptionally, this was considered not to be possible, approval by the Head of School would be required.**

Right to reassessment in all course components

ARSC had previously considered whether, on failure to attain the threshold grade for a course, students should be eligible to be reassessed on all components of the assessment for that course or whether that right should be confined to those components on which the student had failed to achieve the threshold grade. The position reflected in the regulations was the latter. The effect of this was that once the learning outcomes for one component had been demonstrated at a satisfactory level, the emphasis shifted to attaining the others at a satisfactory level too.

Correspondence received from the Business School had reopened this issue, and ARSC considered that there was a point of principle on which it would be helpful to invite ASC's view.

The example given at Appendix B illustrated an inconsistency in the degree to which compensation was currently permitted at first and subsequent diets. The Committee acknowledged this problem, but noted that an alternative system of allowing students to be reassessed in all components of a course where their overall grade was below the threshold would have serious consequences, e.g. in terms of staff workload associated with additional assessment and in the greater complexity of advising students about their reassessment options.

ASC is therefore asked to consider whether to amend the current position of only permitting reassessment in course components where the threshold grade had not been achieved.

4. Application of the Code of Assessment

As noted at the September meeting of ARSC, the Faculty Quality Assurance and Enhancement Officers Group's annual report 2009-10 had referred to 'a need for evaluation as to whether the new Code of Assessment is being applied effectively'. Further investigation had revealed that this comment arose from a concern regarding the relatively low proportion of A grades being awarded in some level 1 and 2 courses in the then Faculty of LBSS. ARSC agreed that it would be timely to disseminate guidance on making use of the full marking scale.

5. Remit and membership

The membership of the Sub-Committee had been amended to reflect University restructuring, with each College now having two representatives. There was one vacancy for the College of Social Sciences, and in the first instance a representative would be sought from the School of Education.

6. Matters for future reporting to ASC

Duration of examinations

Revised MRes regulations and outcomes from on-going review of Masters regulations

Rules/Guidelines for the administration of Joint Honours Exam Boards (to be reported with the outcome from the short-life working group on discretion in Honours classifications)

External Examiners' comments regarding rounding

MA History

I have reservations about the averaging system in use in the university. Students undertake a number of different modules and for each module they complete a variety of assessments. The marks of individual assessments are graded on a 22 point scale and then a weighted average is created for the module. Each student for the MA in history has 12 marks to two decimal places. At this stage all the module marks are rounded to whole numbers, so every mark that is .5 or higher is rounded up, while every mark .49 and lower is rounded down. These whole marks are then averaged to create a mean to one decimal place. This is a strange way of creating a mean, since it is surely far more accurate to create an overall mean based on the existing module marks. The situation arose this year where a student with a run of good 2.1 marks in individual modules (marks in the 17.5-17.99 range) got a first because all those high 2.1 marks were rounded up. Furthermore, this student's overall mean was in the 'discretionary range' only because of the rounding up. I read this student's work and it seemed to be the work of a top 2.1 student not a 1st class student but with 8 first class marks out of 12 the student was awarded a first on preponderance. The history department is aware of my concerns, and has pointed out to me that this is university procedure, but I do not think it serves students well if the use of averages is weak. For every student who gets rounded up to a higher class, there are others who have a number of marks in the .0-.49 range who get rounded down, perhaps out of a discretionary band and therefore miss out on being considered for a better class. It is my opinion that the use of means should be robust and fair to all and currently I do not think the system being used can be described as such.

Electronics and Electrical Engineering

1. The university marking scheme (0-22) is not fit for purpose. Giving final grades using this scheme is acceptable, but taking averages, etc, using this non-linear scheme is not. All intermediate assessments should be carried out using percentages and, only after all processing of marks is complete, should the final result be transposed onto the University marking scheme.

The current scheme is non-linear so precludes concepts such as averaging, and also compounds inaccuracies and rounding errors. I am sure that some degree classifications will be incorrect as a result.

In my opinion, this needs to be fixed as a matter of some urgency.

Illustration of the current limits on the right to reassessment

Extract from Code of Assessment

16.8 A candidate who has failed to attain the threshold grade shall, subject to the provision of §16.9 below, normally be permitted not more than one further attempt at each component of the assessment in which a grade lower than the threshold grade has been awarded. A second further attempt shall not be available as a matter of right but may be permitted at the discretion of the College responsible for the programme in accordance with its policies and procedures which shall be published in the relevant course documentation.

Example:

Course X with a 50:50 weighting of coursework and exam:

At first attempt student A gets F1 for the coursework and D3 in Exam = aggregate E2
[(5+9)/2 = 7]

At first attempt student B gets F1 for the coursework and E2 in Exam = aggregate E3
[(5+7)/2 = 6]

Both resubmit the coursework (or it is deemed impractical to do so) and fail to improve their grade

- Here student A (who is marginally the better student) could have achieved the course threshold grade by attaining a C2 in the first diet exam [(5+13)/2 = 9]: but he is not allowed to resit the exam and therefore no longer has the opportunity to achieve the threshold grade on aggregation.
- Student B can resit the exam and can achieve the threshold grade by attaining a C2 in the exam [(5+13)/2 = 9].

Academic Regulations Sub-Committee: Remit and Membership

Remit

To assist the Academic Standards Committee in fulfilling the following aspects of its remit: 'Advise Education Planning and Strategy Committee on matters relating to the University's academic regulatory processes, including the revision and development of academic regulations in the University, and also the implementation of regulatory policy.'

To consider regulatory matters referred by the Academic Standards Committee and report back to the Academic Standards Committee as required providing:

- Proposed revisions to academic regulations
- Proposed policy amendments for current academic regulations
- Proposed revisions to generic degree regulations
- Proposed development or revision of University guidelines related to academic regulations
- Identification of areas requiring academic regulations and drafts of new academic regulations

Membership

The membership of the Sub-Committee will consist of two representatives from each of the Colleges who will normally be a member of the Academic Standards Committee:

College of Arts

Professor C Steel

Dr S Marritt

College of Medical, Veterinary & Life Sciences

Dr P Cotton

Professor N Evans

College of Science & Engineering

Professor B Hill

Dr B Stewart

College of Social Sciences

Professor T Guthrie (*Convener*)

Vacancy

T Eriksson SRC, student representative

Dr A Whittaker SLP representative

Clerk: Mrs R Cole Senate Office