

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Wednesday 20 April 2011

Report from Meeting of Academic Regulations Sub-Committee held on Wednesday 30 March 2011

Professor Tom Guthrie, Convener

1. Discretion in award of merit and distinction in PGT degrees

The generic regulations for taught masters degrees offered boards of examiners discretion in relation to the taught component of the programme when awarding merit and distinction. No discretion exists in relation to the requirements concerning the dissertation. ASC had asked ARSC to review these discretionary provisions in the light of agreed changes to discretion in Honours classifications.

The Sub-Committee considered that, just as the discretionary zones for Honours classifications were to be narrowed, it would be appropriate to propose a narrowing of the PGT zones for merit and distinction as follows:

Borderline	Range of aggregation scores (taught component)	
	Current	Proposed
Consideration for award of Distinction	17.1 - 17.9	17.5 – 17.9
Consideration for award of Merit	14.1 - 14.9	14.5 – 14.9

Given the differences in nature between PGT programmes and Honours programmes, the criteria to be applied could not be exactly the same. **The Sub-Committee agreed to propose to ASC that rather than referring to outlying grades or to preponderance, Boards should consider the overall profile of grades. Rank order of aggregation scores and the unrounded mean could also be referred to.**

Members agreed to propose that the following should not be referred to: borderline vivas, exit velocity or early performance in the programme.

2. Interpretation of regulatory requirements for students with Accredited Prior Learning (APL)

Accreditation of Prior Learning could lead to the award of credit that counted towards a degree programme's requirements, but all such credit was ungraded. Where degree regulations included requirements concerning the number of credits to be awarded at certain grades, a student with APL might be unable to satisfy those requirements.

One example of such a requirement was that for the award of an ordinary degree, students needed to have 280 credits at grade D. A student entering into year 2 with 120 credits of ungraded APL would be able to achieve a maximum of only 240 credits at grade D.

The Sub-Committee considered two possible approaches to this situation:

- A. That such a student should be required to achieve the same proportion of grade Ds as students completing the full 360 credits:

280/360 x 240 = ~ 190

- B. That an assumption be made that in accepting prior learning, a judgment was made that the learning had been at a 'satisfactory' standard. (The APL guidelines required that 'the overall profile of study and attainment of students whose prior learning is accredited is equivalent to that of students who study at Glasgow for the entire duration of their degree programme'.) If this approach were adopted it could be assumed that the 120 credits of APL were at an equivalent of grade D or above. The requirement for the ordinary degree would therefore be:

280 – 120 = 160 credits at grade D or better from the 240 credits studied.

Members favoured the second approach.

It was noted that a student accepted onto the beginning of year three who then wished to exit with an ordinary degree would only require 40 from the 120 credits studied in that year to be at grade D or above. However, the generic undergraduate regulation also requires 60 credits at grade D to be at Level 3 or higher, and this requirement would need to be adhered to.

It was agreed to propose to ASC that for all regulations in relation to (a) the award of a degree, (b) annual progress or (c) entry to Honours, where ungraded APL meant that such requirements were unattainable, approach B. should be adopted in interpreting those requirements, namely that APL should be treated as credit at grade D or better.

The Sub-Committee noted that there were also degree requirements that would remain achievable for entrants with ungraded APL, but where those regulations would be applied differently for students who did not hold APL. An example was the requirement for a particular GPA in order to qualify for merit or distinction in an ordinary degree. For students without APL the GPA was calculated across 360 credits, while **for a student credited with 120 credits of APL, it would be the GPA achieved in their 240 credits at Glasgow that would determine the award of merit or distinction. The Committee's view was that while this was not ideal, there was no practicable alternative to calculating the GPA on the basis of what had been achieved at Glasgow.**

It was agreed to put this view to ASC.

3. Proposed regulatory changes (Appendix 1)

3.1 Changes for ASC approval

The Sub-Committee agreed to forward to ASC **for approval** regulatory changes concerning:

- Definition of components of assessment (s. 16.2)
- Operation of aggregation (s. 16.31)
- Referral to guidance on discretion for Honours Examination Boards (s. 16.36)
- Operation of Joint Boards of Examiners (s. 16.66)

An important principle was that the views of the external examiner(s) from the first Board meeting should be reflected by those representing the first Board who attended the second. There was some discussion as to whether this should be explicit in the wording of the regulation or whether it was implicit that 'the views of the earlier Board' incorporated the views of the External(s). **It was agreed to**

seek ASC's view on this point. (The version attached includes explicit reference to the views of the External Examiner.)

3.2 Reassessment provisions

The Sub-Committee considered further variants of the regulations on reassessment incorporating a number of decisions made by ASC. Once a final version has been agreed this will be forwarded to the May meeting of ASC for approval.

4. Dissemination of information on regulation changes

A concern was raised about the difficulty for staff of keeping abreast of changes to regulations. It was noted that at the start of the academic session an e-mail was disseminated widely with an announcement of key changes to the University Calendar. The general view was that this message did not necessarily reach all relevant staff and that reminders during the session would be welcomed. It was agreed that Senate Office should consider how best to promote a better understanding of developments in regulations. Senate Office was already reviewing the schedule for publication of the Guide to the Code of Assessment and was considering how more regular communications from the Clerk of Senate could be used to remind/advise staff of relevant provisions at pertinent points in the session (e.g. in advance of examination diets).

5. Items to be reported to May meeting of ASC

- Duration of Examinations
- Revised MRes regulations.

(ARSC had been asked by ASC to carry out a general review of other masters regulations but this would have to be postponed to next session in view of the complexity of reviewing the MRes regulations.)

Various proposed regulatory changes arising from recent ASC/EdPSC decisions

Definition of 'component of assessment'

16.2 (a) Each such course will incorporate a scheme of assessment which:

- (ia) assesses candidates' performance against the intended learning outcomes of the course;
- (bii) includes an appropriate combination of formative and summative elements;
- (iiie) deploys forms of assessment appropriate to the intended learning outcomes of the course, taking due account of its credit rating;
- (ivd) where re-assessment is provided for in the degree regulations, makes provision for the re-assessment of candidates in accordance with the regulations;
- (ve) may be changed only through procedures approved by Senate;
- (vif) may be varied exceptionally in a given session in response to specific circumstances subject to the approval of the Clerk of Senate;
- (viig) is as far as practicable anonymous.

(b) Each scheme of assessment will set out the individual components of assessment and their respective weighting in the calculation of the final grade for the course

(i) 'Component of assessment' means each of the weighted assessments set out in the course specification document.

(ii) Each component of assessment may include sub-components except that individual questions in an examination or other piece of coursework shall not be regarded as sub-components.

Inclusion of all marks in aggregation

16.31 Aggregation to establish a result for a course shall require the computation of the mean, rounded to an integer value, of the relevant aggregation scores of the component assessments or, where the component assessments yield proper percentage scores, the mean percentage score converted to an integer aggregation score (see §16.29). Where appropriate the computation shall employ weights as specified in the course documentation. In carrying out the aggregation all assessment components which are summative must be included.

Reference to guidance on Honours Exam Board discretion

16.36 The mean scores corresponding to the required components of the honours programme shall be summed and an overall mean computed, where appropriate employing weights as specified in the programme documentation, and rounded to one decimal place. Where appropriate, overall means shall be computed separately in respect of assessment relating to Schedules A and B.

(a) There shall be four classes of honours: first, upper second, lower second and third. A candidate who is not placed in one of the four classes shall have failed the honours programme. (This shall not prevent the award of an unclassified honours degree within the terms of regulation §16.52(d)(i)).

(b) Where Schedule A alone applies the honours class awarded shall be that shown in Schedule A as having the range of aggregation scores in which the overall mean lies, except that a Board of Examiners shall have discretion as defined in the Notes to the Schedules. In exercising that discretion the Board of Examiners must apply the guidance set out in the Guide to the Code of Assessment. In determining whether a candidate for joint or combined honours falls within the range in which there is discretion, all of the grades achieved by the candidate across both subjects must be taken into account.

Operation of Joint Honours Examination Boards

16.66 (a) Meetings of the Board of Examiners in respect of a particular course or programme shall be formally called and constituted, separately from other meetings such as School meetings. All Subject to (b) below, all Examiners shall be members of the Board of Examiners and shall be invited to all meetings of the Board: the quorum shall comprise the Head of School (or his or her nominee), the Assessment Officer, an Internal Examiner and an External Examiner. Exceptionally, where due cause is shown, if no External Examiner is able to be present then written confirmation of the discharge of the functions of the External

Examiner may be considered as equivalent to attendance. There may be agreement between the Head of School, the Assessment Officer(s) and External Examiners that attendance by the External Examiner(s) at Board of Examiners meetings for re-assessments is not required. No person other than Examiners and others with direct responsibilities for examining and related administrative and clerical matters shall attend or observe meetings of the Board of Examiners. The business of the Board of Examiners shall be minuted and particular records kept of the External Examiner's adjudications, comments and recommendations, as well as particular decisions made by the Board in respect of incomplete assessment, good cause and disciplinary matters. Returns of results shall be completed, checked by two persons and confirmed at the meeting of the Board of Examiners.

(b) In the case of joint or combined hours degrees the decision on classification of the honours degree for the programme shall be taken at the meeting of the subject Board of Examiners which takes place later. At such meetings the Board shall be composed as set out in (a) for that subject, but the other subject will be represented by a number of members of the Board of Examiners for that subject. These representatives will have authority to agree the final classification to be awarded for the joint/combined honours degree and will convey the views of the earlier Board of Examiners, **including those of the External Examiner(s) present**, to the later meeting. At the later meeting each of the subjects will have an equality of votes in determining the final degree classification. Where practicable the unapproved grades for the subject which has the later Board of Examiners meeting will be made available to the earlier Board of Examiners to enable it to discuss the final classification appropriate in light of these.