

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 7 October 2011

Report from Meeting of Academic Regulations Sub-Committee held
on Friday 22 September 2011

Professor Tom Guthrie, Convener

1. Regulations on Incomplete Assessment and Good Cause*1.1 Non-assessment requirements for the award of credit*

The regulations in the Code of Assessment covering Incomplete Assessment and Good Cause (ss 16.45 – 16.53) provided for the possibility of setting aside a portion of assessment where Good Cause was established and where there was no further opportunity for the student to undertake that assessment. However, the regulations did not set out what should happen in the event of a student failing to complete non-assessment requirements for the award of credit.

For example, it might be stated that 90% attendance was required on a particular course for credit to be awarded. A student who achieved attendance of only 75% would not have satisfied the minimum requirements for the award of credit, even if he or she had submitted 100% of the assessment associated with the course and had experienced circumstances amounting to good cause in relation to the missed attendance.

ARSC had been asked to consider whether it would be appropriate to adopt a standard rule, similar to that employed in relation to incomplete assessment, that up to 25% of the expected level of attendance could be set aside, or whether more flexibility should be permitted in the setting aside of such requirements.

The view of members was that it would be helpful to cover this explicitly in the regulations, and that it would be reasonable to mirror the requirement for at least 75% of assessment to be completed. It was acknowledged that there were areas of the University where the requirements for attendance could not be set aside and this would need to be provided for.

It was agreed to propose to ASC that a clause be added to the provisions on incomplete assessment and good cause indicating that where a minimum level of attendance had been set as a requirement for the award of credit, up to 25% of this could be waived in the event of good cause being established. The view was that this should be introduced only once programme teams had reviewed the level of any current attendance requirements, and robust mechanisms for recording attendance were in place.

1.2 Requirements for award of an unclassified honours degree

The regulations on Incomplete Assessment included the following provision:

- 16.51 If the outstanding work in respect of which good cause is established is identified in regulations as a requirement for the award of a degree this work must be submitted for the candidate to qualify for the award of that degree.

Thus, where there was incomplete assessment, a classified Honours degree could only be awarded where the student had achieved at least a D3 in a dissertation worth at least 20 credits.

An Honours student completing between 30% and 75% of the total assessment could be eligible for the award of an unclassified Honours degree. The current structure of the regulations was such that this provision was subject to the operation of s. 16.51, so that a dissertation would be required for the award of the unclassified degree. ARSC had been asked to consider whether this was appropriate.

Members acknowledged that the award of an unclassified Honours degree was unusual and that it was often associated with a student having experienced difficult personal circumstances. Given that such a degree could be awarded with as little as 30% of the total assessment, there was a high probability that such a student would not have completed their dissertation. It was felt that denying the award of the degree on the basis of the lack of a dissertation was potentially harsh. **It was therefore agreed to propose to ASC an amendment to the current regulations such that an unclassified Honours degree could be awarded even where the requirement for a grade D3 in a dissertation worth at least 20 credits had not been satisfied.**

1.3 Grades to be returned in the event of incomplete assessment

The grade 'MV' denoted that assessment had been affected by good cause and that a particular attempt was to be discounted. At sub-Honours, the presumption was that assessment would be undertaken at a later opportunity, with the end result being that the student would have a final grade for the course in question. At Honours, the opportunities for a later attempt at the affected assessment were more constrained and students were sometimes left with an incomplete profile of assessment. The regulations on incomplete assessment and good cause required that, for Honours, all components of completed assessment be included in the calculation of the Honours classification, but the rules were not clear on how such work should be reflected in the course grades. The view had been expressed that it would be unfair for a student's transcript to show an 'MV' for a course where a substantial part of the assessment had in fact been completed. **Members suggested that for any Honours course where more than 75% of the assessment had been completed, a grade should be returned reflecting the standard achieved in that part of the assessment. In courses where less than 75% of the assessment had been completed, it was suggested that the grade to be returned for the course, which would appear on the student's transcript, should be an 'MV', This would not change the fact that any completed portion of the assessment should be counted in the calculation of the Honours classification. It was agreed to make this proposal to ASC.**

2. Operation of discretion by Examination Boards

During 2010-11 the Committee had been involved in reviewing the operation of discretion by Examination Boards in relation to the award of Honours classifications and to the award of merit and distinction in PGT programmes. Proposals – which had been approved by ASC and EdPSC – concerning narrowing the zones of discretion and guidance to be observed by Examination Boards had been put to Senate in June, but Senate had deferred a decision with a request for further consultation with Schools and Colleges. ARSC had been asked to take this forward.

The Committee was in the process of gathering information on:

- practice in different parts of the University in relation to the operation of discretion in the different borderline zones;
- the recent debate in the College of MVLS concerning borderline vivas.

The Committee would then report to Colleges and Schools, and seek views on proposals. ARSC would then report further to ASC.

3. Assessment of Visiting Students

At its meeting in May 2011 ASC requested that ARSC review the existing principles on the assessment of visiting students, which had been developed in 2003. The Clerk of Senate had identified as the key objective that students should be able to satisfy the requirements of their home University and therefore a reasonable degree of flexibility would be required. ARSC had been asked in particular to consider students leaving Glasgow:

- in advance of the scheduled assessment period, or
- in advance of a Board of Examiners' formal consideration of results.

ARSC discussed the current principles and suggested various modifications. It was agreed to consult with the Colleges before bringing formal proposals to ASC.

4. Review of Code of Assessment in relation to the assessment of professional degrees

ASC had asked ARSC to review the Code of Assessment in relation to assessment on professional degrees, as concerns had been expressed that there were a number of areas where the Code's provisions did not comfortably accommodate the particular requirements of some of these programmes.

Members identified the following as areas for review:

- Schedule B (for some assessments 'Satisfactory' and 'Unsatisfactory' were considered to be the appropriate outcomes).
- Multiple forms of assessment on single courses, being assessed through Schedule A and Schedule B, which could not be combined in order to establish one overall course result.
- Reassessment (there was some concern about how the Code's provisions applied in relation to the components and sub-components of assessment being used on some courses).
- The fact that the professional degrees in MVLS were neither 'Honours' nor 'non-Honours' programmes in the traditional sense used in the Code of Assessment, and that the significance of certain features of the degrees were thus not fully captured.

It was agreed that the College of MVLS would be invited to set out as fully as possible the issues that they were aware of. Representatives would then be invited to attend a meeting of ARSC to discuss these issues and work towards incorporation of appropriate amendments into the Code.

ARSC will report further to ASC in due course.