

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 18 November 2011

**Report from Meeting of Academic Regulations Sub-Committee held
on Friday 31 October 2011**

Professor Tom Guthrie, Convener

1. Review of the Operation of the Code of Assessment in relation to the Professional Degrees

Professor Bissell and Professor Anderson from the College of MVLS attended the meeting. ASC had asked ARSC to review the Code of Assessment in relation to assessment of 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 features and requirements of these programmes.

In advance of the meeting, Professor Bissell and Professor Anderson had submitted detailed comments in relation to different sections of the Code and supplementary degree regulations, and the Committee used these comments as a basis for discussion:

CoA: 16.1 Each approved course contributing to an award of the University shall have a credit rating based upon the notional learning hours required for its completion, and determined in accordance with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).⁸ Regulations governing awards of the University may express the criteria for making such awards directly or indirectly in terms of accumulated credit points. The minimum requirement for the award of credits is addressed in §16.40 - §16.44 below.

The BDS, MBChB and BVMS, were not credit rated. For the time being, therefore, reference to credit, including such terms as "Credit Withheld", was meaningless. The BVMS programme had become partially credit rated through the creation of new courses, where credit rating had been an administrative requirement (CCMIS and now PIP). The issue of credit rating had been debated at length and there was varied practice across the UK as to how this issue was treated on professional programmes. Attempts to introduce credit rating in Scottish universities had been problematic, and there was a view that credit rating did not serve a purpose for students who had to complete all of a set curriculum rather than accumulating credit from a range of courses. It was also felt that credit rating was not appropriate in the context of a vertically and horizontally integrated programme. It was acknowledged, however, that in relation to some issues (e.g. exit degrees) there was value in at least some form of nominal rating, perhaps applied to each year of a programme and incorporating all elements of the programme to be completed. It was noted that any form of rating would reveal the heavy workload associated with the professional programmes. This suggested two possibilities: either rating in terms of the real number of hours of study, or applying a different scale (e.g. 15 hours of work nominally attributed to 1 credit rather than the standard 10).

The overall view was that it should be suggested to ASC that this issue be discussed again and that a form of credit rating for the professional programmes be developed, while acknowledging that there were limitations to the extent to which this could be meaningfully applied.

16.2 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.

The BDS, MBChB and BVMS programmes each had schemes of assessment that were clearly communicated to students and which were mapped transparently to ILOs. For example, there were five compulsory courses in the BDS programme, each course corresponding to a year (BDS1, BDS2, BDS3 etc.). Each course contained a range of ILOs, some of which were knowledge based and some of which were skills based. Hence a range of assessment methods was required. Summative assessment typically consisted of assignments, examinations and in-course assessment. Also typically, written “examinations” had sub-components, for example, a multiple choice examination paper and short-answer examination paper. These sub-components would be aggregated to form a single grade for the examination. Other assessments, principally those related to clinical skills, but also where compensation was considered undesirable, would stand alone. Hence each course might return a number of grades rather than a single “final grade for the course”. In Course Information Documents students were provided with a list of criteria that must be fulfilled in order to “successfully complete” a course and, therefore, be eligible to progress to the next one. Some of these were assessment grades and some related to things that must be done. In relation to the latter, no return was made to Registry to confirm that the requirements had been met, but students were made aware that they would not be able to progress without having satisfied all the requirements. This raised issues about the way that MyCampus treated students on the professional programmes, and the need for some return to the system to indicate that additional requirements had indeed been satisfied and the students were eligible to progress. The professional programmes also required knowledge and practical competence assessment to remain distinct, and this was a factor in needing more than one overall course grade. It was made clear in course documentation that students were required to achieve the satisfactory standard in all aspects of the course: they were not permitted to compensate for poor performance.

Currently there were two schedules for assessment: Schedule A (knowledge based) and Schedule B (practical/competence based). Consideration could be given to combining the two Schedules and thus achieving one overall course grade. However, Schedule A was currently far too complex to be used for the assessment of competence. Different kinds of descriptors would be required, and it would still be crucial that compensation between different aspects of assessment was not permitted.

For additional requirements which were not currently marked in terms of Schedule A/B or reported to Registry it was agreed that these should be referred to in supplementary regulations. It was noted that if satisfying such additional requirements was to be reflected on the transcript there would need to be additional codes against which the results could be held in MyCampus.

[16.8 A candidate who has failed to attain the threshold grade shall, subject to the provision of §16.9 below, be permitted one further opportunity to attempt each component of the assessment.⁹ ⁹ This includes offering reassessment in sub-components.](#)

Reassessment had been offered routinely for many years within the BDS and MBChB programmes. A “Professional Examination” generally consisted of a set of two or more examinations, such as a written examination and an OSCE. Both had to be passed (the threshold grade achieved) and the grades not aggregated. If a candidate failed either the written or the OSCE at the first attempt they were allowed one further attempt at the failed examination. However, as described above, a written examination often had subcomponents.

The BVMS offered a 2nd diet for all courses. The resit diet, as far as practicable, repeated the format of the 1st diet. Students who failed a professional examination were given an opportunity, subject to a maximum number of attempts, to repeat the assessment and they were required to retake all components of the assessment.

The MVLS Board of Studies had considered whether it should be mandatory to allow students to opt only for reassessment in subcomponents; the Board was strongly of the view that it should not. The School of Medicine had supported this stance for the following reasons:

- ILOs were mapped against methods of assessment for each course. Many ILOs were suitable for assessment using MCQ or MSA type questions, or both. Written examinations were frequently constructed so that ILOs were assessed across two or more papers. In confirming the balance of assessment the papers were considered as a whole. If reassessment in individual papers were permitted, a more complex blueprinting exercise would be required to ensure that any combination of resit and first diet papers produced a balanced assessment overall for each candidate.
- It was believed to be educationally sound practice to adopt a number of different assessment methodologies. Where these could, in a valid way, be applied to assess the same ILOs this provided triangulation, and combining the results obtained was likely to be inherently more reliable. This was not always possible since some (probably few) ILOs demanded almost unique assessment methodology, but where such an approach was valid it seemed sensible to adopt it.

There was concern that inclusion in the Code of Assessment of provision for reassessment in sub-components undermined the requirements of the professional programmes. However, it was made clear to students on these programmes that even where an 'examination' consisted of more than one event, if they failed to achieve the required standard, they would be required to repeat all of the relevant events. ARSC considered that this was a reasonable interpretation of the relevant regulation and that the examination should be looked at as a whole and that students would not be entitled to resit sub-components of the exam, as individual (and by extension, collections of) exam questions were excluded from the definition of sub-components in regulations.

[16.23 Judgement shall be expressed in terms of the primary grades and secondary bands set out in Schedule A or in terms of the grades set out in Schedule B below.](#)

In the BDS and MBChB programmes a number of compulsory in-course assessments were graded "competent" or "not yet competent". These were practical clinical procedures that were "stand-alone"; they each had to be successfully completed ("competent" awarded) by designated time points. In the BDS programme students decided when to present for these assessments and multiple attempts were permitted in advance of the deadline. This simple dichotomous grading of essential clinical skills was believed to be, from the GMC and GDC perspective, clear and sufficient. Further elaboration of levels of performance might be seen as helpful to the student but, in fact, the assessments were criterion based and structured and the process already generated detailed feedback. The School of Medicine would wish to see this approach continued.

Students gaining the BVMS degree had the right to join the RCVS and practise in the UK, much of Europe and in many other countries. In North America the recognition as a practitioner was more complex. However, the language used in the accreditation

documents describing the degree related to students reaching a minimum standard consistent with them being functional in a professional environment and competent in the Day 1 competencies. There appeared to be no requirement to grade the final degree (other than competent/not yet competent). It was thought that there was a period in the not too distant past where the BVMS exit examinations were pass/fail and not graded. In developing the new BVMS programme this would be revisited. One potential issue was the importance of class rank and grade point average for Glasgow graduates applying for posts in the North American market. This information was increasingly being requested.

16.24.....Where the outcome of the chosen mode of assessment is a proper percentage score it shall, before being reported to students, be converted into a primary grade and secondary band by reference to a conversion scheme determined by the Board of Examiners as appropriate for the assessment in question and subordinate to the relevant grade descriptors.

In discussion, it was clarified that the primary grade and secondary bands were not the *only* method of providing feedback to students on their performance. It was agreed that it was legitimate to advise students of their overall marks and that the mapping of percentage scores to primary grades and secondary bands must be transparent. (Students could, in any event, request sight of assessment scripts through a subject access request.)

BDS, BVMS and MB ChB Programmes

- 16.38 a) There shall be three categories of award: honours, commendation and pass. A candidate who is not placed in one of the three categories shall have failed the programme.
- b) The regulations of each award shall state the minimum results in terms of grade point average and average aggregation score required for the award and for the individual categories of award.

The requirements for the award of a BDS, MBChB and BVMS were clearly stated in the relevant regulations, but not in terms of grade point averages and average aggregation scores, thus the current wording of (b) was inappropriate. The requirements for the award of Honours and Commendation were less clearly articulated. (See below.) This regulation clearly required amendment to reflect what happened in practice and Professors Anderson and Bissell were invited to consider what form of wording would be appropriate.

Degree regulations: Programme Requirements for the Award of the Degree

5.1 To be eligible for the award of BDS a candidate must attain grade D or better in each of the three components which constitute the Final professional examinations and satisfy additional requirements set out in the Course Information Document. (*Supplementary BDS Regulations*)

5.4 A candidate who has completed all 5 years of the BVMS programme and has achieved grade D3 or better in all of the prescribed courses and has additionally completed thirty eight weeks extramural studies (EMS) will be awarded the Degree of Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery. (*Supplementary BVMS Regulations*)

In order to be in a position to satisfy these regulations the students must have successfully completed all preceding stages of the curriculum, but the outcomes of preceding assessments were not aggregated in making the final *pass/fail* decision. It was this decision alone that was of concern to the regulatory body as students graduating with a BDS were eligible for inclusion on the Dentists Register and no distinction was made with respect to the category of award. A similar situation existed with respect to MBChB and BVMS.

Honours and Commendation

5.2 The Degree of BDS may be awarded with Honours or Commendation to candidates who have shown special merit throughout the course and in professional examinations. (*Supplementary BDS Regulations*)

A very similar form of words was used in the MBChB regulations.

A complex algorithm was used in which assessments in BDS1-3 accounted for one third of the total and assessments in BDS4&5 accounted for two thirds. These proportions were arrived at as a result of past external examiner comments to the effect that the final two years should carry more weight. Use of this algorithm over the last three years of the new curriculum had established thresholds; Honours was awarded to candidates obtaining $\geq 80\%$ of the total possible outcome from the algorithm and Commendation was awarded to those obtaining $\geq 75\%$ but $< 80\%$. It would conceivably be possible to express this in terms of grade point average/ average aggregation score but it would also be possible to simply provide more transparent information on the current system. ARSC considered that it was desirable that there should be greater transparency in the regulations.

5.5 A BVMS with Honours or Commendation may be awarded to a candidate based on their performance throughout the 5 years of the BVMS programme. Honours will be awarded to a candidate who achieves an aggregate result of grade A, based upon the results obtained at the first diet of assessment in each course. Commendation will be awarded to a candidate who achieves an aggregate result of grade B, based upon the results obtained at the first diet of assessment in each course.

In the development of the new curriculum the appropriateness of this method of weighting achievement would be revisited.

Minimum Requirement for the Award of Credits

See comments related to 16.1, above.

Incomplete Assessment resulting from Good Cause

16.46 – 16.51. There was no general difficulty in applying these sections. There was some discussion about use of 'CR' given that this grade made no sense in relation to courses that were not credit-rated. Presently, no single grade summed up achievement at the end of a course. It might be that a 'CR' equivalent was required for professional programmes, which related to whether a candidate had met/not met the requirements for progression. It was clarified that the grade 'CR' could be used where students had failed to complete non-assessment requirements (such as attendance). A further issue was how non-attendance should be recorded for assessments graded using Schedule B; the view was that 'F' was the correct grade to be returned.

Students on the professional programmes were required to be assessed against all the intended learning outcomes of the programme. This required that 100% of assessments be completed and 16.52 (award in the event of incomplete assessment) could not, therefore, apply. MBChB regulations currently included the provision that s.16.52 did not apply and 100% submission of assessments was required. BDS and BVMS regulations needed to be revised to mirror this, and a note permitting such exemption should be included in the Code.

It was agreed that the substance of this discussion would be reported to ASC with an invitation to comment on issues arising from it.

2. Incomplete Assessment and Good Cause Query

The Code of Assessment's section on Outcomes in the event of incomplete assessment included the following:

16.52 d) In respect of honours assessment,

- i) where the candidate has completed at least 30% but less than 75% of the work required for assessment, an unclassified honours degree may be recommended if the completed portion is of honours standard, or, if the completed portion is not of honours standard, no award shall be made and the candidate will be regarded as not having been presented for honours assessment;
 - ii) where the candidate has completed less than 30% of the work required for assessment he or she will be regarded as not having been presented for honours assessment.
- e) In respect of sub-honours and taught postgraduate assessment, where the candidate has completed less than 75% of the work required for assessment he or she will be regarded as not having taken the course.

16.53 Where the Board of Examiners decides to recommend an unclassified honours degree or to make no award, this outcome shall be communicated to the Clerk of Senate together with a reasoned case for the decision. If the candidate has been recommended for the award of an unclassified honours degree, and has not previously refused such an offer, the Clerk of Senate shall invite him or her to accept that award. In the event of the award being declined, the candidate shall be regarded as not having been presented for honours assessment.

Clarification was sought of the meaning of the phrase 'not presented for honours assessment'. Students whose performance in honours assessment was seriously compromised across a significant part of one year could be offered a repeat year, with all assessment that had been undertaken on the first occasion being discounted. While this was considered to be a fair outcome for such a student, the current regulations appeared to suggest that a student so affected in senior honours would also be expected to repeat all of junior honours. Some clarification of this position was required.

Members agreed that it would be onerous to expect a student whose senior honours year had been seriously disrupted to repeat junior as well as senior honours. One view was that the wording of the regulation might date back to the time when honours assessment was all conducted in the final year.

The Committee agreed to propose to ASC that the wording of the regulations should be amended to permit students who repeated senior honours (or fourth or fifth year in five year honours degrees) to rely on assessment results achieved in previous years of the programme.

3. Proposed MRes/PGT Regulations

ARSC received further comments from the Deans of Graduate Schools in relation to the proposed combined PGT/MRes regulations. Detailed comments had been submitted on behalf of the Colleges of MVLS and Science and Engineering. In the main these comments were matters of clarification or requests for guidance. ARSC agreed responses to the points for forwarding to DoGS, which would then report to RPSC.

DoGS feedback indicated disquiet in relation to the proposed requirements for award. Current generic PGT regulations required a grade point average of 12 (equivalent to C3) over 120 taught credits and a minimum grade D3 on the 60 credit dissertation. The proposal was that for programmes (typically MRes) composed of 60 taught credits and two 60 credit projects, the standard required for award would be a grade point average of 12 (equivalent to C3) over the 60 taught credits and 60 of the credits derived from independent work together with a minimum of D3 on the remaining 60 credits of

independent work. Comment from DoGS had again indicated a preference for requiring C3 in both projects. ARSC agreed to respond to this by noting that D3 represented satisfactory achievement against masters ILOs.