

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 16 November 2012

University Guidelines for Boards of Examiners on the Exercise of Discretion

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Guidelines for Boards of Examiners on the application of Discretion when determining final Honours degree classifications, and the awards of Merit and Distinction on taught Masters degrees.

Introduction

The University has agreed to harmonise the ways in which Boards of Examiners (Boards) are permitted to exercise discretion in determining the final awards for Honours degrees and taught Masters degrees¹. It should be noted that while factors which can be taken into account by Boards in the exercise of discretion have been specified (and a number of factors excluded), Boards will have latitude within the set parameters as detailed in the guidance below.

The zones of discretion for Honours degree classifications provided in the Code of Assessment have **not** altered, and Boards are only permitted to consider alternative classifications when a candidate's overall GPA for the award falls within these zones (see Note 3 at the end of the CoA, Gen.22 University Calendar 2012-13). Similarly, the zones of discretion specified in regulations 9.2 and 9.3 of the generic regulations for taught Masters degrees² have not been altered and Boards are only permitted to consider promotion to Merit or Distinction when a candidate's GPA for the taught courses falls within these.

Guidelines

A] Criteria which can no longer be used.

The following **must not** be used in reviewing a candidate's grade profile to determine whether they may be awarded a higher classification:

- Elimination of outlying grades;
- Rank order (i.e. the position of the candidate relative to other candidates (as ranked by GPA));
- Applying additional weight to the performance in any one component of the assessment scheme, such as the dissertation/independent project.

B] A note on Good Cause

Personal circumstances/good cause claims have never been a permitted criterion in the exercise of discretion for final awards, and this position remains. The University's procedures which allow adverse circumstances to be considered and taken into account in the assessment process are detailed in sections 16.45 – 16.53 of the Code of Assessment. These circumstances can only have the effect of setting aside affected elements of

¹ Considered at Senate on 7 June 2012 – see minute SEN/2011/075 at <https://frontdoor.spa.gla.ac.uk/commdoc/senate/SEN/Papers/SEN12001.pdf>

² See University Calendar 2012-13 p Arts.26(PG) College of Arts; p MVLS 41 (PG) College of MVLS; p SciEng 21 (PG) College of Science and Engineering; p SocSci 47 (PG) College of Social Sciences.

assessment or allowing fresh assessment attempts. If an element (or elements) of assessment have been set aside then this should be reflected in the calculation of the student's GPA. If applied correctly, then, personal or medical circumstances will have been accounted for in the calculation of the candidate's final GPA. So, at the stage when discretion is applied, the impact of the adverse circumstances will already have been taken into account. University procedures do not allow speculation over a candidate's achievement of ILOs in the absence of sound assessment. Using the Code of Assessment, Boards have to determine whether the candidate has undertaken a sufficient amount of assessment, which has not been affected by adverse circumstances, to be able to judge their standard of achievement and where this is not possible, candidates cannot be considered for a final Honours or PGT award at this stage.

C] Permitted criteria for the application of Discretion by Boards

Where a candidate's overall GPA falls within one of the zones of discretion determined in Note 3 of the Code of Assessment, or in regulations 9.2 and 9.3 of the generic Masters regulations, Boards should consider the following:

Firstly:

Preponderance of course grades. The course grade profile of the candidate should be reviewed and if there is a preponderance of grades in the higher classification (i.e. a greater number of grades in this – or a higher – classification), the candidate's degree classification may be promoted. Alternatively, Boards may also choose to apply the same process where there are an equal number of grades above and below the borderline classification. Whichever convention is adopted, it must be applied consistently to all candidates considered by that Board.

Secondly, where the candidate is not promoted using preponderance:

Review of unrounded mean scores.

While individual course grades should always comprise a primary grade and secondary band³ with an associated grade point score which is an integer, the aggregation process for calculating a course grade may involve rounding in the process of calculating the grade point scores and weightings of individual components of assessment. Worked examples of these calculation processes are provided in section 2.3 of the Guide to the Code of Assessment (see [examples](#) *nn*)

Comment [hb1]: Examples in the Code of Assessment require numbering.

Aggregated grade scores of course components falling below .5 are rounded down to give the final course grade (e.g. in Example *NN* the aggregation of Bert's results for his assessment components gives 10.25 which is rounded to 10 to provide a D2 course result). Boards may decide to calculate a GPA using the unrounded grade point scores for each course⁴ to see what effect this calculation would have on the overall GPA.

³ This is the case even if the assessment was not originally marked as a primary grade/secondary band. Schedule A assessments, and assessment components, marked by other means e.g. with a percentage score must always be converted to a primary grade/secondary band result and aggregated with the appropriate grade points (see section 2.3 of the Guide to the CoA for more detail).

⁴ Unrounded course grade point scores will not be available on central University records systems. Boards will therefore be reliant on local records of the aggregation of results.

Example:

Angus is a final year Honours student who achieved the following results in his honours assessments:

Honours Course	Unrounded Course Score	Grade	Credits	Grade Points (grade score x credits)	Unrounded aggregation score (unrounded course score x credits)
A	14.2	C1	30	14x30 = 420	426
B	14.48	C1	30	14x30 = 420	434.4
C	14.49	C1	20	14x20 = 280	289.8
D	14.41	C1	20	14x20 = 280	288.2
E	15.45	B3	20	15x20 = 300	309
F	14.49	C1	20	14x20 = 280	289.8
G	15.4	B3	20	15x20 = 300	308
H	15.3	B3	20	15x20 = 300	306
I	16	B2	20	16x20 = 320	320
J	15.48	B3	10	15x10 = 150	154.8
K	14.49	C1	10	14x10 = 140	144.9
L	16.49	B2	20	16x20 = 320	329.8
Totals			240	3510	3600.7

His GPA is **14.6** and therefore falls in the discretionary zone for consideration of either upper or lower second class honours. Total Grade Points/Total Credit [3510/240 = 14.63]

There is no preponderance in the higher classification as there are 130 credits at C1 and 110 at B2/B3.

Using the unrounded course scores, the GPA is recalculated (see unrounded aggregation score in final column above) – 3600.7/240 = **15.0**

On the basis of the unrounded GPA calculation reaching the upper second class range (15.0 – 17.0) the Board may decide to award Angus a 2:1 classification.

In such cases where Boards decide promote candidates to the higher classification after consideration of the unrounded scores, **the formally calculated GPA using the rounded course results must remain as the final GPA score on the candidate's record** and the minutes of the Board meeting should explain how discretion was applied by reviewing the unrounded course results.

D] Further options

Boards may also select to use the following criteria in their consideration of candidates with an overall GPA which falls within one of the zones of discretion:

Borderline Vivas

A small number of areas of the University have traditionally used borderline vivas. Continuation of this practice is permitted, and vivas may be arranged for all students falling within discretionary zones subject to them:

1. Being clearly structured, with guidance published to students in advance; and
2. Only being used as a possible means of promotion from borderline zones.

Exit Velocity

Exit velocity, which is the principle that students build up competence throughout their studies thus performing to a higher standard in their final assessments, is recognised in some Subject areas and is sometimes considered as a factor when determining borderline cases. In some Subjects the potential impact of exit velocity on the overall result for the final award is taken into account systematically by placing a greater weighting on later results (e.g. final Honours year results) in the calculation of the overall GPA. (Where this weighting applies, it must have been set out clearly in course documentation.) This allows all students to have an improving performance taken into account in their final results, rather than only applying the principle to borderline cases.

Where exit velocity is **not** factored into the assessment procedure through heavier weighting of later assessments, Boards may consider it for candidates who are within a zone of discretion. In such cases, the higher classification may be awarded where there is evidence of an improvement in results for the latter stages of the programme.

Comment [tg2]: Do we need this – velocity can increase and decrease.

Boards must always record in their minutes which criteria have been applied in the exercise of discretion.

E] The role of the External Examiner

In some areas external examiners play a key role in determining the final classification of candidates in the discretionary zone by reviewing the full range of the candidate's assessments and making an overall judgement on the standard of the work. This practice may continue, although Boards must ensure that external examiners are asked to judge the standard of the work without reference to any of the criteria detailed in section A] above, or by giving emphasis to any particular assessment (such as the dissertation), and ensuring that any assessments judged to have been affected by adverse circumstances are dealt with in accordance with the procedures laid out in the Code.