

University of Glasgow**Academic Standards Committee – Friday 12 February 2016****Proposed Changes to Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees**

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Summary of proposal

The College wishes to bring the requirements for taught masters degrees into line with those for undergraduate degrees, particularly with integrated masters degrees. It would *greatly* prefer the change to be made across the university. If not, the changes could apply to the College alone but this would create difficulties with joint programmes such as Engineering and Management.

A further modification is required for Engineering to meet the requirements of professional accreditation.

Separately, the College may wish to specify precisely the conditions under which a student may progress to the project, again in a similar way to undergraduate regulations.

Note

These proposals were presented to the Postgraduate Learning and Teaching Committee of the College on 11 December 2015. Although they were generally supported,

- there was deep concern that this College should not use different regulations from other colleges
- the professional engineering institutions are diverging on their limits on compensation for MSc programmes, so the “Further changes for Engineering” may need further adjustment (probably to allow only 20 credits at E with all others at D, which mirrors the undergraduate regulations and brings MEng and MSc even closer)
- there was less support for the “More precise progress regulation”

Introduction

General

At present a candidate requires a GPA of 12.0 (equivalent to C3) or above in the taught courses to obtain a taught masters degree. This is inconsistent with the project, for which a D3 is sufficient, and with undergraduate programmes, for which an overall GPA of 9.0 and a grade of D3 in the project are sufficient. The difference requires a footnote to Schedule A in the Code of Assessment to explain that grade D, glossed as Satisfactory, is *not* satisfactory for a taught masters programme.

Specific issues in the College of Science and Engineering

The College offers two types of taught masters degrees:

- integrated masters programmes, such as MSci and MEng, which are governed by undergraduate regulations
- independent masters programmes, such as MSc, which are governed by postgraduate regulations.

Both types of programme lead to awards at SCQF level 11 and are treated as equivalent by professional bodies. Both should therefore operate to the same threshold academic standard.

Many taught courses are shared between these two types of programme; neither could be delivered economically without this. This sharing creates a problem because the two cohorts of students are assessed under different regulations.

- MSc students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and curricula, should have the equivalent of an upper second class degree but this is not always easy to judge, and require a C grade on average to qualify for their degree; they are allowed reassessment.
- MSci/MEng students have come through a perfectly matched preparatory route and have been rigorously selected for high performance yet require only a D grade on average to qualify for their degree, although reassessment is not permitted.

Thus we demand a higher threshold standard from the students who are less well prepared, which seems unfair. We hope that most MSci/MEng students get far better grades than D but the regulations allow them to graduate with D on average. This situation was highlighted at a recent accreditation visit to Engineering, following which "The IET panel requires the School to justify the different pass marks required of MEng and MSc students who study the same module". Accreditation will be refused unless a satisfactory response is given.

Possible ways forward

Three solutions could address the different treatment of masters programmes.

1. **Split shared courses.** In practice, MSci/MEng and MSc students would still be taught together but would formally be on different courses (different codes) and would have different assessments, adjusted so that a C grade for an MSc student was equivalent to a D grade for a MSci/MEng student. This implies a considerable, continuing load to produce differential assessments every year and to ensure that students register on the correct courses, whose documentation also has to be maintained.
2. **Raise the threshold (pass) grade to C for all programmes at Masters level, including the final year of MSci/MEng.** This would have to include the MSc project for consistency and would mean that the degree classification for

MSci/MEng would be different from BSc/BEng (no third class degrees would be available). Significant adjustment to undergraduate regulations would be required plus a small change to postgraduate regulations.

3. **Lower the threshold grade to D for all courses at Masters level, including MSc.** This would simplify regulations and remove the inconsistency in the Code of Assessment (whether D is satisfactory or not) but would need assessments for MSc to be revised so that grade D required an appropriate level of challenge.

The College proposes the last of these. An objection is that a taught postgraduate award requires an average of 50% in many (but by no means all) universities and the proposal might be seen as a lowering of standards. However, this university uses grade descriptors and the objection carries less weight than it would if we used numerical marks.

It is therefore proposed that an average grade of D should be sufficient for a taught postgraduate award, with minimal changes in the regulations for consistency with this. No change to the requirements for merit and distinction are proposed. The diploma and certificate now demand fewer D grades but a requirement for all credits at F and above has been added to bring the requirements closer to those for the degree. The GPA remains 9.0 for the diploma and certificate as it is for the Ordinary (Designated) undergraduate degree.

Changes to Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees

Section 9.1, *Requirements for the Award of a Masters Degree*, would become [changes noted]:

A candidate will be eligible for the award of the degree on obtaining a grade point average of 9.0 [was 12] (equivalent to D3 [was C3]) or above in the taught courses described in §4, with at least 75% of these credits at grade D3 or better, and all credits at grade F or above, and obtaining a grade D or better in the dissertation or other substantial independent work.

Section 10.1, *Requirements for the Award of a Postgraduate Diploma*, would become:

The requirement for the award of a Postgraduate Diploma is a grade point average of 9.0 [unchanged] (equivalent to D3) in 120 credits, with not less than 60 [was 80] of these credits at grade D or above and all credits at grade F or above [not previously required].

Section 10.2, *Requirements for the Award of a Postgraduate Certificate*, would become:

The requirement for the award of a Postgraduate Certificate is a grade point average of 9.0 [unchanged] (equivalent to D3) in 60 credits, with not less than 30 [was 40] of these credits at grade D or above and all credits at grade F or above [not previously required].

Change to Code of Assessment

Paragraph 16.6 in *Provision for Reassessment*, which defines the threshold grade, would need to be amended but this would depend on whether the threshold became grade D across the university or only for the College.

Further changes for Engineering

Engineering needs a further sharpening of the changed generic regulations because the Engineering Council imposes limits on compensation, which are interpreted rigidly by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (and, very recently, even more

stringently by the Institution of Civil Engineering)). They require for Section 9.1, Requirements for the Award of a Masters Degree:

A candidate will be eligible for the award of the degree on obtaining a grade point average of 9.0 [was 12] (equivalent to D3 [was C3]) or above in the taught courses described in §4, with at least 75% of these credits at grade D3 or better, and all credits at **grade E [was F]** or above, and obtaining a grade D or better in the dissertation or other substantial independent work.

More precise progress regulation

At present the progress regulation (7) in the Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees is the same as the requirement on taught courses for graduation but allows boards of examiners to relax the requirement 'exceptionally'. This leads to inconsistent practice between schools, which causes problems for joint programmes. It also contrasts with undergraduate regulations, where progress requirements are specified in regulations.

It is proposed that students should meet the requirements for the Diploma to be allowed to progress to the project. This is simple but the maximum shortfall to be made up would be raising 30 credits from F to D, which may be considered excessive. Section 7.1, *Candidates for a Masters Degree: Progress*, would become:

A candidate will be permitted to progress to preparation of the dissertation, or other substantial independent work required by the degree, if he or she meets at the first attempt the requirements for the Postgraduate Diploma. Candidates who have been reassessed must meet in full the requirements on taught courses for the Masters Degree. The Programme Document may specify a course or courses in respect of which a specific grade is a minimum requirement of progression.

We also need something for January starters to replace section 7.2:

A candidate who has commenced study midway through an academic session will be permitted to progress to preparation of the dissertation, or other substantial independent work required by the degree, if he or she meets at the first attempt the requirements for the Postgraduate Diploma scaled in proportion to the number of credits that have been taken. The Programme Document may specify a course or courses in respect of which a specific grade is a minimum requirement of progression.

[Should Programme Document be Programme Specification, for precision?]