

**University of Glasgow**

**Academic Standards Committee – Friday 20 May 2016**

**Proposed Changes to Generic Regulations for Taught Postgraduate Degrees**

**Professor Tom Guthrie, Convener of the Committee**

Following earlier discussion of this item at ASC, consultation took place on a proposal to change the required grade for award of a Masters degree to a D average, rather than a C average. The responses received (appended) were generally hostile to this and it therefore seems to be the case that such a change could not be made immediately.

The context in which this consultation took place was an accreditation visit by the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET). This led to a comment that: ‘The IET panel requires the School to justify the different pass marks required of MEng and MSc students who study the same module.’ Failing this, accreditation would be refused. Discussion within Engineering reached the conclusion that the preferred option for addressing this was to align the PGT threshold for award with that which applied to the integrated MEng degree. In light of the responses noted above, this does not appear to be an option. This leaves a number of possibilities:

- (i) Changing the MEng regulations to specify a threshold of C. This would make the MEng regulations inconsistent with the requirements for other integrated Masters programmes in the University and with other Undergraduate degree requirements.
- (ii) Introduce a special set of regulations for the MSc in Engineering which departed from the threshold set for other PGT programmes. This would appear to be problematic given (a) the responses referred to above and (b) would raise the issue of why there were different standards for different awards at exactly the same SCQF level and of the same duration and design.<sup>1</sup>
- (iii) Amend the current generic PGT regulation to permit use of a D threshold. At the moment the regulation permits variation in the duration of a programme and the standard required for progress ‘to reflect the requirements of professional and statutory bodies’ (reg 1.2). The latter variation was inserted to reflect the fact that at the time the regulations were drafted, some external bodies required performance above C as a threshold. If the principle of variation to reflect external requirements is accepted, the regulation could be amended to allow a lower threshold by including permitted variation of regulation 9 (requirements for award) and perhaps specifying that where the threshold was lower than C3 this required the approval of ASC. Of course, the same issues arise with this possibility as with (ii) above.

Since ASC has recently discussed another issue regarding the Generic PGT regulation and indicated that this should be a priority for review in the new regulatory review cycle, it might be considered that option (ii) or (iii) would provide a short-term solution whilst a review sought to resolve it for the longer term.

It is understood that engineering is reviewing options (i) and (ii) and that option (ii) would be easier to implement if the regulations were changed as in (iii) because they would not need to seek new regulations.

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the limits on compensation required by Engineering could mean that some students would graduate under the current generic regulations but not under the special regulations, despite their threshold of D.

## College Responses

### **College of Social Sciences Response:**

Our College PGT Committee would welcome a review of masters level regulations. However, the distinctive and discipline advancing nature of the MSc should be preserved and if this is problematic for the MEng, why not simply move from UG regs at the end of year four to PG for year five? As noted we would welcome a general review of PG regulations.

### **School of Psychology (Update provided by John Davies)**

The proposal was not accepted by the School of Psychology because of concerns over accreditation. Undergraduate degrees are accredited only to a minimum of an upper second class award and the C grade currently required for MSc is consistent with this level.

### **College of Arts response to consultation on proposed changes to Generic Regulations for Taught Masters Degrees**

The College consulted in Schools and received three responses which are summarised below.

There are special circumstances for the degrees concerned and they ought to seek specific regulations for themselves rather than ask everyone to change all degrees where a system works effectively and at what is recognised as the correct level. It's not clear why UG and PGT programmes should not differ in their definitions and grades – there should be progression in difficulty, and recognition that Masters Level study requires work of a very high standard.

It must be a lowering of standards involved if someone can graduate with a GPA of 9, 10 or 11. He/she will hold the same qualification having attained less. Reducing our tariff would potentially damage us.

One colleague noted: I think that key point for me is that to graduate with a taught Masters we require students to be 'good' rather than 'satisfactory' rather than thinking about C being satisfactory at Masters' level'.

On one hand, the proposal is for consistency in the Code of Assessment across UG and PGT assessment, which on the face of it seems desirable. It also seems to make sense within the context outlined in the College of Science and Engineering. On the other hand, in our context, it would appear that such a change would simply be lowering the pass or progression threshold from C to D grades. Presumably, a 'pass' at Masters level would then comprise grades at both C and D. Grading work at Masters level at a 'D' would be contrary to established practice in Arts and would require a shift in the culture and more widespread consultation with programme convenors.

It is possible that, once word gets out, this would be seized upon as a 'dumbing down' (whatever the truth of the matter); it therefore has the potential to do reputational damage (it is, after all, a lowering of the pass mark).

I would have thought a change specifically to deal with the issues in the College of Science & Engineering might be preferable, since it is their integrated Masters that seems to give rise to the anomaly.

The C grade minimum represented a clear higher threshold and distinction from the undergraduate degree.

## **MVLS Postgraduate teaching Committee response to the proposed change to the generic regulations for taught masters degrees**

The issue of proposed changes to the generic PGT regulations was discussed at the March meeting of the Postgraduate Teaching Committee (PTC) in the MVLS Graduate School and Leaders of our five Clusters of PGT Courses (all members of the PTC) were asked to comment further by e-mail after the meeting.

There was a unanimous rejection of the proposal. It was clearly felt that the reduction in requirement for progression to a D3 would 'dumb down' the Masters degree and also result in weak students undertaking projects which would add to the workload.

In addition, we carried out a review of other universities in Scotland and other Russell group Universities and note that for the most part our requirements are similar in spirit to our competitors though with so many different marking schemes it is difficult to compare directly.

The individual comments and review of other Universities are shown below

### **Cluster responses**

#### ***Medical and Clinical Sciences cluster***

**Cluster leader:** I would be very reluctant to reduce the threshold for the award of a Masters degree to a D3 grade. Students averaging less than a C3 will be very weak students and there is a real possibility of devaluing the MSc if we go down this route. This seems to be brought about by a specific issue with regard to the MSci/MEng degrees and I feel that their second option (i.e. raise threshold for an MSci/MEng pass to a C) would work without affecting the all other MScs in the University.

**Deputy Cluster leader:** Whilst it is clear that Engineering have a very difficult and thought-provoking situation on their hands, my initial thought would be that this could be resolved by the creation of a set of non-generic regulations to help ameliorate their difficulty with regard to external accreditation, etc. I understand the University's reluctance to potentially open the floodgates to various programmes looking to have non-generic regulations put in place – but the reality is that there are already clear precedents for this (especially among the "professional" programmes) and no such onrush of non-standard arrangements has resulted.

Secondly, despite the comments in the ASC paper which maybe allude to any changes being perhaps semantic in nature, I really do fear that a change to D3 would devalue our degrees. We would be saying that scoring a mean of 9 out of 22 would be sufficient to graduate with a University of Glasgow Masters degree.

Thirdly, I'd actually be in favour of the thresholds being increased across the board (i.e. That the dissertation should be a C3 threshold too), if consistency is the driver.

#### ***Health Professions cluster***

**Cluster Leader:** Agreed with comments of the Medical and Clinical Sciences Cluster Leader

**Deputy Cluster leader:** Students currently gaining C3 are weak students and to lower the threshold to D3 would I think be a devaluation of a Masters degree. If consistency is the issue here I would prefer that everything was pushed up to C3.

#### ***Plant and Animal Sciences Cluster***

The cluster leader agree with the comments of the Medical and Clinical Sciences Cluster

Leader

**Biomedical Sciences Cluster**

The cluster leads agreed with the comments of the Medical and Clinical Sciences Cluster Leader

**Health and Wellbeing Cluster**

*The following responses were obtained from programme coordinators and one head of section*

“I agree that this doesn’t seem acceptable, my take is that they are requesting to lower the progression onto project threshold from its current C3 (on average) to D3 (on average) – moving from a threshold of “good” to “satisfactory” being enough to progress onto the research project.

A D is *satisfactory* for PGT courses but it does not meet the required threshold of *good* (C) that we expect students to attain (on average) to complete their independent piece of work / research project. If we lowered this standard to a D3 minimum then it’s going to allow less able students to progress onto their project, which could potentially increase the workload of supervisors to pull these lower attaining students through. I think having this cut-off is also for the student’s benefit, not everyone is capable of independent research, progression threshold allows us to monitor ability (similar purpose to reviews for PhD students?). Very rarely do students not progress onto their project, some resit their courses to ensure they have a minimum of a C3 on average, others opt to leave with a diploma, even if they do have a sufficient GPA”.

“It is not surprising that this has come forward as most of our centrally imposed changes to our masters degree in recent years have damaged it. I would object to the reduction in standards and suggest that engineering reconsider its offering so that it fits with current PG taught regulations. I do agree that, on the face of it, the ‘satisfactory’ is at odds with the need for an overall average of ‘good’ in order to progress to Masters. In some universities there is a clearer line drawn between the first part of the student’s studies – usually the PGDip – and the Masters for which they must demonstrate sound performance in order to progress. Our line is less clear (progression requirements cannot be fully assessed until July) and this contributes to the ‘satisfactory’ and ‘good’ anomaly. Also, although PGT regs require the taught course average to be C3, 75% of courses must be at D3 or better and all at F or above. This means that our students may progress to Masters with an F and a combination of Cs and Ds and this looks less impressive than the C3 average might on the face of it imply and underscores the ‘average’ nature of the C3 requirement. Reducing the standard may mean more income but can an ancient university really afford the longer term reputational damage that this might cause?”

“The information seems ambiguous & opaque. My reading of it (esp the 'absolute academic standards should not change' bit) is that we should mark the same, but award “our degree” at D3 level. Is that your reading of it too? If so, it’s a major dumbing down and I would object to it on the grounds that it devalues “our degree” relative to others....”

“Agree with all [the above]– the threshold for continuing onto a project should not change”. In summary, the consensus from IHW is that this change to the rules would not be welcome for the reasons outlined above. Engineering need to work with their accreditation body to come to an agreement that satisfies both parties rather than forcing the rest of the University of Glasgow to accept lower standards, (however notional engineering perceive them to be), as a result of an anomaly that is peculiar to the way engineering assesses its students. So, No, this is a change we cannot and will not support.

**Taught Masters Generic Regulations Bench Marking Exercise**

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| <p><b>Russell Group Universities</b></p> | <p><b>Generic PGT Regs</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Cardiff</b></p>                    | <p><b>To be eligible for the award of a Distinction:</b><br/>         In the Master's Degree a student must have satisfied the requirements of the award and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- achieved a Final Mark of 70% or above, AND - achieved a mark of at least 70% in their Dissertation, AND - achieved an average mark of at least 65% across the Units of Study in accordance with such weightings ascribed to the Units of Study in the Programme Information.</li> </ul> <p><b>To be eligible for the award of a Merit:</b><br/>         In the Master's Degree a student must have satisfied the requirements of the award and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- achieved a Final Mark of 60% or above, AND - achieved a mark of at least 60% in their Dissertation, AND - achieved an average mark of at least 55% across the Units of Study in accordance with such weightings ascribed to the Units of Study in the Programme Information.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Durham</b></p>                     | <p>Each component of assessment for a module shall be marked according to the table below. <b>Marking Levels</b><br/>         70-100 Distinction<br/>         60-69 Merit<br/>         50-59 Pass<br/>         0-49 Fail<br/>         for the award of a Masters degree: a total of 180 credits including at least 150 credits at Level 4.</p> <p>The pass mark for Masters programmes is 50% which must be achieved overall in each of the taught modules and in the dissertation. There is no compensation between modules.</p>  |
| <p><b>Edinburgh</b></p>                  | <p>In order to be awarded a masters degree students must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) have satisfied any requirements for progression, as laid out in taught assessment regulation 53 above, and</li> <li>(b) attain an additional 60 credits, by achieving a mark of at least 50% for the dissertation or project component and</li> <li>(c) satisfy any other specific requirements for the masters degree programme, that are clearly stated in respective Programme Handbooks.</li> </ul> <p>When all the marks for the taught components of the programme or diploma are available, if the student has achieved PASS marks in at least 80 credits and has an overall average of 40% or more over the full 120 credits, then they will be awarded credits on aggregate for the failed courses, up to a maximum of 40 credits. For a certificate, a maximum of 20 credits may be awarded on aggregate.</p> <p><a href="http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/TaughtAssessmentRegulations.pdf">www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/AcademicServices/Regulations/TaughtAssessmentRegulations.pdf</a></p> |

|                          | <p>Postgraduate Assessment Mark</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Mark (%)</th> <th>Grade</th> <th>Description</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>90-100</td> <td>A1</td> <td>An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction</td> </tr> <tr> <td>80-89</td> <td>A2</td> <td>An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction</td> </tr> <tr> <td>70-79</td> <td>A3</td> <td>An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction</td> </tr> <tr> <td>60-69</td> <td>B</td> <td>A very good performance</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>50-59</b></td> <td><b>C</b></td> <td><b>A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>40-49</b></td> <td><b>D</b></td> <td><b>A satisfactory performance for the diploma and certificate, but inadequate for a masters degree</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td>30-39</td> <td>E</td> <td>Marginal Fail</td> </tr> <tr> <td>20-29</td> <td>F</td> <td>Clear Fail</td> </tr> <tr> <td>10-19</td> <td>G</td> <td>Bad Fail</td> </tr> <tr> <td>0-9</td> <td>H</td> <td>Bad Fail</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Mark (%)   | Grade | Description | 90-100 | A1 | An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction | 80-89 | A2 | An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction | 70-79 | A3 | An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction | 60-69 | B | A very good performance | <b>50-59</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree</b> | <b>40-49</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>A satisfactory performance for the diploma and certificate, but inadequate for a masters degree</b> | 30-39 | E | Marginal Fail | 20-29 | F | Clear Fail | 10-19 | G | Bad Fail | 0-9 | H | Bad Fail |
|--------------------------|--|--|-------|-------------|--------|----|--|-------|----|--|-------|----|--|-------|---|-------------------------|--------------|----------|--|--------------|----------|--|-------|---|---------------|-------|---|------------|-------|---|----------|-----|---|----------|
| Mark (%)                 | Grade  | Description  |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 90-100                   | A1   | An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 80-89                    | A2   | An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 70-79                    | A3   | An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 60-69                    | B  | A very good performance  |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| <b>50-59</b>             | <b>C</b>   | <b>A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree</b>   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| <b>40-49</b>             | <b>D</b>   | <b>A satisfactory performance for the diploma and certificate, but inadequate for a masters degree</b> |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 30-39                    | E  | Marginal Fail  |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 20-29                    | F  | Clear Fail   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 10-19                    | G  | Bad Fail   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| 0-9                      | H  | Bad Fail   |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| <p><b>Leeds</b></p>      | <p><b>Taught Postgraduate Awards</b></p> <p>The minimum pass mark for Postgraduate level M modules is 50 (on both the 20-90 and 0-100 scales).</p> <p>5.1 Programme Specifications for awards of the University of Leeds (including intermediate awards and</p> <p>Taught postgraduate awards are classified by credit-weighted grade across all modules studies as part of the programmes</p> <p>Classification thresholds</p> <p>7.00 or over – Masters with distinction</p> <p>6.00 – 6.99 – Masters with Merit</p> <p>5.00 – 5.99 – Masters pass</p> <p>4.99 or lower – Fail</p>   |  |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |
| <p><b>Manchester</b></p> | <p><a href="http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=13144">http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=13144</a></p> <p>In theory a student could pass all course units e.g. with marks of 50 for a Masters programme with some at the level compensation and this would produce an overall average below 50%. For this reason the classification of pass degree at masters (PGT Degree Regulations) is set at 59.9% or less providing the credit requirement in the degree regulations is satisfied; i.e. passing 180 credits for a Masters irrespective of the average programme weighting. It is key to remember that the award is based on the achievement of required amount of credit rather than the average mark.</p>  |  |       |             |        |    |  |       |    |  |       |    |  |       |   |                         |              |          |  |              |          |  |       |   |               |       |   |            |       |   |          |     |   |          |

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
|                    | <p>Mark (class) descriptor    Mark range (whole numbers)</p> <p>Distinction                    70 to 100</p> <p>Merit                             60 to 69</p> <p>Pass                              50 to 59</p> <p>Compensatable fail         40 to 49</p> <p>Non-compensatable fail    39 or less</p>   |
| <b>Newcastle</b>   | <p><a href="http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/docs/documents/MastersRegs0809.pdf">http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/docs/documents/MastersRegs0809.pdf</a><br/> <b>Marking scale applicable to postgraduate masters programmes</b></p> <p><i>0-50: Fail</i></p> <p><b>50-59: Pass</b></p> <p><i>60-69: Pass with merit</i></p> <p><i>70 or above Pass with Distinction</i></p>  |
| <b>Sheffield</b>   | <p><a href="http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.422821!/file/XVI_general-regulations-for-higher-degrees-pgdips-and-pgcerts.pdf">http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.422821!/file/XVI_general-regulations-for-higher-degrees-pgdips-and-pgcerts.pdf</a></p> <p>The Examiners may in their discretion recommend that a student who is awarded not fewer than 165 credits be deemed to have passed the Examination for a Master's Degree, providing that the student has obtained an average grade of not less than 50 and a grade or grades of not less than 40 in the elements of the programme of study in respect of which credits are not awarded, this calculation to include all units.</p>   |
| <b>Southampton</b> | <p><a href="http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/progression-regs-standalonemasters.html">http://www.calendar.soton.ac.uk/sectionIV/progression-regs-standalonemasters.html</a></p> <p>In order for credit to be awarded for a Module, the Module must be passed at the specified Module Pass Mark. The University standard Module Pass Mark for Standalone Masters students taking Modules at all levels is 50. Where a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requires a Pass Mark that differs from the University standard Module Pass Mark this will be stated in the Programme Regulations. The University standard Qualifying Mark for Standalone Masters programmes is 35, unless stated otherwise in the Programme Regulations.</p> <p>The Pass Mark for the dissertation shall be the Module Pass Mark. A candidate failing to achieve the Pass Mark may submit a revised dissertation on one occasion only. The mark for a resubmitted dissertation will be Capped at the Module Pass Mark to determine the award of Merit or Distinction.</p> <p><i>Classification:</i> Degree classification for a Standalone Masters degree is based on the 100 point Mark Scheme for the Final Average Mark as follows:</p> <p>70 and over        Distinction</p> <p>60 - 69             Merit</p> <p>These boundaries refer to the Final Average Mark rounded to the nearest integer.</p> <p><i>Classification Algorithm:</i> The class awarded shall be that within which the Final Average Mark rounded to the nearest integer falls, or the next higher class if the Final Average Mark is within 2 marks of the higher class and at least 50% of the credit points are derived from Module Marks in the higher class or above.</p> |

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| <p><b>St Andrews</b></p>                         | <p>A graduating student who, over a minimum period of one year of full-time study, has gained passes in modules taught in the University worth 120 credits shall be eligible for the award of a Certificate of Higher Education.</p> <p>The General Degree may be awarded with Distinction to a student who fulfils the conditions for the award of the degree and who either gains: - passes at grade 16.5 or above in modules totalling 120 credits; OR passes at grade 13.5 or above in modules totalling 180 credits of which 20 credits must be passed at grade 16.5 or above and 40 credits must be at 2000 and 3000-level.</p> <p><a href="https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/UG%20Reqs%202015-16.pdf">https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/UG%20Reqs%202015-16.pdf</a></p>  |  |        |   |       |   |       |       |      |
| <p><b>York</b></p>                               | <p>The University applies the following mark scale to <b>postgraduate</b> work:</p> <table data-bbox="411 701 1222 835"> <tr> <td>Distinguished performance at postgraduate level:</td> <td>70-100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good performance at postgraduate level:</td> <td>60-69</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Satisfactory performance at postgraduate level:</td> <td>50-59</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fail:</td> <td>0-49</td> </tr> </table> <p>The pass mark for masters-level modules is 50.</p> <p>For the award of a <b>Masters degree with Distinction</b>, you need to achieve the following,</p> <p>at the first attempt (ie without compensation or reassessment):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 70 over all modules (taught and ISM);</li> <li>- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 70 in your ISM; and</li> <li>- no failed modules.</li> </ul> <p>For the award of a <b>Masters degree with Merit</b>, you need to achieve the following, at the</p> <p>first attempt (ie without compensation or reassessment):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 60 over all modules (taught and ISM);</li> <li>- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 60 in your ISM; and</li> <li>- no more than 20 credits of failed modules, with no outright failures (module marks below 40).</li> </ul> | Distinguished performance at postgraduate level: | 70-100 | Good performance at postgraduate level: | 60-69 | Satisfactory performance at postgraduate level: | 50-59 | Fail: | 0-49 |
| Distinguished performance at postgraduate level: | 70-100  |  |        |   |       |   |       |       |      |
| Good performance at postgraduate level:          | 60-69   |  |        |   |       |   |       |       |      |
| Satisfactory performance at postgraduate level:  | 50-59   |  |        |   |       |   |       |       |      |
| Fail:  | 0-49  |  |        |   |       |   |       |       |      |