

University of Glasgow**Academic Standards Committee – Friday 24 March 2017****Report from Meeting of Academic Regulations Sub-Committee held
on 16 March 2017****Professor Marc Alexander, Convener of the Sub-Committee****1. PGT Review: Masters Assessment and Threshold Grades [For approval]**

Professor Alexander introduced a paper regarding masters assessment and threshold grades. This explored a range of issues arising from the fact that the 'threshold grade' for PGT programmes was C3 whereas for undergraduate programmes it was D3.

The Code of Assessment currently included the following note on use of the descriptor 'Satisfactory' for grade D in Schedule A:

This gloss is used because it is the lowest grade normally associated with the attainment of an undergraduate award. Postgraduate students should be aware, however, that an average of at least grade C in taught courses is required for progress to the dissertation at Masters level, and students should consult the appropriate degree regulations and course handbooks for the grade they may require to progress to specific awards.

One issue raised by an accrediting body (the Institute of Engineering and Technology) during session 2015-16 was the anomalous situation where two Engineering students, one in fifth year of an integrated masters programme and one on a one year PGT programme, could be taking the same course and be assessed in the same way but be governed by different threshold grades (D3 and C3 respectively). In May 2016 ASC had agreed that in order to address the concerns of the accrediting body, Engineering would be permitted to adopt non-generic regulations governing PGT programmes, using D as the threshold grade. This was regarded as a temporary measure, pending alternative outcomes from the overall review of PGT regulations.

Professor Alexander's paper outlined a number of possible outcomes from the review:

- Adopting grade D as the threshold grade across all taught programmes. Recent feedback from a number of areas and from discussions with MVLS had indicated that such a change was likely to create significant difficulties in terms of external perception and accreditation.
- Adopting C as the threshold grade for the final year of integrated masters degrees, to address the current anomaly noted above. While this would minimise the changes required across the University, there were potential difficulties and confusion arising from the change of threshold midway through programmes, especially where students could be studying level 4 and level 5 courses concurrently.
- Developing distinct schedules of assessment for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. It was noted that the University of Edinburgh's Common Marking Scheme for PGT degrees defined C as 'A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree' and D as 'A satisfactory performance for the diploma and certificate, but inadequate for a masters degree'. For UG degrees the Common Marking Scheme described D as the basic 'Pass' threshold. The University of Glasgow could develop two schedules, to be adopted on different courses as appropriate. While this offered flexibility, implementation would inevitably involve a

heavy administrative burden and would again bring the strong possibility of confusion.

Members agreed that the problems associated with the various options were considerable, and it was desirable to find a way forward that minimised administrative burden and potential confusion for staff and students. Significant changes to schedules of assessment had extensive knock-on effects in terms of developing and communicating amended verbal descriptors and of needing to edit PIP and associated course documentation.

Members considered the detail of the proposed non-generic Engineering PGT regulations. The following comparison was noted:

	Taught courses (120 credits)				Dissertation/project grade
	GPA required	% of credits required at D3	Minimum course grade permitted	Permitted reassessment	
PGT generic	12.0	75% (90/120)	F3	On any courses graded < C3	D3
Proposed non-generic Engineering PGT	9.0	83% (100/120)	E3	Only on up to 20 credits graded < D3	D3

While the threshold grade for the proposed non-generic regulations (D3) was lower than for the current generic regulations (C3), the former were more demanding in terms of permitted compensation, minimum grades and eligibility for reassessment. The academic standard required for the award of a degree could not be fully represented simply by referring to the relevant threshold grade. Engineering had indicated that analysis of a previous cohort's results suggested that fewer students would qualify for award of the masters under the proposed regulations than had done under the existing generic regulations. The threshold grade was therefore just one aspect of the overall requirements, and to reduce it from C to D did not necessarily indicate a lowering of the overall standard. Going forward, ARSC was therefore comfortable that non-generic PGT regulations could exceptionally be permitted, with the approval of ASC (e.g. where required by accrediting bodies).

Taking account of the various options, ARSC's view was that the University should continue to use Schedule A in its current form, and should retain the requirements for progress/award as currently expressed in the generic PGT regulations. Members believed that these conditions were well embedded and on the whole appeared to be understood and accepted. Adopting this approach would mean that the current distinction between the threshold grade on undergraduate programmes and that on generic PGT programmes would remain. As noted above (in relation to the comparison of proposed non-generic Engineering PGT regulations and University generic PGT regulations), the threshold grade was not the only difference between undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. It was therefore suggested that the footnote to the descriptor 'Satisfactory' in Schedule A could helpfully be expanded. The statement that 'students should consult the appropriate degree regulations and course handbooks for the grade they may require to progress to specific awards' could also incorporate a general reference to limits on compensation, minimum grades and eligibility for reassessment.

At its previous meeting ARSC had identified some aspects of the generic PGT regulations that should be referred to Schools and Colleges for consultation (e.g. requirements for the award of merit and distinction), but members agreed that its position on threshold grades, as set out above, should be proposed directly to ASC.

Following review by ARSC, ASC is therefore asked to approve the following proposals:

- **The current position in generic PGT regulations, where C3 is regarded as the ‘threshold grade’ on taught courses, should be maintained.**
- **The requirement for progress to the dissertation stage on a PGT programme should therefore remain as GPA of 12.0.**
- **Non-generic PGT regulations that use a threshold grade of D should exceptionally be permitted, with the approval of ASC (e.g. where required by accrediting bodies).**

2. Penalties for Late Submission of Coursework: Electronic Submissions [For noting]

The Code of Assessment set out standard penalties for the late submission of coursework. A two point secondary band reduction was applied to the grade for every late day, with work that was submitted more than five working days late receiving grade H.

A question had arisen regarding the treatment of a submission that was made on time but was found to be incorrect (e.g. incomplete, a wrong file, or the wrong version of a file). Electronic submissions might be checked by the School on receipt or might not be looked at until they were marked. A mistake might therefore be identified at some point during the five day penalty period or after the five days had passed entirely.

It was expected that students required to submit work electronically would be instructed to take due care in completing an electronic submission, and in some areas detailed instructions were given which included the student making a final check of the material submitted. However, members were aware that students did still make mistakes. Where the work in question contributed towards the final degree classification, an H grade could have a significant negative impact.

Anecdotally, members were aware of variation in how such submissions were currently treated, even within the same School. In some cases students had been asked to make a further submission of the correct material at whatever stage the mistake was identified, with an amnesty on late penalties. In others, it was seen as the student’s responsibility to ensure that the correct material was submitted on time and a penalty was applied to any later corrected submission.

The Clerk of Senate had been consulted and his view was that submission of the correct material was the responsibility of the student and that there should therefore be no amnesty on the application of late penalties where a corrected submission was accepted.

There was a suggestion that students could be asked to submit a paper copy of their work alongside the electronic submission, so that there was a means of checking what the student had intended to submit. However, members felt that this introduced an unreasonable administrative burden and unless such submissions were formally logged, the system would not be reliable, which could create further problems.

Members were in agreement that submission of the correct materials was the responsibility of the student and that there was no expectation that staff should carry out a check. It was agreed that it would be helpful to include a note on this issue in the Guide to the Code of Assessment and disseminate information to Schools to ensure consistency of practice.

3. External Examiner Comments on Assessment 2015-16 [For noting]

ARSC received a digest of comments concerning assessment that had been extracted from External Examiners' reports from 2015-16. It was noted that the issue of discretionary decisions for honours and PGT classifications was still prompting comment from External Examiners but the level of comment had fallen since previous years and a number of comments referred positively to the more detailed guidance in this area that had recently been introduced. It was still the case, however, that some Externals believed that Boards had too little discretion while others believed that they had too much.

Members considered the various comments and identified where a response should be provided to the External Examiner or where further information was required. No issues were identified as requiring referral to ASC.