

SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC POLICY DECISIONS – SPRING 2012

This information note refers to decisions made at the following meetings:

Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee – 8/02/12

Academic Board – 21/03/12

Senate – 25/04/12

Minute numbers are given to indicate the source of the information set out below. Where extracts of minutes are included verbatim, this is indicated by speech marks.

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SECTION A – FOR ACTION

1. Departmental Student Support (S.M.127.12)

Resolved 'that the Policy for Departmental Student as set out in paper S/12/25 (Appendix A) be approved for introduction with effect from the 2012-13 academic year.'

See: https://www.essex.ac.uk/committees/committeedocs/ACBD/2011/documents/2012-03-21_9_DepartmentalStudentSupport.docx

2. Report from the Rules of Assessment Review Group (SMM.128-130.12)

(i) Postgraduate Rules of Assessment

Resolved 'that the Rules of Assessment as set out in paper S/12/25 be approved.'

See [Appendix A](#)

(ii) Undergraduate Rules of Assessment

Noted There was discussion about the proposals contained in the report from the Rules of Assessment Review Group regarding study abroad that were recommended to come into effect for the 2011-12 academic year. It was noted that the changes were common practice across the sector and were interim arrangements designed to ensure the year abroad was not detrimental to students while a full review of marks conversion for the study abroad year was being led by the Associate Dean (Student Mobility). Senate members agreed that it was important for proposals resulting from the review to come before Senate.

Resolved 'that the Rules of Assessment as set out in paper S/12/25 and Appendix B be approved.'

See [Appendix B](#)

SECTION B – FOR INFORMATION

1. Update on the Implementation of Key Information Sets (QAEC.12.30)

Received 'An update on the work undertaken by the Key Information Set Implementation Group to prepare for the launch of Key Information Sets in September 2012. Members were reassured that good progress was being made by the group, and that provisions were being made to meet internal data requirements (for example using timetabling information to generate information on contact hours). Departments would be expected to verify the information generated, and there was ongoing dialogue with Departmental Administrators in this regard. A KIS guide for Departmental Administrators would be circulated in due course.'

2. Student Charter (S.M.107.12)

Resolved 'That the Student Charter be approved with immediate effect'.

The Student Charter can be found online at:
http://www.essex.ac.uk/about/essex_student_charter/

3. Academic Offences Procedures (S.M.131.12)

Resolved That the Academic Offences Procedures, be amended with effect from 2012-13

See https://www.essex.ac.uk/committees/committeedocs/ACBD/2011/documents/2012-03-21_11_AcademicOffencesReportAppendixA.docx

4. Extenuating Circumstances: Documentary evidence requirements for coursework (S.M.132.12)

Recommended to Senate:

'that the undergraduate and postgraduate taught extenuating circumstances policies be amended with effect from 2012-13 to state that students must submit documentary evidence to support claims of a medical or non-medical nature relating to absence from examinations/invigilated tests, or related to an individual coursework assignment or unit of assessment which counts for 50% or more for the assessment of a module.'

Richard Stock
Deputy Academic Registrar
31 May 2012

CIRCULATION

FOR ACTION:

Heads of Department/School
Directors of
 Human Rights Centre
 Interdisciplinary Studies in the Humanities
 Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies
 Study Abroad Office
 Centre for Theoretical Studies
Departmental Administrators (including Centres listed above)

FOR INFORMATION:

Vice-Chancellor
Pro-Vice-Chancellors
Deans
Academic Registrar
Faculty Managers
Academic Officers

1 Postgraduate Rules of Assessment

a) Volume of Reassessment

that, for students enrolling on PGT programmes in 2012-13, the following change be made to the rules of assessment. NB – the existing rules would need to be retained for students entering stage two of 24-month programmes in 2012-13:

“4.1 Second attempts at the assessment for taught modules

- a) Students may have a second attempt for module(s) that have been failed, up to a maximum of ~~40~~ 60 taught module credits.”

b) The use of Discretion in the Postgraduate Rules

- i) that, for students enrolling on PGT programmes in 2012-13, discretion be removed from the PGT rules except in relation to extenuating circumstances. NB - discretion would need to be retained for students entering stage two of 24-month programmes in 2012-13.
- ii) That, with effect from the 2012-13 academic year, a common form of wording be used for both the UG and PGT rules as follows:

“Extenuating Circumstances

Extenuating circumstances can only be considered by the Board of Examiners if the student has submitted an extenuating circumstances form by the agreed deadline. When substantial extenuating circumstances are accepted by the Board of Examiners it may use its discretion to depart from the rules of assessment where this is necessary to achieve a fair result.

Examination Board Discretion

Except in the case of Extenuating Circumstances, the Board of Examiners does not have powers of discretion in relation to the application of the rules of assessment.”

c) Clarification of when credits are awarded

that, with effect from the 2012-13 academic year, the paragraph relating to pass marks in the PGT rules of assessment be amended as follows:

“2 PASS MARK

- a) The pass mark for all modules of the Masters degree is 50. Credits are only awarded if the module is passed. In cases where failure with a mark of 40 is condoned, the credits are not awarded.”

REPORT FROM THE RULES OF ASSESSMENT REVIEW GROUP

Undergraduate Issues

a) Degree Classification Rules

Since the first cohort of students graduated on the new rules of assessment in 08-09, the Review Group has kept the rules under annual review. In recent years the Group has received comments from departmental staff who act as Externals elsewhere and from our appointed External Examiners suggesting that our rules are out of line with other institutions. The Group was therefore asked to seek information about the rules at comparable institutions.

The Group has compared the Essex degree classification rules with those of 17 out of the 19 institutions in the 1994 Group (excluding the Institute of Education, which does not award undergraduate degrees, and the University of Sussex, where each subject currently has its own set of rules but all of these are currently under review)¹. The Essex rules currently calculate a student's class of degree in two ways: by weighted average ("Degree Mark", calculated from second- and final-year marks weighted 40:60 for students on three-year degrees) and by "Dominant Quality" (the number of credits in a particular class). While a Degree Mark calculation based on a weighted average is commonly used at other universities, Essex appears to be the only member of the 1994 Group that couples this Degree Mark calculation with a "pure" Dominant Quality calculation (i.e. one that includes no consideration of the quality of individual marks within classes).

Although there is considerable variety in the formulae used at other 1994 Group institutions, the most common pattern appears to be for institutions to calculate a Degree Mark based on a weighted average to provide a *prima facie* classification (as we do at Essex): Degree Mark 70 or more = First Class; Degree Mark 60 or more = 2.1 and so on. The 40:60 weighting used at Essex is the basis for this primary calculation at a number of other institutions (Durham, UEA [proposed rules], Leicester [except Biological Sciences], Loughborough, York); other institutions (Bath, Birkbeck, Exeter, Royal Holloway, Reading, Surrey) attach increased weight to the final-year credits, commonly by double-weighting them (i.e. a 1:2 ratio). The strongest final-year weighting (30:70) is that applied in Biological Sciences at Leicester. Although this question will need to be kept under review, the Group is not proposing to recommend that the 40:60 weighting used for candidates on three-year degrees (or the equivalent weightings used for candidates on four-year degrees) at Essex should be changed at this stage.

Institutions in the 1994 Group that calculate the Degree Mark in this way commonly go on to provide for what may be termed a "borderline zone": a candidate whose Degree Mark falls just short of the boundary will be awarded the higher class of degree, or may be considered for the higher class of degree, in certain circumstances. This borderline zone is commonly set at 68, 58 and 48 (Bath, Durham, UEA [proposed rules], Exeter, Goldsmiths, Reading, Royal Holloway, York), though some institutions set it lower (Leicester uses 67, 57 and 47 and Lancaster uses marks on a 24-point scale which are broadly equivalent to this). St Andrews uses a one-point borderline zone within a 20-point scale, though marks on this scale cannot be directly translated into a percentage equivalent.

The "borderline rule" (again, a convenient phrase that does not appear in any of the sets of rules) applied to candidates in the borderline zone varies widely between institutions. Some sets of rules (Durham, Lancaster, Leicester) simply provide that a candidate in the borderline zone must be considered for the exercise of discretion; others (Bath, UEA [proposed rules], Exeter, Goldsmiths, Reading, Royal Holloway, St Andrews, York) specify a formula that will be used to determine whether a candidate will (or *may*, in the case of Reading and Royal Holloway) be placed in the higher class. The most common type of formula (though the details vary) relates to the number of credits obtained in the higher class: a formula of this type is used at Bath, UEA [proposed rules], Exeter, Goldsmiths, Reading, and Royal Holloway.

The current Essex rules for Dominant Quality set a lower threshold (in terms of numbers of credits in the higher class) for the award of First Class honours than they do for the award of Upper Second or Lower

¹ In the case of the University of East Anglia, where the rules are currently under review, we were given an indication of the likely form that the rules would take, subject to final approval, from 2013 onwards.

Second Class honours: a candidate with 120 First Class credits will be awarded a First Class Degree on the basis of Dominant Quality, whereas a candidate for Upper Second or Lower Second Class honours requires 150 credits in the higher class to qualify by this route. This difference is not apparent at other 1994 Group institutions: in all the institutions where a borderline zone and a borderline rule apply, the thresholds and formulae for the award of First Class Honours are directly equivalent to those for Upper and Lower Second Class honours. The Essex rules for the award of Upper Second and Lower Second class honours seem to be in some respects more generous than those at other 1994 Group institutions (in that a candidate with 150 credits in a particular class will get that class of degree regardless of the overall quality of the marks), and in some respects harsher (in that a candidate with 120 credits in a particular class will only get that class of degree if the Degree Mark falls above the 60/50 boundary, even if all 120 credits in the higher class have been obtained in the final year of study). Essex's rules appear to be unique among the 1994 Group in providing for a lower threshold for the award of First Class honours. They are also uniquely generous at this level, in that a candidate with four Lower Second Class marks in the final year and four First Class marks in the second year (assuming four 30-credit modules in each year) would receive overall First Class honours; such a candidate would not receive automatic First Class Honours at any other 1994 Group institution (and might indeed receive Lower Second Class honours at a number of institutions).

Recommendations to Academic Board:

- i. The Group proposes to recommend that the existing rules should be amended from the start of the 2012-13 academic year to include a borderline zone and a borderline rule, in line with many other 1994 Group institutions. The Group has considered whether the borderline zone and the borderline rule should be *added* to the existing Degree Mark and Dominant Quality rules, or whether they should *replace* the existing Dominant Quality rule. The Group prefers the second of these options.
- ii. The Group also proposes to recommend that the formulae used at the First Class honours borderline should be directly equivalent to those used at the Upper Second and Lower Second Class borderlines, as is the case at all other 1994 Group institutions.
- iii. The Group recognises that students who have already registered on a degree course cannot be prejudiced by any change to the Rules of Assessment, and is accordingly proposing that a "hybrid" of the old and new rules should apply to all current students. The proposed changes will require extensive rewriting of the Rules of Assessment, and they are only given in summary form here. If Academic Board is happy to accept the proposed changes in principle, then re-drafted Rules of Assessment will be submitted to the Summer Term meeting of the Board for formal approval, and will then be considered at the final meeting of Senate of the 2011-12 academic year.

Summary of current rules: three-year degrees

The classification is based on the 240 credits taken in the second and third years of study. Students must attempt 120 credits (or more, if an approved variation is in place for their degree course) in each of the three years of study, and may fail no more than 30 credits across the entire degree. To be eligible to graduate, a student must have passed all "core" modules, and must have passed at least 90 credits at Level 6. Subject to these general rules:

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 120 credits at 70 or more with no credits below 50.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*

- 150 credits at 60 or more with no credits below 40 (and no more than 90 third-class credits²).

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 50 or more with no more than 30 credits below 40³.

Third Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who does not qualify for any other class of degree and has no more than 30 credits below 40.

Proposed rules to apply for students entering the preliminary or first year from the start of 2012-13 academic year: three-year degrees

Subject to the general rules that currently apply (noted in the previous section), which the Group does not propose to change:

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 120 credits at 70 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 68.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 120 credits at 60 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 58.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 120 credits at 50 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 48.

Third Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who does not qualify for any other class of degree and has no more than 30 credits below 40.

Proposed rules to apply with effect from 2012-13 to students who are entering the second or final year: three-year degrees

Subject to the general rules:

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 120 credits at 70 or more with no credits below 50; *or*
- 120 credits at 70 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 68.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 60 or more with no credits below 40 (and no more than 90 third-class credits); *or*
- 120 credits at 60 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 58.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 50 or more with no more than 30 credits below 40; *or*
- 120 credits at 50 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 48.

² This requirement is normally redundant in the case of three-year degrees, because a candidate who is being assessed on the basis of 240 credits and who has 150 credits at 60 or above can never have more than 90 third-class credits. It may, exceptionally, be relevant when a candidate has been required or permitted (by an approved variation) to take additional credits in the second or final year.

³ This requirement, though stated in the current rules, is also redundant because no candidate is allowed to graduate with more than 30 failed credits.

Third Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who does not qualify for any other class of degree and has no more than 30 credits below 40.

Summary of current rules: four-year degrees

Academic Board should note that it would clearly be necessary to make equivalent changes to the rules for four-year degrees; these changes are shown below.

There are currently five different types of four-year degree, differing according to the number of assessed credits awarded to the additional year.

Model 1: No assessed credits awarded for third year: students assessed on basis of 240 credits; Degree Mark calculated 40:0:60. Degree Mark and Dominant Quality rules are otherwise exactly the same as three-year degrees.

Model 2: Students assessed on basis of 330 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:20:50.

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 70 or more with no credits below 50.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 60 or more; no credits below 40; no more than 90 third-class credits.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 50 or more; no more than 30 credits below 40.

Third Class honours: as three-year degrees.

Model 3: Students assessed on basis of 300 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:20:50. Dominant Quality thresholds, like the Degree Mark calculation, are the same as Model 2.

Model 4: Students assessed on basis of 360 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:30:40. Dominant Quality thresholds as follows:

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 70 or more with no credits below 50.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 210 credits at 60 or more; no credits below 40; no more than 120 third-class credits.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

Either a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
210 credits at 50 or more; no more than 30 credits below 40

Model 5 covers a non-assessed work-placement spread over two years; the student is assessed on the basis of 240 credits with the Degree Mark calculated 40:45:15. The Dominant Quality rules are exactly the same as Model 1 above and the three-year rules.

Proposed rules to apply from start of 2012-13 academic year for students entering the first year: four-year degrees

Model 1: Degree Mark calculated 40:0:60. Rules otherwise exactly the same as three-year degrees.

Model 2: Students assessed on basis of 330 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:20:50.

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 70 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 68.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 60 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 58.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 50 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 48.

Third Class honours: as three-year degrees.

Model 3: Students assessed on basis of 300 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:20:50. Rules otherwise exactly the same as Model 2.

Model 4: Students assessed on basis of 360 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:30:40. Dominant Quality thresholds as follows:

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 70 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 68.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 60 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 58.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 50 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 48.

[Model 5 To be deleted.]

Proposed rules to apply with effect from 2012-13 to students who are entering the second, third or final year: four-year degrees

Model 1: Degree Mark calculated 40:0:60. Rules otherwise exactly the same as three-year degrees.

Model 2: Students assessed on basis of 330 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:20:50.

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 150 credits at 70 or more with no credits below 50; *or*
- 150 credits at 70 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 68.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 60 or more; no credits below 40; no more than 90 third-class credits; *or*
- 150 credits at 60 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 58.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 50 or more; no more than 30 credits below 40; *or*

- 150 credits at 50 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 48.

Third Class honours: as three-year degrees.

Model 3: Students assessed on basis of 300 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:20:50. Otherwise as Model 2.

Model 4: Students assessed on basis of 360 credits; Degree Mark calculated 30:30:40. Dominant Quality thresholds as follows:

First Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 70 or more; *or*
- 180 credits at 70 or more with no credits below 50; *or*
- 180 credits at 70 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 68.

Upper Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- *Either* a Degree Mark of 60 or more; *or*
- 210 credits at 60 or more; no credits below 40; no more than 120 third-class credits; *or*
- 180 credits at 60 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 58.

Lower Second Class honours will be awarded to a candidate who has:

- Either* a Degree Mark of 50 or more; *or*
- 210 credits at 50 or more; no more than 30 credits below 40; *or*
- 180 credits at 50 or more and a Degree Mark of at least 48.

[Model 5 To be deleted.]

