

## SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC POLICY DECISIONS – SPRING 2004

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

ASC – 26 January 2005  
ASC – 2 March 2005  
Senate – 23 March 2005

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 BY HEADS OF DEPARTMENT AND CENTRES**

##### **1. Procedure for Approval of New Degree Schemes (S.M.34/05)**

'Resolved

that the following procedure for the approval of degree schemes be approved with effect from 1 April 2005:

|   | <b>TYPE OF SCHEME</b>  | <b>APPROVAL REQUIRED</b>   |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | New schemes which are wholly constructed from existing courses or include only one new compulsory course.  | Paperwork submitted direct to the School Board;<br>No external comment required.   |
| 2 | New schemes which include more than one new course as a compulsory component   | Paperwork submitted direct to the School Board;<br>External comments required.   |
| 3 | New schemes which are in new curriculum areas (as defined by QAA Subject Benchmarks) and/or involve external collaboration, and/or where internal validation is necessary to meet external requirements. | Approval via a Validation Panel which reports to the School Board.<br>QEO convenes a Validation Panel on behalf of the School Board in line with existing validation procedures in place for collaborative provision.' |

## 2. Framework for the Award of Distinction and Merit to Masters Students (S.MM.52-55/05)

'Resolved

- (i) that the framework for the award of distinction and of merit be approved as set out below with effect from October 2005:

### Distinction

1. Marks of 70% or more are distinction level marks.
2. To obtain a Masters with distinction three conditions should be met:
  - a) \*two-thirds of the total weighted aggregate marks must be at distinction level;
  - b) where the assessment for the dissertation is weighted below 30% overall, the mark should be no less than 67%. Where it is weighted at 30% or above, the mark should be at least 70%;
  - c) No component should have an aggregate below 50%.

### Merit

1. Marks of 60% or more are merit level marks.
2. To obtain a Masters with merit three conditions should be met:
  - a) \*two-thirds of the total weighted aggregate marks must be at merit level;
  - b) where the assessment for the dissertation is weighted below 30% overall, the mark should be no less than 57%. Where it is weighted at 30% or above, the mark should be at least 60%;
  - c) No component should have an aggregate below 45%.

\*The proportion should be as close to this figure as possible but some variation is inevitable because of the differing scheme structures and course/module weightings.

This framework does not imply a *requirement* to award degrees with Merit.

- (ii) that departments should amend their rules of assessment for Masters degree schemes where necessary to ensure that they were consistent with the framework;
- (iii) that the framework should be reviewed by the Graduate School Board after one year of operation in order to address any outstanding concerns of departments.

Noted

The Graduate School would work with individual departments to revise rules of assessment in those cases where there was a potential lack of clarity about the elements of assessed work that would amount to two-thirds of the total weighted aggregate marks.'

## **SECTION B – FOR INFORMATION**

### **1. Examination Regulations (S.M.42.05)**

'Resolved

that Examination Regulation 6.5 be amended as follows (new text underlined), with effect from 2005/06:

6.5.

No candidate will be admitted to the examination room later than 55 minutes after the start of the examination. No candidate will be permitted to permanently leave the examination room until 55 minutes after the start of the examination.

### **2. Course Enrolment and Timetable Clashes (S.M.43/05)**

'Resolved

that a new regulation be approved for inclusion in the General Regulations: Attendance and Conduct section of the Calendar with effect from 2005-06, as follows:

7.3

Every effort is made to timetable optional courses in such a way that clashes are minimised. However, where a student is enrolled for two courses with a timetable clash between lectures, the student is required to change one of the conflicting courses. Students may request special permission from the Dean of the relevant School to be exempted from this requirement. Each request will be judged on its merits.'

### **3. Guidelines for Pre-Boards (S.M. 44/05)**

'Resolved

that the following amendment to paragraph 6j (iii) b of the *Assessment Policies for Undergraduate Awards of the University of Essex* be approved with immediate effect:

The Examination Board makes the final decision about whether circumstances are extenuating. ~~However, the (departmental) committee should be chosen so that the Board can have confidence in its recommendations. If the Board has that confidence, it will very rarely ask for the reasons for its recommendations, or alter them.~~

### **4. Exam Boards Acting Outside the Rules of Assessment (S.M.46/05)**

'Resolved

that a new regulation be approved for inclusion in the Examination Regulations: Award and Conferment of Degrees section of the Calendar with immediate effect, as follows:

6.18

- a. The Chair of a Board of Examiners may suspend any particular decision of the Board where:
  - i. the decision contravenes either a University regulation, policy, or procedure;
  - ii. the decision, in the judgement of the Chair, leads to unfairness or inconsistency.

- b. In signing the grids at the conclusion of the Board meeting, the Chair shall indicate next to his/her signature that he/she has not approved the decision relating to the relevant candidate number(s).
- c. The Chair shall then refer the decision to a sub-Committee of Senate by notifying the Vice-Chancellor's Office. The sub-Committee shall be chaired by the Vice-Chancellor or his/her nominee, and shall consist of not fewer than three further members of Senate who are also senior members of academic staff. Where possible, the members should be chosen from disciplines cognate with that in the case under consideration. The sub-Committee shall review the facts of the case and take an independent and final decision. Any decision open to the original Board of Examiners shall be available to the sub-Committee. The sub-Committee may wish to view the grids of other students in order to ensure consistency.
- d. The decisions of the sub-Committee shall not require the agreement of external examiners but the external examiner shall be informed of the decisions.'

## **5. School Appeals Committees (ASC.M.39/05) (S.M.48/05)**

ASC resolved (ASC.M.39/05)

'that the appeals procedures should be revised and made uniform, so that appeals against progress decisions of Boards of Examiners, if upheld by the Appeals Officers, should be dealt with by re-convened Exams Boards. School Appeals Committees would therefore no longer exist.'

Senate approved consequential changes to sections 12 and 13 the *Progress and Appeals Procedures for Taught Course Schemes* with immediate effect, as set out in [Appendix A](#) attached. (S.M.48/05)

## **6. Reform of Academic Decision-Making Structures (S.M.59/05)**

'Noted

Academic Standards Committee had established a Working Group to give further consideration to the proposed reform existing academic decision-making structures. The Group would include a representative from each School of study and from the Students' Union, and would make a progress report to a Heads of Department meeting early in the summer term. The Group would consider existing proposals as well as exploring possible alternatives. The objective was to present a proposal to the Senate at its June 2005 meeting, although this might be an interim proposal if the Group had not yet reached a conclusion. If necessary the consultation process, which would begin with the planned report to Heads of Department, would be extended to cover the period to December 2005 which would be the next opportunity for the Senate to re-visit this matter.'

## **7. Code of Practice for Masters' Dissertations (ASC.MM.57-58/05) (S.MM.56-58)**

'Noted

It was noted that the Graduate School was seeking to introduce a University-wide Code of Practice for the supervision of Masters' dissertations in order to ensure not only that all students receive an adequate level of supervision but that they are also aware of key information relevant to the preparation of the dissertation.

Resolved

that the Code of Practice be approved as set out below:

1. Departments/Centres must provide all Masters students with a document which sets out:
  - a) the date of a meeting with all Masters students to outline the expectations of the Masters dissertation;
  - b) the required length of the dissertation and its weight in the overall assessment of the scheme;
  - c) the nature and timing of any dissertation-specific training that will be provided;
  - d) how and when supervisors will be allocated;
  - e) the supervision that will be available to students. This must amount to at least four hours per student;
  - f) what reading, if any, of drafts will take place;
  - g) the final deadline for the submission of the dissertation, which must be no later than mid-September. (If an extension is granted, the student must be reminded that student accommodation contracts end mid-September).
2. Departments must provide some supervision for the dissertation during the Summer vacation. If a student is allocated a supervisor who is likely to be unavailable for much of the vacation, the student must be told how supervision will be provided during this period.
3. Supervisors are strongly advised to keep a record of the supervision they provide.'

This item was also the subject of discussion at Senate, (see S.MM.56-58).

#### **8. Student Satisfaction Survey (ASC.M.87/05)**

The following note was included in the Autumn 2004 Summary of Academic Policy Decisions:

ASC's decisions in M.126/04 paragraph (a) (ii)-(iii) have been reviewed in the light of national developments in respect of the National Student Survey (NSS). It is expected that the decisions in M.126/04 paragraphs (a) (ii) and (iii) will be rescinded. An update will be provided in the Summary of Academic Policy Decisions – Spring 2005.

ASC revisited this matter in March 2005 (ASC.M.87/05):

'Noted

The Committee noted the developments in relation to the National Student Survey and the resulting changes to the approach that would be taken to the University's internal student satisfaction survey as a result [details set out in Paper ASC/05/12]. The internal student satisfaction survey would be run in 2004/05 on the same basis as in 2003/04, although the questionnaires would be modified slightly in the light of feedback from the pilot.'

Joanne Tallentire  
Senior Assistant Registrar  
May 2005

#### **CIRCULATION**

##### **FOR ACTION:**

Heads of Department  
Directors of  
Areas and Study Abroad Office  
Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies  
Centre for Theoretical Studies  
English Language Teaching Centre  
Human Rights Centre  
Departmental Administrators (including Centres listed above)

##### **FOR INFORMATION:**

Vice-Chancellor  
Pro-Vice-Chancellors  
Deans  
Academic Registrar  
Academic Section Administrators

## School Appeals Committees

### Amendments to University Progress Procedures (new wording underlined, deleted wording struck through)

1. Paragraph 12c (v):  
If the Appeals Officer decides that *prima facie* the appeal meets the designated grounds, s/he will forward it to the Dean of the School, together with his or her written comments, ~~to be referred to the School Appeals Committee~~ The Academic Registrar will inform the student, and will subsequently advise the student when the Board of Examiners will meet to reconsider the case. On receipt of the complaint and the Appeals Officer's comments, the Dean shall cause the Board of Examiners responsible for the assessment against which the student has complained to reconvene and put before the Board the student's submission, the Appeals Officer's comments and any material relevant to the original assessment. The Dean will then formally ask the Board to review its decision. Paragraphs 13k—l, 13n, and 13p below will apply.
2. Paragraphs 12d (i—iv) will be deleted entirely.
3. Paragraph 12e will become 12d and also requires the following amendment:  
  
Any appeal following the formal conclusion of the appeals procedures set out above may be made on the grounds of procedural irregularities in the appeals process only. A student who wishes to appeal against the outcome of these procedures should write to the Academic Registrar within four weeks setting out in detail the nature of the evidence to support the claim that there were procedural irregularities in the appeals process. If *prima facie* there is evidence to support the claim then the case will be reviewed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Standards). If the Pro-Vice-Chancellor determines that there were procedural irregularities in the appeals process then the case will be referred to an ~~appeals committee for consideration, and paragraphs d i—iv above will apply~~ alternate Appeals Officer for consideration and paragraphs 13g—n and 13p below will apply.
4. Paragraph 12f will become 12e.
5. Paragraph 13j requires the following amendment:  
  
If the Appeals Officer decides there are sufficient *prima facie* grounds for putting the case to the Board of Examiners, he/she will forward it, together with his/her written comments, to the Dean of the student's School of Study. The Academic Registrar will inform the student, and will subsequently ~~let~~ inform the student ~~know~~ when the Board of Examiners will meet to reconsider the case. On receipt of the complaint and the Appeals Officer's comments, the Dean shall cause the Board of Examiners responsible for the assessment against which the student has complained to reconvene and put before the Board the student's submission, the Appeals Officer's comments and any material relevant to the original assessment. The Dean will then formally ask the Board to review its decision. The Appeals Officer will have the right to attend and to address the meeting of the Board of Examiners.
6. Paragraph 13l requires the following amendment:

The Dean of the student's School of Study shall take the actions described in paragraph j (or 12c (v) as applicable) above, whether or not the Dean is Chair of the Board of Examiners responsible for the assessment against which the student has complained.