

SUMMARY OF ACADEMIC POLICY DECISIONS – SUMMER 2008

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

Undergraduate School Board – 04/06/08

Senate – 02/07/08

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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FOR ACTION

1. Criteria for the Nomination of External Examiners for Taught Provision (S.M.236/08)

‘Resolved that the revised Criteria for the nomination of External Examiners, as set out in **Annex A** to the report of the Quality Assurance Committee (07.05.08), be approved with effect from 2008-09.’

[See Annex A attached.](#)

2. Distance Learning Policy (S.M.237/08)

‘Resolved that a revised policy on distance learning be approved with effect from 2008-09, as set out in **Annex B** to the report of the Quality Assurance Committee (07.05.08).

[See Annex B attached.](#)

3. In-Sessional English (S.M.249/08)

'Resolved

- i. that the policy regarding in-sessional English Language support for non-native students should be revised as follows:
 - (a) that enrolment and attendance on in-sessional English Language courses should be ~~obligatory~~ **recommended** for all new students who have C ~~or B~~ scores in the English Language test at the start of the year. **Students in this category should be advised that not making use of the support could be detrimental and in the event of failure would be part of the evidence available to Examination Boards. The importance of taking up the language support available should be emphasised in both pre-registration and post-registration material.** All students with a B score who request support should also be accommodated on a first-come first-served basis, subject to sufficient resource being available.
 - (b) that departments (as well as the **International Academy** ~~English Language Teaching Centre~~) should ~~have responsibility for~~ monitoring student engagement with ~~required~~ in-sessional English Language courses, so that they are able to ensure that their students' academic achievement is not compromised by inadequate English language skills. **The department should include, as part of their Autumn term meeting with first year UG students, a consideration of language skills and uptake of the available support.**
 - ~~(e) that students **undertaking the in-sessional English language courses** should be assessed at the end of the course (20 weeks) in four skill areas with the emphasis placed on writing skills ;~~
 - (c) that where the English Language course is not integral to a degree scheme then consideration should be given to introducing an element of progression. For example, those students whose profile demonstrates a need for further support should be ~~required~~ **advised** to attend a Pre-Sessional course **and/or make use of the International Academy's in-sessional programme of language support.** ~~Returning students who were unable to provide evidence of having attended a language course during the vacation would be assessed and required to join a language class the following year as necessary.²~~

4. Outcomes of Thematic Review of Academic and Careers Support (TRACS) (UGSB.MM.57-65/08) and S.MM.62-64/08)

- ‘Resolved
- a. that Staff-Student Liaison Committees should include as a standard item on the agenda the quality and usefulness of assignment coversheets and marking criteria, and the quality and timeliness of feedback provided to them in order that this feedback can be fed into Annual Monitoring process;
 - b. that Faculty Boards should be asked to discuss minimum departmental requirements in the provision of material in the CMR and on-line materials in the Library (for UG and PGT students). The outcome of these discussions should be reported to the School Boards with a view to the Boards discussing the adoption of a University expectation which, while recognizing variation between disciplines, ensures a comparable student experience across the University;
 - c. that the LTU should undertake a comprehensive audit of opportunities to acquire and develop study skills and make recommendations to the School Boards as appropriate;
 - d. that an expansion of central skills training provision, delivered by the Careers Centre, and including both academic and career management skills training, should be provided centrally. This will ease the burden on departments and avoid unnecessary duplication; departments should be asked to concentrate primarily on subject-specific skills;
 - e. that central help, advice and training in the use of learning technology applications for both staff and students as well as in basic computer software applications including Windows functions is needed to improve staff efficiency, and should be provided through ISS and LTU.’
- ‘Recommended to Senate and Resolved
- i. that the expectation for the return of assessed work should normally be no more than four weeks, less wherever possible and that this should apply to vacation periods as well as term-time (i.e. coursework handed in at the end of term should be returned at the start of the following term, not four weeks into it). Where necessary the nature of the feedback being provided should be reviewed if it is felt that generating this feedback is the cause of undue delay;
 - ii. that some flexibility be permitted in the implementation of the Senate requirement that every first year student should have an individual meeting with the Director of Undergraduate Studies or his/her nominee before the end of the Autumn term. So long as a meeting with all students to monitor progress, identify additional support needs and support PDP is provided, a variety of mechanisms should be possible. Information regarding the mechanism adopted to meet the Senate requirement should be included within the relevant student handbook;
 - iii. that the Senate requirement that every full-year and Autumn term module should include an early assessment opportunity to provide feedback before the end of the Autumn term should be amended as follows:
 - that every **level 4** full-year and Autumn term module should include an early assessment opportunity to provide feedback before the end of the Autumn term on individual student performance to allow any additional support to be targeted at an early stage.
 - that information should be included within the relevant student handbook on how this Senate requirement is met.’

5. External Examiners and Involvement in Level 4 (S.M.126/08)

‘Resolved That with effect from 2008-09, External Examiners need not be routinely engaged in level 4, unless required to by professional body expectations. Instead, Externals should be offered the opportunity to request to view level 4 assessment instruments and sample work if they have concerns. Routinely, however, departments are not required to send examination papers to Externals.’

6. Academic Offences (S.MM.244-245/08)

Minor revisions to the Academic Offences Procedure be approved for implementation for 2008-09.

See www.essex.ac.uk/academic/docs/regs/offpro.shtm

SECTION B – FOR INFORMATION

1. Proposal to retain Ordinary Degrees (S.M.246/08)

‘Resolved that the awards available within the University’s framework of awards should include the Ordinary degree, defined as 300 credits of which at least 60 must be at level 6 and that the rules of assessment should be amended accordingly, as indicated in Annex 3 to the report of the Undergraduate School Board (04.06.08).’

See [Annex 3 attached](#).

2. Changes to Appeals Procedure (S.M.248/08)

‘Resolved that a single appeals procedure for all taught students be adopted from 2008-09’

See www.essex.ac.uk/academic/docs/regs/progress.shtm

3. Academic Offences in relation to Fitness to Practise/Professional Suitability (S.M.245/08)

‘Resolved that the following addition be made to Section A of the Academic Offences Procedures:
A11

For students subject to the *Breach of Professional Misconduct and Termination of Training Procedure*, an academic offence that affects professional suitability may also be referred to other relevant University authorities to be handled in accordance with the appropriate procedures.’

4. Higher Degree Regulations (S.M.265/08)

‘Resolved that the revisions to the Higher Degree Regulations, as set out in appendix 1 to the Graduate School Board report (11.06.08), be approved with effect from October 2008.

See www.essex.ac.uk/academic/docs/regs/highercont.shtm

5. Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees (S.M.266/08)

‘Resolved that the revisions to the Code of Practice on Research Degree Programmes, as set out in paper GS/08/24, be approved with effect from October 2008.’

See www.essex.ac.uk/academic/docs/regs/prdcode.shtm

6. Appeals Procedure – Research Students (S.M.267/08)

‘Resolved that the revisions to the Appeals Procedures for research students, covering progression and appeals against an examination decision, as set out in paper GS/08/25, be approved with effect from October 2008.’

See www.essex.ac.uk/academic/docs/regs/researchchap.shtm

7. Employability Skills (extract of notes of meeting of Senate members)

‘Noted The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) reported on recent developments to the proposed introduction of the Undergraduate Skills Programme, which focused on employability skills development. Following consultation with Heads of Department options for embedding skills development within the curriculum and for making it compulsory were now being considered. A revised consultation paper would be issued to Heads of Department in the near future and a survey of departmental preferences as well as existing skills development provision would take place. Further consideration needed to be given to the development of basic skills assessment and training, to cover literacy, numeracy and ICT skills.

The Learning and Teaching Strategy Group would have oversight of the skills development agenda. Detailed proposals for a skills development framework would be submitted to the Undergraduate School Board during 2008/09, with a view to implementing agreed policy in 2009/10.’

Joanne Tallentire
Deputy Academic Registrar
September 2008

CIRCULATION

FOR ACTION:

Heads of Department
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
Academic Section Administrators

Criteria for the nomination of External Examiners

(approved by Senate June 2006)

The provisions below may be varied, at the discretion of the relevant Dean, to deal with cases (especially in small fields of study) where there is particular difficulty in identifying suitable individuals willing to serve as External Examiners.

It is the responsibility of the nominating department or partner institution to check that a proposed External Examiner meets all the criteria for selection listed below. Where the criteria are not fully met, a written case for an exception must be submitted with the nomination form for consideration by the relevant Dean.

- a. External Examiners should normally be senior academics,
- b. No previous student or previous member of the academic staff of the University or its partner institutions may be appointed as an External Examiner unless at least five years have elapsed between ~~leaving the staff~~ **leaving or ceasing to be a student the University or partner institution** and the first day of the academic year in which he or she is to act as External Examiner.
- c. Previous External examiners for taught schemes may not be re-appointed with the University unless three years have elapsed since their last appointment.
- d. A Department or partner institution nominating an External Examiner for appointment, and an External Examiner accepting appointment, shall confirm formally that there is no conflict of interest, arising from personal or ~~family~~ **professional** relationships, ~~or from other direct ties to~~ **with** members of staff or students.
- e. A Department or partner institution may not nominate a taught scheme External Examiner from another institution where a member of staff of that Department or partner institution is currently serving in a similar capacity within the same subject area.
- f. A Department may not nominate an External Examiner for appointment if approval of the nomination would lead to the Departments having either two Undergraduate External Examiners, or two Taught Postgraduate External Examiners, from the same institution. (Where a partner institution of the University, or an institution from which an External Examiner is to be nominated, does not have a departmental management structure, each subject area in which teaching is organised will be considered as a department for the purpose of this criterion.)
- g. A Department may not nominate a new External Examiner to succeed another from the same institution. (Where a partner institution of the University, or an institution from which an External Examiner is to be nominated, does not have a departmental management structure, each subject area in which teaching is organised will be considered as a department for the purpose of this criterion.)
- h. External Examiners should normally reside in the UK. Approval to appoint an Examiner from outside the UK will be granted only exceptionally.
- i. Undergraduate External Examiners are asked to confirm that they hold no more than one other appointment as External Examiner, and that they undertake to maintain this position for the period of their appointment to the University of Essex. (External Examining of individual candidates for research degrees is not counted for the purposes of this requirement.)
- j. An existing external examiner can hold a role in more than one department at the University (for example where there is overlap in discipline ~~i.e. In search, LP or partner institutions~~) however the external can only serve the maximum four year term from the start of their first appointment, which for the purposes of consistency in the role might make this an unsuitable option if the external is already in year three or above for the other department.

Distance Learning Policy

Introduction.

While the University perceives itself as offering predominantly campus based learning experience for its students, there are a number of courses and modules offered by distance learning in order to meet specific student needs, for example:

- Work based or vocationally based courses or modules, where there is a necessity for a significant portion of the student's learning to take place and be supported away from campus and in the learner's work environment.
- Part-time courses or modules, where there is a need for flexible delivery to suit the learner's needs because of, for example, distance, accessibility problems, work or home commitments.
- DL courses or modules validated but not delivered by the University (e.g. Kaplan).

Definition¹

DL takes place when the teacher and learner are in physically separate locations. Access to the teacher and other learners is usually enabled through the use of technology (e.g the web, CDs, videoconferencing) and so distance learning is often a form of e-learning. The interaction between the learner and teacher may be synchronous (in real time e.g. videoconferencing) or asynchronous (with a time delay e.g. email) or both. Distance learning may also be paper-based, in which case the interaction will be asynchronous.

A hybrid degree course offers students a combination of both DL and campus-based learning (e.g. two years by distance, one year on campus).

Blended learning (BL) combines aspects of online and traditional educational practices for campus-based students. Examples would be the provision of educational material on-line for use off-campus, or the use of technology in the classroom.

E-learning is learning supported or enhanced through the application of Information and Communications Technology (ICT). It most commonly takes the form of web-based learning: a generic term for teaching, training or learning delivered over the Internet or an intranet using a Web browser. Web-based learning includes static methods -- such as streaming audio and video, hyperlinked Web pages, live Web broadcasts, and portals of information -- and interactive methods -- such as bulletin boards, chat rooms, instant messaging, videoconferencing and discussion threads.

Policy

A DL course is expected to be of the same high quality as any other course of the University and must demonstrate that it will meet student needs effectively as part of the approval process.

DL proposals are approved in the same way as any other course or module. The approval process for DL makes reference to the QAA Code of Practice (section 2) and is designed to safeguard the student experience.

New courses which are delivered all or part by distance learning require a validation event as which key questions will include the management of the learning experience, scrutiny of the learning platform, staff skills and training, learner support, contingency plans should the technology fail.

¹ Chris Fowler, Director, Chimera

New modules are approved via the standard procedure for new module approval. However, DL module approval includes an extra set of questions. Departments are also required to indicate the number of other DL modules they have and whether a student could study a significant part of their course at a distance. The Dean may request an early Periodic Review if they are concerned that the volume of new modules delivered by DL is creating courses that are hybrids or entirely DL.

Rachel Lucas
Assistant Registrar (Quality)
June 2008

2. **Framework for University of Essex Undergraduate Awards**

- 2.1) Each undergraduate Stage (equivalent to a full-time year) of study normally consists of 120 credits made up of 15 and/or 30 credit courses/modules.
- 2.2) Each undergraduate Stage is normally divided into four components of 30 credits each, eight components of 15 credits each, or any combination of these to a total of 120 credits. A 30 credit component may be filled with one 30 credit course or two 15 credit courses.
- 2.3) Credit is awarded in recognition of achieved learning at the level of the component. A pass mark of 40% is required to achieve credit (unless otherwise specified in the award's programme specification). A component is allocated credit on the basis of the component mark rounded to the nearest whole number, with marks of .5 being rounded up (eg 39.5% = the award of credit).

TABLE 1 UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX AWARDS FRAMEWORK

QUALIFICATION	LEVEL	MINIMUM OVERALL CREDITS TO BE STUDIED	RANGE OF CREDITS REQUIRED
Five-Year Honours Degree	6	600 credits	Follows Four-year Model One pattern (see table in 4.3.2 on Four-Year-Honours schemes)
Four-Year Honours Degree	6	480 credits	(see table in 4.3.2 on Four-Year-Honours schemes)
Three-Year Honours Degree (Final year is Stage Three)	6	360 credits	Credits from Stage One and Two plus a minimum of 90 credits at level 6. A maximum of 120 credits at level 4 are included
Three-Year Ordinary Degree (Final year is Stage Three)	6	300 credits	Credits from a Stage One and Two award plus a minimum of 60 credits at level 6 A maximum of 120 credits at level 4 is included
Foundation Degree (Final year is Stage Two)	5	240 credits	Credits from Stage One plus a minimum of 105 credits at level 5 or above (may include a maximum of 30 credits at level 6)
Diploma of Higher Education (Dip HE - Stage Two)	5	240 credits	Credits from Stage One plus a minimum of 105 credits at level 5 or above (may include a maximum of 30 credits at level 6)
Certificate of Higher Education (Cert HE - Stage One)	4	120 credits	120 credits at level 4
Certificate of Continuing Education (Cert CE - Stage One)	4	60 credits	60 credits at level 4

- 2.4) Each course/module has a final **course mark** derived from coursework and/or exam marks, rounded to one decimal place.

- 2.5) Each component has a final **component mark** derived from the mark for each course within the component, weighted in accordance with the credit value of each course/module where there are two courses/modules in the component, and rounded to one decimal place.
- 2.6) In second and subsequent Stages of study, each component is allocated a class on the basis of the component mark rounded to the nearest whole number, with marks of .5 being rounded up (e.g. 59.5 = Class 2.1).
- 2.7) A stage mark is derived from the component marks for the purposes of determining progression and degree classification, weighted in line with the credit value of each component and rounded to one decimal place.
- 2.8) **For an Honours degree:**
- a three-year Honours degree consists of 360 credits: at least 330 credits must be passed.
- Preliminary Stage (where applicable) – 120 credits must be passed at level 3. No level 3 credits may be taken beyond this stage.
- Stage One – 120 credits must be passed at level 4. No level 4 credits may be taken beyond this stage.
- Stage Two – Students must attempt 120 credits. Of these at least 90 credits must be passed in order to progress. Stage Two must include at least 90 credits at level 5 and a maximum of 30 credits at level 6.
- Stage Three/Final Stage – Students must attempt 120 credits. If 120 credits have been passed in Stage Two, then a minimum of 90 credits must be passed at Stage Three. If only 90 credits have been passed in Stage Two, then 120 credits must be passed in Stage Three. Stage Three must include at least 90 credits at level 6 and a maximum of 30 credits at level 5.
- A four-year Honours degree consists of 480 credits of which 450 must be passed. In general the Stage requirements outlined for a three-year Honours degree apply. There are different models of four-year schemes, as outlined in Table 2 in 4.3.2, and each has different requirements.
- 2.9) Students not eligible for an Honours Degree may be eligible for other awards in accordance with the requirements of the University's Awards Framework (see Progression and Eligibility sections of the relevant award).
- 2.10) **For an Ordinary degree**
- An Ordinary degree consists of a minimum of 300 credits, all of which must be passed.
- Stage One – 120 credits must be passed at level 4. No level 4 credits may be taken beyond this stage.
- Stage Two – Students must attempt 120 credits. Of these at least 90 credits must be passed in order to progress. Stage Two must include at least 90 credits at level 5 and a maximum of 30 credits at level 6.
- Stage Three/Final Stage – Students must pass a minimum of 60 credits at level 6.
- 2.11) **For a Foundation degree:**
- a Foundation Degree consists of 240 credits: at least 225 credits must be passed.
- Stage One - 120 credits must be passed at level 4
- Stage Two - Students must attempt 120 credits of which at least 105 credits must be passed. Stage Two must include at least 90 credits at level 5 or above and a maximum of 30 credits at level 6.

2.12) **For a Diploma of Higher Education:**

a Diploma of Higher Education consists of 240 credits: at least 225 credits must be passed.

Stage One - 120 credits must be passed at level 4

Stage Two - Students must attempt 120 credits of which a minimum of 105 credits must be passed. 90 credits must be passed. Stage Two must include at least 90 credits at level 5 or above and a maximum of 30 credits at level 6.

2.13) **For a Certificate of Higher Education:**

for the award of a **Certificate of Higher Education** students must attempt 120 credits at level 4, all of which must be passed.

2.14) **For a Certificate of Continuing Education:**

for the award of a **Certificate of Continuing Education** students must attempt 60 credits at level 4, all of which must be passed.

Proposed Additional Rule of Assessment for Ordinary degrees PROGRESSION

The rules of progression to the final year of an Ordinary degree are the same as those for a three year honours degree.(See 3.1)

ELIGIBILITY FOR AN AWARD (Final Stage)

For the award of an Ordinary degree, a total of 300 credits must be passed, with a minimum of 60 at level 6.

To be eligible for an Ordinary degree, students must:

- a) pass a minimum of 60 credits at level 6
- where only 90 credits have been passed in Stage Two, an additional 30 credits at level 5 must be passed in the Final Stage
and
- b) meet any additional scheme-specific requirements outlined in the variations to the Rules of Assessment, including professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements.

If a student does not meet the requirements for an Ordinary degree:

- a) where the student has failed **up to 15 credits at level 6**, he/she may resit the necessary examinations and/or resubmit coursework. Marks will be capped at 40%. Where a student is already repeating the Stage he/she must withdraw from the University (students may not resit at the end of a repeat Stage).
- b) where the student has failed **more than 30 credits at level 6** and has a year mark greater than 20%, he/she may repeat the Stage of study on a full-time basis for uncapped marks (no student may repeat more than one Stage of study), **or** resit the necessary examinations the following year without attendance with the marks capped at 40%.
- c) where the **Stage mark for the 60 level 6 credits is below 20%**, or where a student was absent from all examinations with no substantiated extenuating circumstances, he/she must withdraw from the University.

When the Board meets after re-sits/resubmissions are completed, the Board may consider the following options (Boards may offer no more than three attempts at the assessment for the Stage, and no more than one opportunity to take exams without attendance):

- a) to repeat the Stage of study full-time for uncapped course marks (no student may repeat more than one Stage of study)
or
- b) where the student has failed **up to 15 credits at level 6**, to repeat the Stage of study part-time, with marks capped at 40% (no student may repeat more than one Stage of study).[NB This option is not available where students have failed credits during a period abroad]
or
- c) to resit examinations the following year without attendance where the mark recorded will be capped at 40%. This option cannot be offered where a student has already resat

the exams without attendance. [N.B. where failure has occurred on a period abroad, resits may not be available.]

or

- d) where the **Stage mark is below 20%**, or where a student was absent from all examinations with no substantiated extenuating circumstances, to withdraw from the University.

AWARDS CLASSIFICATION FOR ORDINARY DEGREES

Ordinary degrees are unclassified.