



Senate

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| Paper Title | Assessment Governance Update (December 2014) |
| Outcome requested | Senate is asked to note a number of issues related to assessment that will be consulted upon during semester two. |
| Points for Senate members to note and further information | <p>A consultation is scheduled to run early in semester two, with its outcomes presented to the March 2015 meeting of Senate.</p> <p>Items for review will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• harmonisation of late work penalties;• harmonisation of over-the-word-limit penalties;• mock assessments;• examination board quorum. <p>Items for information will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reminders on the new award rules for 2015/16;• notes on the new postgraduate classification schemes;• a new policy on scaling and standard-setting. |
| Questions for Senate to consider | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are members satisfied for the consultation to go ahead?• Do members have any specific comments on the issues under consideration? |
| Regulatory/statutory reference points | The policies under review are – or would be – included in the Academic Regulations and the Assessment Handbook. Following the consultation period, proposals will be put to Senate to include the policies in those documents. |
| Strategy and risk | N/A |
| Reporting/consideration route for the paper | Senate to note. |
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Assessment Governance Update (December 2014)

Background

This paper provides an update on assessment governance projects that are taking place during 2014/15. In June 2014, Senate approved the continuation of the Assessment Governance Group's work to coordinate the review of assessment processes. The Group has identified a number of issues for consideration, and recommends that a short consultation exercise should take place in early 2014, with the goal of presenting proposals to Senate in March 2015. Finalised policies would then be included in the Academic Regulations and Assessment Handbook, which would be considered at the June 2015 meeting. The consultation will include both significant policy issues on which detailed responses will be requested and a number of matters for information, on which respondents will be invited to comment where they have specific points to make.

Matters for consultation

Mock assessments

The Assessment Governance Review 2014/15 proposed the introduction of January examinations. This recommendation was not accepted, but Senate agreed that a new consultation exercise would be conducted to establish other means by which students could experience different forms of assessment throughout the year, better preparing them for end of year examinations.

The consultation will propose that all semester one and full year modules (in all developmental years) should include some form of formative assessment, of the same type as that used in the final summative assessment. Students would gain experience in the assessment type, become familiar with the marking scheme, and gain useful feedback. These are all points that are annually flagged as requiring address in the National Student Survey. Conducting an assessment at this stage would also force students to engage properly with the module material at an earlier stage. Such assessments could be group-marked by students, in sessions led by module organisers. This would allow students to engage directly with the marking scheme, and to become familiar with the expectations for each grade at the relevant academic level.

Harmonisation of late work penalties

QMUL does not have a common policy on penalties for assessments submitted late; there is only a requirement that, where such a penalty is used, it must be published to students in advance. The lack of parity causes particular problems – and confusion – for joint honours students, but the lack of consistency is a concern for all students. It is proposed that a uniform policy should be introduced for all schools and institutes from 2015/16. A working group in Humanities and Social Sciences has conducted work on this issue, and it is intended that the consultation should extend that work across all faculties.

Harmonisation of penalties for students exceeding the specified word limit

This issue is similar to that of late work penalties, and has likewise been explored by an H&SS working group. Again, it would be desirable to apply a common penalty. The existing flexibility to not apply penalties at all would be retained, as writing to the specified length is not a significant learning outcome in some disciplines and specific assessments. Where penalties are applied, however, a common approach is desirable.

Examination board quorum

Following the outcomes of the Assessment Governance Review 2014/15, it will in future be necessary for many SEBs to hold additional meetings, particularly in the late summer period. In light of those changes, it is proposed that the requirements for quorum should be revisited to ensure that they remain proportionate for the business under consideration. Currently, the minimum requirement is for 50 per cent of the total membership (including the Chair/Deputy and at least one external examiner) to attend. It is proposed that this should be amended to 50 per cent of the total membership *or* five members (whichever is fewer), in both cases still including the Chair/Deputy and at least one external. This is intended to ensure that there are always sufficient members present to take informed and balanced decisions while avoiding unnecessary bureaucracy. It should be stressed that this would remain a *minimum* requirement.

Matters for information

Reminders on the new award rules for 2014/15

Schools and institutes will be reminded of the changes introduced through the Assessment Governance Review 2013/14, which included major changes to award regulations, particularly at undergraduate level. Schools and institutes should be preparing for the new rules through review of their programme specifications and module diets, and especially through consideration of the new requirement for undergraduate students to take at least 90 credits per developmental year at the directly corresponding academic level. A reminder to update student literature to take account of the changes will also be included.

Postgraduate classification schemes

In 2012/13, QMUL approved a new set of postgraduate classification schemes, which were used for the first time at the October 2014 Degree Examination Boards. There were two motivations for the change. Previously, many programmes had used individual sets of special regulations, meaning that there was no standard for a QMUL taught postgraduate award and that performance could not be meaningfully compared across disciplines (or even within disciplines, in some cases). Secondly, it had been noted that QMUL was out of line with the sector in requiring a mark of 65.0 or higher for a Merit. The new scheme classifies as follows:

| Classification | College Mark | Dissertation/Project |
|----------------|--------------|----------------------|
| Distinction | 70.0+ | 65.0+ |
| Merit | 60.0+ | 60.0+ |
| Pass | 50.0+ | N/A |

The vast majority of examination boards were satisfied with the changes, and a number commented that they actively welcomed the new policy. In a small number of cases, SEBs expressed some discontent. One SEB requested that the minimum dissertation/project mark for distinction should be set at 70.0+ rather than 65.0+. The programme in question had previously used special regulations to set that higher threshold. In the interest of consistency, it is proposed that exceptions to the standard rules should not be permitted.

A second SEB expressed concern over the requirement for students to achieve a dissertation mark of 60.0+ in addition to the College Mark of 60.0+ for Merit, noting that a significant number of students with College Marks above 60.0+ had received pass classifications. A very small number across QMUL had College Marks above 65.0 and dissertations/projects below 60.0; those students would, under the old regulations, have achieved Merit classifications. However, the vast majority of these students had College Marks between 60.0 and 64.9, and therefore did not meet the requirements under either the old or the new systems. Senate took a deliberate decision in adding the

dissertation/project threshold in 2012/13, as it deemed this module to be a key part of the award. The change to regulations has seen a significant increase in the proportion of Merits awarded, and it is not proposed that the regulations should be revisited to further increase that number.

The question of discretion and the dissertation/project mark does require some consideration. In cases where the College Mark was above 60.0/70.0 but the dissertation/project was fractionally below 60.0/65.0, a number of SEBs queried whether or not discretion could be applied to award the higher classification. From 2014/15, the new borderline policy common to all SEBs (approved in June 2014) will replace the local discretion policies, and it is recommended that discretion should not be applied on the dissertation/project element, and that the minimum standard should not be lowered further.

Scaling and standard-setting policy

At the Undergraduate Sciences Degree Examination Board in July 2014, it was noted that two schools had used mark scaling to a greater extent and in a different manner to standard usage. The matter was discussed at the Board, and following discussions between the affected schools and the Vice-Principal (SETL) it was agreed that work would be undertaken to clarify and codify acceptable practices in scaling and standard setting. This related to scaling that mapped the difficulty of an assessment against the standard QMUL marking schemes, rather than scaling as a possible outcome of the double marking and moderation process (no changes were deemed necessary to that latter policy). These processes are distinct from moderation in that scaling and standard setting calibrate the difficulty level and other settings against the assessment criteria, and are not intended to address differences between markers or issues related to the quality of marking.

A meeting with representation from all faculties was held to develop ideas for a scaling policy. A draft policy has been written, and will be included with the consultation document and presented to Senate for approval in March. The essence of the policy is that, where an SEB wishes to use scaling or standard setting, it must have a formal policy for doing so that includes the justification for scaling and the permitted measures. This would prevent the use of scaling as a reactive measure. Policies would be subject to approval by Degree Examination Boards, but varying approaches between SEBs would be permitted, to take account of subject benchmarks and disciplinary differences.
