



Senate

<b>Paper Title</b>	<b>Suspension of Regulations: December 2014 to February 2015 Summary Report</b>
<b>Outcome requested</b>	Senate is asked to <b>note</b> the report and consider approaches for the reduction of situations resulting in suspensions.  Senate is asked to <b>approve</b> a suspension in relation to POLM059 Approaches to Political Economy
<b>Points for Senate members to note and further information</b>	A detailed summary of suspensions of regulations requested during the period December 2014 to February 2015, and the outcomes.  This report also contains a detailed report on a suspension request for POLM059, for which the approved assessment scheme was not used in 2014/15.
<b>Questions for Senate to consider</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Are members concerned by the number of suspensions?</li><li>• How can the number of suspensions be reduced?</li><li>• Do members feel that the suspension decisions are appropriate?</li></ul>
<b>Regulatory/statutory reference points</b>	The paper concerns exceptions granted to the normal application of the <i>Academic Regulations</i> , the main regulatory document for the management of quality and standards in relation to our academic provision.
<b>Strategy and risk</b>	Security of academic standards and quality relies upon the approved frameworks being applied consistently. There should be no exceptions. This paper details action taken to address those exceptions that did arise.
<b>Reporting/consideration route for the paper</b>	N/A
<b>Author</b>	Kate Ruffell, Assessment Governance Administrator Simon Hayter, Assistant Registrar (Assessment Governance)
<b>Sponsor</b>	Professor Susan Dilly, Vice-Principal (Student Experience, Teaching & Learning)

## Suspension of Regulations December 2014 – February 2015 Summary Report

### Background

A report on suspensions of regulations is submitted to each meeting of Senate. Examination boards may request a suspension where a situation arises in which the normal application of the Academic Regulations would either be manifestly unfair to one or more students, or where a situation has arisen which was not foreseen by the regulations (that is, where a change to the regulations is needed, but action is required on behalf of the current cohort). These cases should be extremely rare, and the situations leading to them are normally avoidable.

To obtain a suspension requires support from the appropriate Subject and Degree Examination Boards and the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning) for regulatory issues associated with assessment, or from the Head of School/Institute/Directorate or equivalent and the Vice-Principal (Teaching & Learning) for other issues (such as admissions regulations). All requests are passed through ARCS, and screened.

This report covers the period December 2014 to February 2015. Tables showing a breakdown of requests by faculty and school/institute are provided, and a précis of each suspension and its cause is given in the appendix.

### Summary data: December 2014 - February 2015

There were nine requests for suspension in this quarter. In the equivalent quarter in 2013/14 there were 12, and in 2012/13 there were six. It should be noted that three of the suspensions requested changes to assessment patterns, as incorrect schemes had been delivered to students. This is a recurring problem each year.

School or Institute	Upheld	Rejected	Pending	Total
Mathematical Sciences	2	-	-	2
Electronic Engineering and Computer Science	1	-	-	1
Economics and Finance	2	-	-	2
Languages, Linguistics and Film	1	-	-	1
Institute of Health Sciences Education	1	-	-	1
Politics and International Relations	1	-	1	2

Faculty	Upheld	Rejected	Pending	Total
Humanities and Social Sciences	2	1	2	5
Science and Engineering	3	-	-	3
Medicine and Dentistry	1	-	-	1
Other	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>9</b>

## Notable cases

### Assessment schemes

Four requests were made to alter assessment schemes for individual modules, either because module organisers had given incorrect information to students, or because module organisers had intentionally made changes to the scheme without approval. This is a perennial issue, and is wholly avoidable.

Three of the suspensions, where incorrect information had been published to students, were approved. The fourth, where a deliberate change had been made without going through the module amendment process, was deemed more serious, and the Vice-Principal requested a formal report from the School concerned before taking a decision. A summary of the case and the report from the School are given below. Senate is asked to consider the case, to take a decision on whether or not to approve the suspension, and to consider any further action that may be necessary (either for this case, or for these types of cases more generally).

### ***POLM059 Approaches to Political Economy***

The approved assessment for the SPIR module POLM059 is as follows:

1. Presentation, including 1,500 word summary for formal submission (25%).
2. 3,500 research essay (75%).

That scheme had been approved in the spring of 2014, to come into effect for the first time in 2014/15. However, the previous scheme (below) was delivered by the module organiser. This was a conscious decision rather than, as is more common, an oversight.

1. 2,500 word critical review (40%).
2. 3,500 word research essay (60%).

In January 2015, after the module had been delivered and assessed, a suspension request was made to ratify the change. This reported that the rationale had been, *“larger number of students on the module (22) than was originally anticipated. Given the timetabling constraints of the module, it therefore made assessment via student presentation difficult and would undermine the quality of contact time.”*

The case was taken particularly seriously as there had been an active decision to depart from the (very recently approved) assessment pattern. It was noted that such cases could be seen as a risk to standards, as they might indicate to an external reviewer that QMUL was not in control of its assessment and quality assurance procedures. The Vice-Principal requested a formal report for consideration by Senate, addressing the points below:

1. Why the proper process (not making changes to assessments after the deadline in the previous academic year) had not been followed.
2. How the School's quality assurance procedures did not prevent this from occurring.
3. Why, if it was impracticable to deliver a presentation to a group of 22 students, that had originally been approved as the means of assessment, and/or why a limit had not been placed upon the number of students permitted to register for the module.
4. Why the issue had not been raised immediately with ARCS in October, on discovery of the issue, rather than after the module had ended.
5. Actions that would be taken to prevent recurrence of similar issues in the future.

The Head of School led a review of the case, and provided the following report for Senate:

[report begins]

We are extremely sorry for these occurrences related to POLM059 *Approaches to Political Economy* and POLM065 *Theories in British Politics*. Although the reason for the changes in assessment were made on the grounds of what would be pedagogically best for students, we do entirely accept that processes were not followed and that quality assurance procedures did not pick up the problem nearly early enough. While it is no excuse, we would like to point out some difficult circumstances that have tested our procedures in the run up to the start of this academic year especially significant changes to the structure of our administration linked to an historic capacity problem in the unit. This, combined with the starting of a number of new postgraduate programmes this year, certainly strained our capacity to ensure smooth procedures. Now that we are on a much more settled footing with regards to both of these challenges, and given our answer to point 5 below, we are confident that this will not happen again.

With regards to the questions asked of us:

- 1) For POLM059 we were not expecting such a rise in student numbers for our International Business and Politics masters. The convener for the compulsory course found out late in the day about this increase (as is generally the case with the admissions cycle for masters) and acted to address the pedagogical issue, as he saw it, in good faith. This was, however, already far past the deadline for making changes.
- 2) There was no final administrative check in place to ensure that the stated assessments uploaded onto QMPLUS matched those on SITS.
- 3) The convener was most concerned with upholding the pedagogical standards that the module enjoyed the year before. After conversation with colleagues who are more experienced in teaching bigger postgraduate classes, he now agrees that there was no serious pedagogical issue, although he genuinely believed so at the time. We do confirm that this is the case and that we have a scalable resource plan in place to ensure quality and quantity of teaching for this and all our postgraduate modules.
- 4) The convener was not aware that such changes had to be registered as soon as possible and admin was not aware that the change had been made.
- 5) Now that we have a stable and well equipped administrative unit we shall, in time for next academic year, mirror all the rigorous quality control functions that we currently deploy at undergraduate level at masters level. Additionally we shall:
  - a. Ensure that the postgraduate administrator will provide a final check on the match between assessments stated on QMPLUS and SITS in all our modules.
  - b. Communicate this case to all academic staff to ensure they understand the gravity of – and reasons for – sticking tightly to process and procedure.
- 6) For POLM065 the above points are equally applicable. In addition module is part of a new Programme, MA in British Politics. The changes have been discussed with the students who have been aware throughout of what is expected of them given this is contained in the course guide for the module. We have discussed procedures to ensure any amendments are adhered to and that handbooks/QMPlus should display the correct information.

The School has also requested a suspension in module regulations for POL240 *International Relations: Theories and Contemporary Issues*.

The School's LTC scrutinises all module amendments in careful detail as both UG and PG level. Module convenors are required to submit amendment forms to LTC for scrutiny in advance of the key dates in the College's approval calendar. All staff are reminded of this at the School Away Day and at the School Board before Christmas and in January. Hence, the process depends on module convenors planning such changes earlier in the academic year. In this instance staff did not notify LTC of the assessment changes.

To ensure such mistakes are not made in the future, SPIR will do the following;

- 1) Continue to notify staff orally in key meetings of the deadlines and processes for any module amendments in both the School Away Day (usually held in September) and in the December and January School Boards.
- 2) Procedure for module amendments and proposal of new modules will be clearly outlined in the new staff handbook that will be revised in Summer 2015.
- 3) The School Office will set all assessment deadlines (in consultation with the module convenors). When doing so, the office will remind module convenors of the assessment breakdown and criteria of the module and reassert that information about assessment needs to be consistent in all student-viewing formats e.g. QM Plus, Module Handbooks.
- 4) LTC has introduced a 'module health check' where the committee reviews two modules each meeting. This reviews the content, assessment, module handbook and QM Plus pages of modules. A key element of which is making sure information is presented to students in a consistent manner that adheres to the School's QM Plus guidelines developed in summer 2014. While the health check cannot address all problems, it is a good opportunity to ensure consistency and accuracy across our modules.

[report ends]

The School's reflection on the issues, and its work in putting in place active measures to prevent future occurrences, was welcomed.

Senate is asked to consider the POLM059 suspension request, and to take a decision on whether or not to grant approval. In common with all suspension requests concerning assessment schemes, failure to agree a suspension would manifestly disadvantage the students, who completed the module and the assessments in good faith, on the assumption that they were approved. It is therefore recommended that Senate should **approve** the request from SPIR to apply an alternative assessment scheme to POLM059 for the 2014/15 year only.

## Appendix – suspensions of regulations December 2014 to February 2015

Ref.	Regulation	Desired outcome	Reason for request	Upheld?	Avoidable?	School
2014-08	Academic 2.82	Allow a return from interruption mid-semester.	School error.	Yes	Yes	IHSE
2014-09	Programme (diet)	Allow student to take a non-DL module as DL.	Student's individual circumstances.	Yes	No	EECS
2014-10	Academic 4.23*	Grant first takes in three passed modules.	Student's individual circumstances.	Yes	No	Maths
2014-11	Academic 2.135	Create a new assessment offence penalty for this student (combining parts of two existing ones).	Student's individual circumstances. A task and finish group has been established to review the existing assessment offence penalties.	Yes	Yes	SEF
2014-12	Module (assessment)	Deliver an alternative assessment scheme to the one approved.	School error.	Yes	Yes	SEF
2014-13	Academic 4.23	Allow first takes in passed modules.	Student's individual circumstances. An amendment to the regulations to prevent the need for future suspensions will be proposed for 2015/16.	Yes	No	Maths
2014-14	Module (assessment)	Deliver an alternative assessment scheme to the one approved.	School error.	Pending (POLM059)	Yes	SPIR
2014-15	Module (assessment)	Deliver an alternative assessment scheme to the one approved.	School error.	Yes	Yes	SLLF
2014-16	Module (assessment)	Deliver an alternative assessment scheme to the one approved.	School error.	Yes	Yes	SPIR