



## Senate

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| <b>Paper title</b>                                 | Assessment Governance Consultation 2014-15  |
| <b>Outcome requested</b>                           | Senate is asked to <b>approve</b> the paper.  |
| <b>Points to note and further information</b>      | The paper makes revised recommendations to Senate on the introduction of new policies on late submission penalties, word count, and preparing students for summative assessments.   |
| <b>Questions to consider</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Is Senate satisfied with the recommendations?</li><li>• Do the recommendations aid in the maintenance of academic standards?</li><li>• Are there any other major assessment issues that should be reviewed in future years?</li></ul>   |
| <b>Regulatory/statutory reference points</b>       | If approved, the policies would form part of the broader suite of assessment policies in the Assessment Handbook (2015/16 onwards).   |
| <b>Strategy and risk</b>                           | Supports the SETLA Strategy (1.1 and 1.2).  |
| <b>Reporting/consideration route for the paper</b> | <p>Original proposals formulated by Assessment Governance Task and Finish Group, consulted upon across QMUL, revised by Education Quality Board, and considered by Senate in March 2015.</p> <p>These revised proposals were developed by the Task and Finish Group following a second round of consultation and EQB consideration.</p> |
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| <b>Sponsor</b>                                     | Professor Susan Dilly<br>Vice-Principal (Student Experience, Teaching & Learning)   |

## Assessment Governance Consultation 2014/15 Final Recommendations

QMUL recently consulted on a number of issues related to assessment governance. The Assessment Governance Task and Finish Group made proposals on three topics following an earlier round of consultation and feedback from Education Quality Board and Senate. The issues under review were:

- late submission penalties;
- word count policies and penalties;
- preparing students for summative assessments.

Fifteen responses were received, from schools, institutes, and the Students' Union. The main section of this paper takes the original proposals, summarises the feedback, and makes revised proposals. Appendix 1 contains the complete feedback for each proposal. Education Quality Board considered and endorsed the revised proposals in May 2015.

### Proposal 1: Late submission penalties

#### **Background**

Differing penalties for late coursework submission (without extenuating circumstances) form a notable area of student dissatisfaction. A clear policy is desirable for parity of treatment, proper understanding of penalties, and consistency of standards. Students on joint honours programmes, where different rules apply to different assignments, are particularly affected.

Feedback from the first round of consultation showed that, while many schools and institutes were willing to adopt a proposed single, harmonised penalty, others were not. The clearest division was between those desiring a penalty of graduated deductions, and those wishing to apply an immediate mark of zero. There was a clear academic rationale in both cases.

Senate, in March 2015, agreed that late submission penalties were a standards issue and that it was inappropriate to have numerous approaches. Senate agreed that there should be a limited number of specified penalties that schools and institutes could apply.

While it was acknowledged that each school/institute was likely to have a different approach to the system of graduated deductions (model two), Senate agreed that there would only be one model, and to minimise the complexity of penalty calculations, it agreed that graduated deductions would cease after five days, after which a mark of zero would be applied.

The previous round of consultation raised the question of whether weekends and bank holidays should count when calculating graduated deductions. Students gained extra time over weekends (a standards issue), but where submission was hard-copy only there was no earlier opportunity to submit. Applying different policies for hard-copy and electronic submission would be confusing, and present additional standards issues. It was proposed that weekends and bank holidays should count as additional late periods when calculating graduated penalties. This will ensure parity of treatment, and is based on the principle that students should submit by the published deadline in any case.

#### **Original proposal**

*Where an assignment is submitted late (and there are no extenuating circumstances), one of the following late work penalties shall be applied. Schools/Institutes must make clear which penalty*

*applies to each assessment, or else a default penalty of 0FL shall be applied immediately upon a deadline being missed.*

- 1. A mark of zero (0FL – zero, fail, late) shall be applied immediately if the submission date and time is missed. This shall be the default penalty.*
- 2. Five per cent of the total marks available (i.e. five marks for an assignment marked out of one hundred) shall be deducted for each 24 period (including weekends and bank holidays) after the submission date and time, following an immediate deduction of five percent at the submission date and time. If the assignment is submitted after five deductions have been made, a mark of zero (0FL – zero, fail, late) shall be applied.*
- 3. Assessments weighted at less than 20 percent of a module's total assessment scheme shall, as standard, be exempt from this policy and no late penalty shall be applied. Penalty one or two may be applied where a school/institute chooses to do so.*

*Where a student fails a module as a consequence of one of these penalties in an assessment, normal resit provision shall apply (where attempts remain).*

### **Summary of feedback**

*Model one (immediate mark of zero)*

Respondents were satisfied with model one (immediate mark of zero) as the default option.

*Model two (graduated deductions)*

Twelve of the fifteen respondents were satisfied with model two (graduated deductions) as the non-default model.

History and the Students' Union expressed a preference for the deductions to cease at the minimum pass mark rather than going to zero. History felt that the proposal was harsh, and would increase numbers of appeals and extenuating circumstances. The School was also concerned about the impact on progression. The Group noted that if the policy was applied consistently and appropriately then there would be no grounds for appeal, and that if the extenuating circumstances policy was likewise applied consistently and appropriately then students should understand the policy and not submit invalid claims (particularly after the first year of operation). In terms of progression, the Group noted that the introduction of late summer resits allowed an opportunity to progress without having to resit out of attendance. The Group further noted that deducting only to the minimum pass mark created a standards issue, as that provision could not be applied to other types of assessment such as examinations.

The School of English & Drama, which assessed students almost entirely by coursework expressed concern that its students would be disproportionately affected by the policy. The Group noted that consistency of approach was a standards issue, both between schools and between assessment types. A student who failed to revise in the available time or who failed to attend an examination had no opportunity to complete the examination later and receive a passing mark. Further, the Group noted that submission deadlines could be adjusted by schools so as not to overburden students with multiple deadlines on a single date. This could include submissions during the period when other schools were running examinations.

The Group invited the Schools of History and English & Drama to discuss the concerns in more detail.

*Model three (exemption for smaller assessments)*

There was near universal agreement that model three was neither necessary nor helpful.

### *Multiple models*

The Students' Union and the School of English and Drama expressed concern that the revised proposal failed to address the aim of introducing a consistent approach to late submission penalties. The Group accepted that the use of multiple models was not ideal, but noted that (with the removal of option three) a reduction to two models, with one as the default, was a great improvement on the current variety of practices. A number of exercises over recent years had failed to achieve any consensus across QMUL when attempting to introduce a single model.

### *Phrasing*

The Schools of Business & Management and Politics & International Relations accepted the proposals, but suggested that the phraseology – particularly in model two – could be made clearer.

## **Recommendation to Senate**

The Group recommends that Senate should **approve** the following policy to come into effect for all programmes from 2015/16:

1. Where an assignment is submitted late (and there are no extenuating circumstances) a mark of zero (OFL – zero, fail, late) shall be applied immediately, unless the School/Institute has made it explicit that the alternative penalty of graduated deductions applies.
2. Where the penalty of graduated deductions applies, five per cent of the total marks available (i.e. five marks for an assignment marked out of one hundred) shall be deducted for each 24 hour period or part thereof after the submission date and time, including weekends and bank holidays. An assignment submitted more than 120 hours late shall be awarded a mark of zero (OFL).
3. Where the penalty of graduated deductions applies, a school/institute must make students aware of the penalty in advance, or else the default penalty (an immediate mark of 0 FL) will apply. This may be published in the programme handbook and/or - where a school/institute does not use the same policy for all assessments - in module handbooks.
4. Where a student fails a module as a consequence of one of these penalties in an assessment, normal resit provision shall apply (where attempts remain).

## Proposal 2: Word count policies and penalties

### **Background**

The original consultation proposed the introduction of a standard penalty where students exceeded specified word counts in their assessments. There is currently great variation in practice.

Around half of respondents agreed with the proposed single penalty, but many others did not. No formal proposal was made to Senate. Senate considered that word count penalties were not a matter of academic standards, and that variation in practice (both between and within schools/institutes) could be justified by variation in learning outcomes. However, Senate agreed that there was a need for improved clarity in communicating penalties to students.

### **Original proposal**

1. *Schools/institutes may choose whether or not to apply penalties where students exceed a specified word count.*
2. *Where a school/institute does apply a penalty, students must be made aware of the penalty in advance. The penalty for exceeding the word count in each element of assessment must be*

*included in the module handbook (and/or, where a school/institute uses the same policy for all assessments, in the programme handbook – this may include instances where the length of a submission is considered under the standard marking conventions rather than as a statutory penalty).*

3. *Module organisers should also, where possible, remind students of the penalty when actually setting the assessment (orally, electronically, and/or in writing).*
4. *The following statement below should be added to submission cover sheets; by submitting, students would confirm their understanding of the policy on the penalty for exceeding the word count: “I understand the policy on penalties for exceeding the word count for this assignment.”*
5. *There is no fixed penalty for submissions that are under the specified word length. In these cases, students will either have displayed skill in covering the material very concisely, or else will have failed to fully address the materials; in either situation the normal marking conventions should take this into account.*

### **Summary of feedback**

All schools and institutes that responded were satisfied with the revised proposal.

#### *Communication of the penalties*

The School of Electronic Engineering and Computer Science suggested that there should be less emphasis on reminding student of penalties for each and every assessment, and that students should take some initiative in this regard (where information on the penalties was readily available). The Group agreed, and amended the recommendation to state that schools/institutes should make their general policies widely known to students through core documents such as programme handbooks, and focus on exceptions through module handbooks and any assessment-specific guidance in use.

#### *Multiple approaches*

The Students' Union expressed dissatisfaction that there was not a recommendation to adopt a single approach applicable to all schools and institutes. This issue was discussed at the March meetings of both Senate and Education Quality Board, where it was agreed that word count policies were not a matter of academic standards and that penalties (if any) should be designed to reflect the learning outcomes of the individual assessment. The Group did not propose any further changes, here.

### **Recommendation to Senate**

The Group recommends that Senate should **approve** the following policy to come into effect for all programmes from 2015/16:

1. Schools/institutes may choose whether or not to apply penalties where students exceed a specified word count. This may include instances where the length of a submission is considered under the standard marking conventions rather than as a statutory penalty
2. Where a school/institute does apply a penalty, students must be made aware of the penalty in advance. The penalty for exceeding the word count must be published to students; this may be in the programme handbook and/or - where a school/institute does not use the same policy for all assessments - in module handbooks.
3. There is no fixed penalty for submissions that are under the specified word length. In these cases, students will have displayed skill in covering the material concisely, or else have failed to fully address the material; in either situation the normal marking conventions should take this into account.

## Preparing students for summative assessments

The original consultation proposed a requirement for module organisers to introduce practice examinations for all students, in all modules at all levels, to prepare them for end of year examinations. There were two aims – to improve familiarity with the format in relation to the content of the module, and to give a first experience of the assessment type for some students. As an example, there are undergraduate programmes where students complete long-essay style examinations for the first time at the end of the third year; it was deemed necessary to provide training in the assessment style.

There was some support for what the original proposal tried to achieve, but there were many concerns over the practicalities of delivering such a high additional assessment load. It was also felt that it was unnecessary to deliver such assessments on a module by module basis where a school used the same assessment methods throughout a programme of study.

Senate agreed with the feedback, and recommended the introduction of a new policy statement in place of the original proposal. This statement would promote the use of practice assessments (for all assessment types, not just examinations) while leaving schools and institutes much greater discretion over where and how to deploy these assessments.

### **Feedback**

All schools and institutes that responded supported the revised proposal. The Students' Union expressed a preference for the previous proposal, and for additional formative assessment. The Group recommended that the revised proposal was approved without amendment, and that schools and institutes considered the Students' Union's comments when applying the policy.

### **Recommendation to Senate (and original proposal)**

The Group recommends that Senate should **approve** the inclusion of the following policy statement in the Assessment Handbook 2015/16:

“Schools and institutes shall ensure that their programmes provide students with practice in the required assessment techniques and familiarity with the marking schemes for major components of assessment.”

## Appendix: Full feedback from the consultation

| Late work penalties |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Geography           | The School of Geography supports this proposal. It would not be our policy to treat assessments below 20% as exempt but we do not object to point 3 if other Schools would like this flexibility.   |
| History             | <p>History is not satisfied to adopt this revised proposal, because the School predicts that these measures will have a marked and negative impact on student progression and retention.</p> <p><b>The first model</b> is too severe.</p> <p><b>The second model</b> is similar to the School's longstanding regulations insofar as History students lose 5 marks each day that a coursework assignment is late. Importantly, however, under the School's regulations the late penalties cease at the pass rate of 40%. Students are therefore able to submit late work and receive a mark of up to 40% until the School's final coursework deadline, which falls each year during the week before exams begin.</p> <p>This extra time allows a significant minority of students to receive a penalised but still passing mark for late coursework. It is especially helpful to first-year students, many of whom learn to manage their time and work to deadlines over the course of the year.</p> <p>Applying a mark of 0 FAIL to late coursework after five days would result in many of these students failing modules and becoming disengaged from their studies. The School predicts that it would also lead to a dramatic increase in applications for extenuating circumstances, as well as appeals from students who think that they have been unfairly treated.</p> <p><b>The third model</b> is likely to confuse students who expect one of the first two models to be the norm. For reasons of consistency and clarity, it would not be useful. More importantly, allowing lightly weighted coursework to be exempt from late penalties would not solve the problems likely to ensue from severely penalizing more significant pieces of coursework.</p> <p>We therefore strongly urge that these proposals are reconsidered, taking into account their impact on student progression and retention. These are areas in which the School is directing concerted effort and new initiatives, but we predict that these efforts will be undermined by the proposed set of regulations.</p> |
| SBM                 | <p>We accept in principle, but we think (2) might need clarification. Our assumption is the following: 5% deduction for the first 24 hours, then 5% for each subsequent period of 24 hours (or part thereof) up to the maximum of 120 hours. An assignment more than 120 hours late will get zero (0FL).</p> <p>We see no reason for the third model.</p>   |
| SED                 | <p>The School cannot accept this recommendation, for the following reasons:</p> <p>First, the proposal fails to achieve the objectives it sets out to achieve. According to the covering paper, Senate agreed that it is 'inappropriate to have significant variations in approach' to late submission penalties. Yet that is precisely the outcome of the recommendation. For assessments weighted at more than 20%, Schools are permitted to choose between two policies which on any reading differ significantly in terms of the severity of the penalty imposed. The recommendation also permits Schools to exempt assessments weighted at 20% or less from any penalty. Most extraordinarily, Schools 'would not be obliged to apply the same one of the three models to every module (or every assessment within a module)'. In theory, a module assessed by three items of coursework (a common pattern in SED) could apply a different late-work model to each item. It would be difficult to imagine a policy -- conceived in the name of uniformity -- that is more likely to create confusion and discontent.</p> <p>Secondly, penalties 1 and 2 are significantly more punitive than those currently imposed by SED. As we pointed out in our response to the first consultation, coursework assessment is the norm in SED. It is in that context that over time the School has developed and fine-tuned its present approach to late submissions. Our policy is rigorous but also fair in acknowledging</p>   |

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|            | <p>that on programmes that are almost entirely made up of coursework students face particular challenges in managing deadlines. Penalties 1 and 2 would impact disproportionately on our students and at the same time undermine our efforts to improve retention.</p> <p>Thirdly, proposal 3 is inconsistent with the spirit of the other proposals, which is to encourage the timely submission of work. It also risks sending out a message that Schools regard assessments with a weighting of 20% or less as unimportant.</p>  |
| SEF        | We agree. The third model is not needed.  |
| SLLF       | Model 2 as the best option for assignments over 20%, Model 3 for assignment worth less than 20%. Model 3 should definitely be used as well for assignments worth less than 20%. Of course, we would assume that the penalties for late submission would not be applied, discretionally, to work which had a genuine and evidenced reason for being late, e.g problems with QM Plus that could be verified.  |
| SPIR       | <p>We prefer our existing system whereby students are penalised by deducting five marks for every 24 hour period or part thereof they submit their assessment late up until 14 days, after which a mark of zero (OFL – zero, fail, late) is applied. This system has worked well for us.</p> <p>We do not think that proposal 3. is needed, and we believe that it may lead to confusion on the part of the students as it introduces variation across assessment for each module, across modules and across Schools.</p> <p>Should proposal 2. be imposed on all Schools, we suggest that the wording is made clearer to make clear that five marks are deducted for every 24 hour period or part thereof up until five days after which a mark of zero (OFL – zero, fail, late) is applied.</p>   |
| BUPT/NCU   | <p>It is not clear whether, if the third model is left out this means Schools can set their own late penalties or if this means no penalties can be set for late submission.</p> <p>If there are no late penalties, how do we get students to submit on time and also what happens once we have given answers to students as feedback who had submitted on time and then someone else replies later? Do we then move from model 2 to model 1?</p>   |
| EECS       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agreed</li> <li>2. Five 24(h) periods, 5% each; agreed</li> <li>3. Not sure about the exemption; it seems unfair that some assessments are and others are not affected by late work penalties; our recommendation is to apply the same standards to all assessments. Reduce complexity.</li> </ol>  |
| SMS        | <p>No new comments, but referred to comments from previous proposal:</p> <p><i>Disagree strongly (with previous proposal), we believe it should be guidelines only. Within the School we have processes that work and are tailored to our subject needs. Do not accept.</i></p> <p><i>If this must be policy, it absolutely needs to be restricted to assessment components worth more than 30% of module mark reflecting the practice with school based discipline panels.</i></p>   |
| Dentistry  | The IoD feels option 3 is not appropriate   |
| MBBS       | MBBS is supportive of penalties 1 and 2, however would not see the merit of the third option being available. The third model is neither desirable nor needed.  |
| SMD PG     | No comments.  |
| SMD UG     | Agreed. We think that the third option is neither necessary nor desirable.  |
| Stu. Union | <p>The revised proposal does not address QMSU's chief concern, which is that whatever penalty is imposed should be consistent across the College. QMSU believes that, of the three options, number 2 is preferable. However, we believe the wording of number 2 should be amended as follows:</p> <p><i>Five per cent of the total marks available (i.e. five marks for an assignment marked out of one hundred) will be immediately deducted a minute after the original submission date and time, and a further five per cent shall be deducted for each 24 hour period after the set deadline (including weekends and bank holidays). If the assignment is submitted 5 calendar days after the set deadline, marks shall be capped at 40 per cent; and after a further 2 days (7 calendar days after the submission date), the assignment is to be awarded with a mark of zero (ONS)</i></p> <p>Number 3 does not appear feasible.</p> |



| <b>Word count policies and penalties</b> |  |
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| Geography                                | The School of Geography supports this proposal.  |
| History                                  | The School of History is satisfied with these proposals as they stand.   |
| SBM                                      | Accept.  |
| SED                                      | SED accepts this recommendation.   |
| SEF                                      | We agree.  |
| SLLF                                     | <p>There should be penalties for exceeding the word limit (by more than 10%) but a sliding penalty, as with late submissions, to take account of slight and severe word overruns. However, we think that, by using the 'Task Fulfilment' criteria, this includes word count, and takes into account both overruns and underruns. We suggest wording on the Assignment Brief as follows: "The limit for this piece of work is XXXX words. If you exceed this limit by more than 10%, marks will be deducted"</p> <p>And in the Handbook, we propose: "Some of your assignments may include a word limit, i.e. the maximum number of words you can use to complete the assignment. If so, this will be clearly stated in the written instructions for the piece of work. If you exceed this limit by more than 10%, marks will be deducted"</p>  |
| SPIR                                     | <p>The current SPIR policy for all assessments is to take the length of the assignment into account in the normal marking process rather than having an automatic mark deduction. We continue to make the policy clear to students and to make them aware that other Schools may have a different policy. This policy falls within what is proposed here, and we are happy to support it.</p> <p>However, in order to avoid confusion on the part of students, Schools wishing to use a standard penalty might consider applying it across all assessments, as otherwise it will be confusing to students for the same reasons that the current differences in policy are confusing to them. We also note that the fact that the proposal allows Schools not to impose the penalty means that there will still be variation of the kind that, allegedly, leads to confusion on the part of students.</p> |
| BUPT/NCU                                 | We are happy with this.  |
| EECS                                     | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Schools have a choice; seems required for this case; good.</li> <li>2. Students must be made aware: could be difficult; students will claim they were not made aware; difficult to implement.</li> <li>3. Another complication for the module organiser; recommendation: when students select a module, it is their responsibility to check the penalty scheme for word count policies and penalties.</li> <li>4. Good; reflects the comment for 3.</li> <li>5. Why would one need to mention this? It over-complicates the policy.</li> </ol> <p>In summary: Implement pt 4 and make sure that students are responsible for collecting the information and for their action. Do not create a situation where module organisers "should have reminded" students.</p>   |
| SMS                                      | No new comments, but referred to comments from previous proposal (where SMS accepted the proposal).  |
| Debtistry                                | IoD is happy with this approach  |
| MBBS                                     | MBBS is fully supportive of the revised proposal.  |
| SMD PG                                   | No comments.   |
| SMD UG                                   | Agreed - all these points are acceptable   |
| Stu. Union                               | <p>The revised proposal does not address QMSU's chief concern, which is that whatever penalty is imposed should be uniform across the College. QMSU believes, therefore, number 1 should be reworded as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Schools imposing a mark deduction should adopt a standard tolerance of 10 per cent over the specified word limit. Beyond that limit, a standard penalty of 5 marks deducted shall apply.</i></li> </ol> <p>QMSU agrees with paragraphs 2-5</p>   |

| <b>Preparing students for summative assessments</b> |   |
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| Geography   | The School of Geography supports this proposal.   |
| History   | The School of History is satisfied with this proposal as it stands.   |
| SBM   | Accept.   |
| SED   | SED accepts this recommendation.  |
| SEF   | We agree.   |
| SLLF  | We agree.   |
| SPIR  | SPIR is happy to support this proposal. Our students already have revision sessions (including those in revision week), which are designed to help with exams. In addition, our first year students have a special meeting with their personal advisor specifically to discuss exams related questions. Finally, we have in place a system whereby students are encouraged to get feedback on their exams from their personal advisor, and module convenors post general exam feedback on QMPlus.   |
| BUPT/<br>NCU  | This is mostly already in practice (e.g. revision lectures are held and sample exam papers and solutions are provided) so this proposal is ok.  |
| EECS  | Agreed. For 1 <sup>st</sup> -years, this is implemented by mid-term tests.<br><br>In more general, regarding revision lectures, we are thinking of distinguishing between recap revision lectures (end of term), and exam preparation lectures (in what is referred to as the "revision" week). Currently, the notion revision lecture can mean recap or exam practice. This has an implication of revision lectures for term-2 modules, addressing an in-balance between term-1 and term-2 modules.  |
| SMS   | No new comments. Referred to previous response, where SMS rejected proposal for mock examinations.  |
| Dentistry   | IOD is in agreement   |
| MBBS  | MBBS is fully supportive of the revised proposal.   |
| SMD PG  | No comments.  |
| SMD UG  | Agreed – we appreciate this revision  |
| Stu. Union  | QMSU recognises the need for schools/institutes to ensure that their programmes provide students with practice in the familiarity of assessment techniques and marking schemes. Hence, QMSU is in favour of more formative assessment and believes mock/formative assessments should be offered as standard across the College, to ensure consistency. QMSU suggests the following text should be substituted for the proposed wording:<br><br><i>To ensure consistency across the College, all departments should offer students the opportunity to undertake specified mock/formative assessments for all semester one/full year modules, to provide experience of assessment techniques and familiarity with marking criteria. Information on such opportunities should be prominently displayed, e.g. within module information rather than just in programme handbooks, so that those students who wish to avail themselves of the opportunity for formative/mock assessments may be made aware of their right to do so.</i> |