



Senate

Paper Title	Suspension of Regulations: March to May 2016 Summary Report, and outcomes of the Suspension of Regulations Working Group
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to note the report.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	<p>A summary of suspensions of regulations requested during the period March to May 2016, and the outcomes.</p> <p>Senate commissioned a working group to consider means to reduce the numbers of suspensions and whether (and what) penalties should be introduced for those suspensions that did occur. The recommendation of that group is included.</p>
Questions for Senate to consider	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are members concerned by the number of suspensions?• Do members feel that the suspension decisions are appropriate?• Do members agree with the recommendation of the working group? Should further actions be taken?
Regulatory/statutory reference points	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.
Strategy and risk	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.
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	Senate only.
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Sponsor	Professor Rebecca Lingwood, Vice-Principal (Student Experience, Teaching and Learning)

Suspension of Regulations March to May 2016 Summary Report

Background

A report on suspensions of regulations is submitted to each meeting of Senate. Suspension may be requested 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 that 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 Vice-Principal (SETL or Research) for assessment issues, or from the Head of School/Institute/Directorate and Vice-Principal for other issues. All requests are passed through ARCS, and screened at that stage.

This report covers the period March to May 2016. Tables showing a breakdown of requests by faculty and school/institute are provided, and a brief summary of each suspension and its cause is given in the appendix.

This paper also details the outcomes of a working group that considered means by which to reduce the occurrence of situations requiring suspension of regulations, and potential consequences for suspension.

Summary data: March to May 2016

There were seven requests for suspension in this period. In the equivalent quarter in 2014/15 there were seven, in 2013/14 there were eight, and in 2012/13 there were five. Numbers have not increased, but they should ideally have fallen.

School or Institute	Upheld	Rejected	Total
Centre for Commercial Law Studies	2	-	2
Biological and Chemical Sciences	1	-	1
History	1	-	1
Blizard Institute	1	-	1
Mathematical Sciences	1	-	1
Engineering and Materials Science	1	-	1

Faculty	Upheld	Rejected	Total
Humanities and Social Sciences	3	-	3
Science and Engineering	3	-	3
Medicine and Dentistry	1	-	1
Other	-	-	-
Total	7	0	7

Commentary

Five of the seven cases were wholly avoidable. Four cases required the suspension of programme or module regulations due to errors on the part of schools/institutes. These included the registration of associate students on unsuitable modules, changes to programme diets due to errors in the original programme specification, and the delivery of an incorrect assessment weighting scheme.

Suspension of Regulations Working Group

Senate commissioned a working group to look at suspension of regulation cases. The Group was chaired by the Vice-Principal (SETL). The Deans for Taught Programmes, one other member of Senate from each faculty, the Deputy Academic Registrar, and the Assistant Academic Registrar (Assessment Governance) were invited to attend.

Senate had been concerned by the continuing need for suspensions in cases where incorrect or unapproved assessment or teaching methods were delivered. In such cases, academic standards were actively undermined. New regulations from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) had yet further increased the need to deliver the approved and advertised content. Some deviations are very minor and others much more serious; in either case, unapproved regulations were in use. The Group was established to consider methods by which to reduce the incidence of these cases, and to consider potential penalties for situations in which suspension proved necessary. At the time of the Group's meeting, 18 of the 23 suspensions in 2015/16 had been made on these grounds.

The Group considered potential penalties, but ultimately considered that standardised penalties would be ineffective. It was felt that financial penalties for schools/institutes would not target the problem, and might have little effect on recurrence. Disciplinary action against the individual(s) responsible for the issue was also considered; it was noted that whilst this might be appropriate for a particular case, this would be the exception rather than the rule.

The Group considered how best to avoid the need for suspension. The Group agreed that the best approach would be increased communications to schools/institutes on their assessment patterns. It was noted, however, that each school/institute already signed off annually on its module provision (including assessment patterns), and that all of the relevant information was freely available at any time by logging into MySIS.

The Group agreed that, as a further effort to communicate the correct information, ARCS would write to school/institute managers at the start of teaching, reminding them of the need to use the approved assessments and asking them to send an email to all teaching staff requesting them to do the same. Links to the correct assessment schemes (via MySIS, or in Excel reports) would be included in the emails. Senate would continue to monitor suspensions through the quarterly reports, which it was hoped would show a decrease in cases in 2016/17.

Appendix – suspensions of regulations March to May 2016

Ref.	Regulation	Desired outcome	Reason for request	Upheld?	Avoidable?	School/ institute
2015-21	Programme: diet	Move two compulsory modules from year one to year two of a part-time programme (during year one).	Error in the institute's original programme proposal.	Yes	Yes	Blizard
2015-22	Academic: 3.55	Suspend the fit to sit regulation for one module, awarding a certified absence and a first sit in place of failed attempt.	Appeal outcome - ECs that could not reasonably have been made known, and which affected the student's ability to judge fitness to sit.	Yes	No	SBCS
2015-23	Programme: diet	Drop two compulsory modules to take electives in their places.	Electives were relevant to the student's interests/future studies, and the school approved the change. Only raised with ARCS after the student had completed the modules and missed the compulsory ones.	Yes	Yes	SEMS
2015-24	Programme: diet, Academic 4.14	Take 135 credits in year two, and take the modules out of the specified order.	Student changed programme, and needed to take an additional compulsory module for the new programme.	Yes	No	SMS
2015-25	Module: assessment, credit load, content, occurrence.	to create semester a variant of a full year module	A one-semester associate student was registered on a year-long module in error. An artificial 15 credit version was 'created' by suspension so as not to disadvantage the student.	Yes	Yes	CCLS
2015-26	Module: assessment, credit load, load, content, occurrence.	to create semester a variant of a full year module	A (second) one-semester associate student was registered on a year-long module in error. An artificial 15 credit version was 'created' by suspension so as not to disadvantage the student.	Yes	Yes	CCLS
2015-27	Module: assessment	Apply alternative weightings	School had amended the weightings for 2015/16, but the module organiser used the old weightings.	Yes	Yes	History