Guide to the Code of Assessment – Introduction

Location of the Code

The Code of Assessment is published as Regulation 16 of the ‘University Fees and General Information’ chapter of the University Calendar. It contains most but not all of the regulations relating to assessment.

If in any case an explanation or illustration in this guide appears to contradict the terms of the Code itself, the Code takes precedence.

Key changes for 2016-17

Changes have been made in the following areas:

1. Guidelines for Boards of Examiners on the exercise of discretion (see section 2.7.7)
   The guidelines have been amended to:
   - Clarify that GPA on its own cannot be used as a criterion to justify promotion (section 2.7.1).
   - Show how GPA may be considered alongside grade profile (section 2.7.3(a))
   - Provide further information on the role of the external examiner in making discretionary decisions (section 2.7.4).

2. Penalties for the late submission of coursework (see section 2.2)
   The Code previously allowed penalties to be applied where work was submitted up to five days late, with any work submitted more than five days late receiving grade H. In order to allow for the rapid return of coursework (e.g. where a series of assessments are set in close succession), a new provision has been introduced allowing grade H to be awarded to work which is submitted after the return of feedback, even where this is less than five days after the submission deadline. This new rule can only be applied to up to 25% of the total assessment for a course.

3. Semester 2 Study Abroad (see section 2.10)
   Advice is now included in the Guide in relation to students who are away from Glasgow for semester 2 but have outstanding assessment from semester 1 courses. For non-Honours courses, the assessment may be taken at the August resit diet. For Honours courses, where no assessment is set for the August diet, students may complete the assessment at the next opportunity (e.g. at the April/May diet in the following year) unless an alternative form of assessment, which can be completed at the end of semester 1, has been arranged.

A reminder of areas where there were changes for 2015-16:

1. Incomplete Assessment and Good Causes s. 16.46 (Guide Chapter 5)
   All good cause claims must now be submitted through MyCampus.

2. Attendance of External Examiners at Exam Board meetings s. 16.64 and 16.66 (a) (Guide Chapter 6)
Many External Examiners are involved in both undergraduate and PGT programmes and there may therefore be a number of meetings of their Boards throughout the session. In practice, it is problematic for External Examiners to attend all of these. Academic Standards Committee has therefore agreed that Externals may be absent from meetings so long as there is engagement with the process by correspondence and this is fully minuted. Section 16.64 of the Code requires attendance of External Examiners at the Board of Examiners meeting at least once per session.

3. Feedback on Summative Examinations (Guide Chapter 1)

Although not incorporated into the Code of Assessment, it should be noted that the University’s Learning & Teaching Committee has developed a policy on feedback provided to students following summative examinations. The provision of individual feedback to all students after exams is not expected to be the norm. However, the policy requires each School and Research Institute to establish a series of minimum standards of feedback to be applied on all courses for which it is responsible.

Other assessment regulations

The ‘University Fees and General Information’ chapter of the Calendar contains further Regulations relevant to assessment which are not part of the Code and are therefore not included in this Guide. These Regulations are:

- Instructions to candidates on their conduct in written examinations (Regulation 17)
- Use of a computer in an examination (Regulation 18)
- Use of dictionaries by students in examinations (Regulation 19)
- Use of electronic calculators by students in examinations (Regulation 20)
- Invigilation (Regulation 21)
- Rules of invigilation (Regulation 22)
- Appointment of external examiners for taught courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level (Regulation 23)
- Examination and other assessment arrangements for disabled students (Regulation 24)
- Code of practice for exceptional international examination arrangements (Regulation 25)

The essence of the Code

Assessment is an integral part of the process by which the University makes awards to students who have completed their programmes. The regulations which comprise the Code of Assessment are intended to deliver transparently fair and consistent outcomes in all student assessment. It is the pursuit of transparency which has imposed most demands on the design of the Code and on examiners.

Consider the case of an able and hard working student who received a mark of 67% for a very good essay. We may take for granted that this mark was fair and reflective of consistent standards. We therefore assume that students who had performed as well in previous years might also have got 67%, and, within this student’s own cohort, those students whose essays were less good were awarded less than 67% and those (very few) who had written better essays achieved marks (only a little) higher than 67%. But this model of fairness and academic rigour has two weaknesses:
• Its range of consistency is very limited – students in other subjects who had demonstrated as thorough a grasp of their course content might have scored 87% or even more.

• It is meaningless beyond the function of ranking students – the essay was a very good one and yet it scored only two thirds of the way up the implied scale of 0 to 100.

The object of the Code of Assessment is to make assessment outcomes as consistent as possible across all taught disciplines within this University, and to provide a clear statement of the learning that each student has demonstrated.

Chapter 1 of this Guide discusses intended learning outcomes (ILOs). ILOs tell students what they are expected to learn, and all universities are now required to publish these. One of the things the Code of Assessment does is make an explicit connection between ILOs and the assessment of each student’s performance. Thus employers (and anyone else) may determine what the grades reported in a student’s transcript actually mean.

Chapter 2 explains how this connection is made by a set of grade descriptors, in which each grade is described in terms of a student’s achievement of ILOs. What the examiner has to do is determine which grade descriptor best matches the student’s performance. The University uses eight grades, A to H, and the bands into which these grades are divided allow the marker 23 discrete scores from A1 to H. The chance awkwardness of this number confirms that a student’s performance is being assessed against grade descriptors, not as a ratio of right answers to questions asked.

University awards are not made on the basis of a single assessment. The Code must, therefore, provide a way of aggregating grades from all summative components. The simplest and most readily transparent method of combining grades is to convert them into numbers, and Chapter 2 explains how this should be done and how the final score should be translated to a course result or a classified degree. The Code acknowledges the danger that these calculations will suggest a precision which may be deceptive. For Honours Degree classification it therefore requires that Examination Boards look afresh at the position of all students for whom the aggregation process delivers anything close to a marginal result.

Other aspects of the Code

As noted, it is an objective of the Code to deliver fair and consistent outcomes in all student assessment. Consistency across the University requires regulation; fairness calls for sensitivity, on the one hand, to the individual student – recognising when his or her circumstances justify special provision – and, on the other, to the integrity of the University’s awards. These issues are never far from the surface in the rules governing reassessment (Chapter 3) and incomplete assessment resulting from good cause (Chapter 5). Course credits represent a transferable currency – this University will recognise credits gained by students in other institutions just as other institutions will recognise the value of credits awarded here – and students must accumulate course credits in order to qualify for a certificate, diploma or degree. Chapter 4 is concerned with setting minimum standards for the award of credits. Chapter 6 is about making the whole thing work, and sets out the responsibilities of Heads of Schools and Research Institutes, assessment officers and examiners, both internal and external.