

**‘Translating’
overseas grades
for home
recognition – a
guide for staff**

Introduction and context

1. Grade conversion of marks awarded overseas during student mobility has caused difficulties for Schools and concern for students. Worries about grade conversion have in the past been identified as one of the biggest barriers to increasing outward mobility in certain subject-areas or Schools. Conversion procedures and grade conversion outcomes must not discourage students from participating. Students should feel secure that there is no latent or unspoken penalty for undertaking 'study exchange'. Students rightly have an expectation that the conversion process for grades gained during a period of UG mobility at a partner university should be transparent, fair and just. This includes grades awarded either as part of a student exchange agreement for a semester or session, or at the conclusion of a shorter period of outward mobility such as an approved summer school.

This document introduces new arrangements across the University for implementation as from Session 2016-2017. These procedures seek to address student concerns, to standardise School practices, and to respond to new ERASMUS + requirements.

2. A further challenge arises. New expectations are contained in ERASMUS+. The ERASMUS Student Charter¹ requires us to have in place procedures to meet new obligations to students as regards grade conversion. The relevant provisions of the Charter are as follows:

After your mobility period

- In accordance with your Learning Agreement, you are entitled to receive **full academic recognition** from your sending institution for activities that you have completed satisfactorily during your mobility period.
- If you are studying abroad, within five weeks of the publication of your results, your receiving institution will send a Transcript of Records to you and to your sending institution, showing your credits and grades achieved. Upon receipt of your Transcript of Records, your sending institution will provide you with complete information on the recognition of your achievements.

The 2015 version of the Student Charter does not, as the previous version did, require that all the information on recognition of study abroad is provided within 5 weeks of receipt of the transcript, but a formal confirmation from a conversion committee of the proposed converted grade should be made available by the end of October in the session following the mobility period.

¹ Available here: http://ec.europa.eu/education/opportunities/higher-education/doc/charter_en.pdf.

Which grades have to be converted

3. Prior to undertaking studies abroad, students must know what courses will be recognised for study abroad purposes. **The overriding principle is that grades awarded at a 'host' institution should be treated as if these were grades awarded at Glasgow.** Thus all assessed coursework taken at a partner institution and which is graded by the host university is subject to grade 'translation' and recognition upon a student's return.² In other words, coursework taken overseas involving the allocation of a specific grade by the host university (rather than merely graded by 'pass/fail') is given 'full academic recognition' (in the words of the ERASMUS Student Charter). Thus a student who undertakes graded coursework outside the scope of his or her programme – for example, introductory but graded language courses – must be able to expect that grade to be 'translated', even if this is only in the calculation of a student's GPA (rather than for Honours classification, for example).
4. As discussed above, assessment arrangements and expectations differ across different partner institutions. Grade conversion must be based upon the actual grade **reported to the University of Glasgow by the host institution.** Thus no account should be taken of any 'resit' arrangements: the grade on the transcript must be treated as the actual grade awarded. **Students must be made aware of the rules governing identification of the coursework taken abroad that is to be taken into account by a Board of Examiners, and the manner in which it is to be recorded in determining the classification of an Honours degree award.**
5. Some students may undertake study abroad in year 2. Where a student goes abroad during year 2, **grades awarded overseas must be taken into account for entry into Honours.** In other words, no difference in treatment between students remaining in Glasgow, and those who study overseas, is appropriate.
6. As far as reporting grades which are to count for honours classification is concerned, differences exist in current practices, but each approach broadly seeks to ensure that overseas grades(after being 'translated') are reported to Boards of Examiners in such a manner that equates to standard credit weightings for Honours programme requirements for students who do not study abroad. This is consistent with conversion processes that are 'transparent, fair and just'. There are two approaches. In most programmes, all level 3 coursework is currently aggregated into one overall (arithmetical) mark. This is reported as the outcome of level 3 coursework, but Boards of Examiners will be given details of the weightings and converted grades awarded overseas to help in any question concerning the 'preponderance' of marks.

² Assuming the coursework has been approved in advance (for example, in the learning agreement). In some Schools, students are encouraged (and even expected) to undertake coursework of their own choice *providing always* that the course is of a requisite standard and that there is no substantial overlap with coursework already undertaken in Glasgow. Elsewhere, students find they are directed to particular courses which appear to replicate those they would have undertaken if they had remained in Glasgow.

Alternatively, in a limited number of Schools (e.g. Law), overseas grades are allocated to blocks reflecting the credit rating of level 3 Honours courses (e.g., by repackaging best grades awarded into 2 x 30 credit courses and listing outcomes as 'Overseas Honours coursework 1 and 2'). Both approaches are permissible. Grade conversion should mirror existing arrangements.³ Boards of Examiners when determining Honours classifications at the end of year 4, however, must be able to apply presumptions and conventions in the normal manner while also exercising any available discretionary authority in the full knowledge that both 'raw' overseas grades and applicable conversion tables may contain an inherent element of inconsistency and unreliability. Whatever the approach to be adopted, **it must always be readily obvious to Boards of Examiners in assessing a student's overall Honours classification that a certain element of the coursework undertaken has involved overseas grades that have been converted into UofG grades.**

Conversion tables

7. **Conversion tables will be published at University level.** The creation of the tables will be undertaken by the Translation of Grades from Study Abroad Sub-Committee (TGSA) of Academic Standards Committee and publication will be the responsibility of MaRIO. These tables will be kept under review at University level in light of experience of partner institutions and analysis of student performance.
8. However, **modification of tables may well be required** where there are clear reasons for this. In determining whether to modify the conversion table, **a number of factors may require be taken into account** where these appear relevant. Many of these factors may only become evident with the benefit of hindsight (i.e. after a student has returned, and only after a number of years of experience in grade conversion). These may include the following:
 - Assessment conventions at the host institution (i.e., grade profiles, etc. indicating the normal distribution of grades awarded at the host institution)
 - Any modification of a table by another UoG cognate School.

Other information may also become available such as

- Published conversion tables of other UK universities
- The normal distribution of grades gained by visiting students
- Particular variations in the normal range of grades awarded (at different levels of study, or on account of differences in delivery of learning and teaching methods).

In time, further refinement may be required on account of factors such as

- The normal distribution of grades gained by Glasgow students in recent sessions

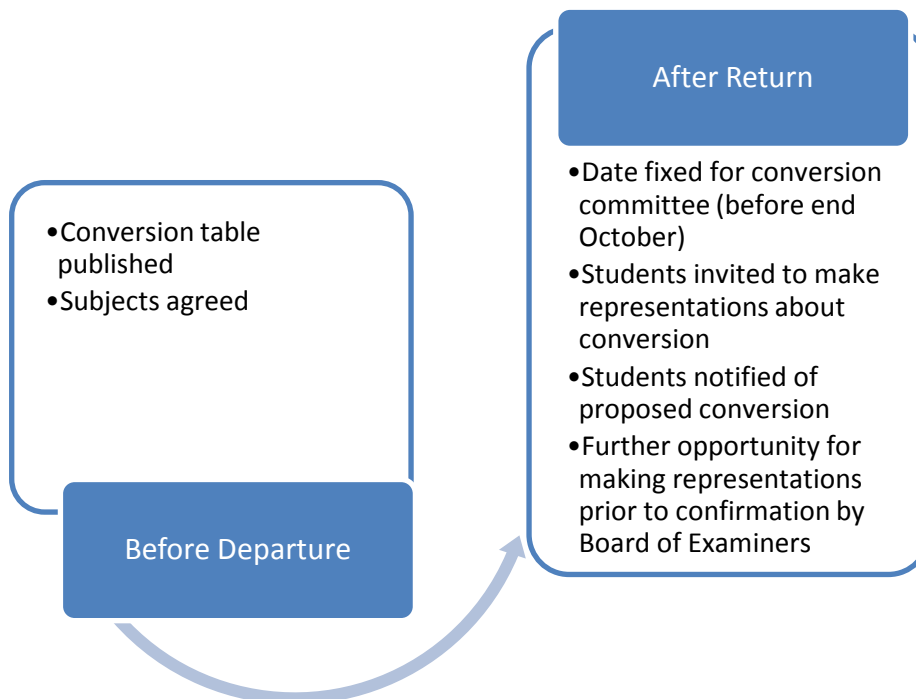
³ Clause 16.37(a): The weighting of courses for the calculation of an Honours classification for an undergraduate Honours degree should normally follow the credit weighting of those courses in the third and fourth years of the Honours programme. These weightings must be set out in the programme specification.

- The range of marks awarded in courses at a similar level at Glasgow (with a view to ensuring that no particular institution particularly favours or penalises UoG students- although it should be recognised that research suggests students in general perform better when abroad).

Past experience of reported grades from overseas should thus be used as continual guidance, and in certain cases it will be appropriate for conversion committees to seek additional information from the host university (but there should be no obligation to attempt to obtain information that may not be readily available). While seeking this information may result in delay, the procedure proposed below will mean this is most likely to occur when students themselves have requested that the existing conversion table be reconsidered.

9. **Proposals for modification** of the operation of the conversion tables at subject level should be made to TGSA, providing details of the proposed modification and as full a rationale as possible for this. It is anticipated that as the new process beds in, responsibility for looking at modifications will devolve to College.

Procedures for conversion



10. **The aim of the grade conversion process is to convert overseas grades to their University of Glasgow equivalent in as fair and just a manner as possible, in as transparent a manner as possible, and in as prompt a manner as possible as is consistent with School (or subject) efficiency.**
11. **The following considerations apply to conversion of grades at College/School/Subject Level:**

- a. **Grades that have been converted by a conversion committee and which constitute coursework that forms part of a student's final Honours classification are *recommendations* to the relevant Board of Examiners, i.e.,** grade conversions reported to students remain ***provisional*** until approved by the Board of Examiners.
- b. **Students must be told of the recommended grade conversion.** This is required by the ERASMUS Charter. It will thus allow students to make any further representations to the relevant Board of Examiners well in advance of the Board's meeting (and if necessary, to make a subsequent appeal against the Board's decision). It should be made clear, as noted above, that the grade communicated is ***provisional*** until approved by the Board of Examiners.
- c. The Guide to the Code of Assessment makes clear that students have a right to make representations before the process of grade conversion occurs: 'the process must normally incorporate the possibility of the candidate making representations to the coordinator or committee which is charged with converting grades.' Indeed, students should also be *expected* to assist those charged with the responsibility of carrying out the grade conversion in ensuring the conversion tables are fair. Students may have a firmer grasp of assessment criteria used abroad than academic staff (until a 'critical mass' of outgoing students has been attained). This involvement may also help ensure a much speedier conversion process as a School can identify at an early stage issues that may require further discussion with the 'host' institution, and also in providing information of use in determining whether a table requires modification. Students must thus have an opportunity of making **written representations as to the fairness of conversion tables** where these representations could help ensure that conversion tables are appropriate. When it appears that retroactive amendment of a published table is necessary and if this to a student's disadvantage, **fairness dictates that the students who may be affected should be allowed an opportunity to make observations before this is applied if the likely impact would be disadvantageous.** Where it is considered that a change is needed to the conversion tables this requires ***approval*** by the Translation of Grades from Study Abroad Sub-Committee. Further guidance will be issued on this before conversion for students studying abroad in 2016/17 takes place.
- d. A particular problem may arise when it is alleged that there have been serious deficiencies in the assessment process at the overseas institution. This may simply involve complaints as to the nature of the assessment process – but assessment procedures are likely to be significantly different from those at Glasgow. Senate policy encourages 'students to find out for

themselves as much as they can about study and assessment in a host institution they intend to visit'. It would be inappropriate for conversion committees to take into account different methods of assessment if such differences should have been clear to students when selecting overseas institutions. However, the matter may be otherwise where a student alleges impropriety (such as bias or irrationality) in the conduct of the assessment. The expectation is that students should make use of remedies available at the host university. Allegations of irregularity in the conduct of assessment overseas should first be drawn to the attention of the host institution by the individual student as soon as practical. Only when this has been done should a conversion committee consider its own views on whether such representations are meritorious.

- e. Fairness also dictates that **compelling personal circumstances which may have affected performance at the host institution may be taken into account**. Again, the expectation is that students should be expected to make use of remedies available at the host university. However, it would be wrong to take such personal circumstances into account if these have already been taken into account by the 'host' institution. While conversion committees must not - in accordance with the Code of Assessment - modify grades but rather ensure that such representations are forwarded to the relevant Board of Examiners at the appropriate time, conversion committees have certain responsibilities. First, committees should ensure that any representations concern circumstances that would be taken into account at Glasgow;⁴ second, committees should ascertain whether students have made use of any prescribed procedures for drawing such circumstances to the attention of the 'host' institution (as this is necessary to ensure that compensation is not awarded twice); and third, committees will require to take a position on whether a student claiming there has been a significant impact upon performance because of personal or medical grounds may be affected by the rule applying where a student has not completed 75% of the required coursework for Honours classification.

Ensuring adequate quality control

12. At a University level, oversight will be exercised by TGSA. This will, at least initially, approve the University-wide conversion tables and proposals to depart from these in specific areas. It will also receive and consider statistical analyses relevant to grade conversion and annual reports from Colleges on the operation of the system. It is, as

⁴ This would thus preclude representations concerning e.g. the method of teaching; the level of course or the suggestion that certain courses (e.g. Law) are inherently more difficult because they are offered at 'postgraduate' level overseas; or the fact that the marking scheme uses a 'Bell curve' or similar arrangement whereby marks are determined not by reference to grade descriptors but by position in class.

indicated above, anticipated that once more experience has been gained, variation of the operation of the conversion tables will be delegated to Colleges.