

## GUIDANCE ON ASSESSING STUDENTS

### 1. Introduction

Students who are enrolled on University of Wales validated programmes are properly regarded as being as much students of the University as those attending programmes of study at any one of the University's Accredited Institutions in Wales. In order to ensure the quality and standards of the awards at validated institutions, the assessment and examination of a University of Wales validated programme must be conducted in accordance with the detailed and documented criteria agreed at validation and within the requirements of appropriate Regulations, Academic Protocols and other guidelines issued by the University. In addition, all programmes validated by the University of Wales are subject to audit by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Every effort has been made to map this guidance against the precepts of the QAA's Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education, section 6, Assessment of Students.

A recurring area of discussion between the University and its partners has been over the purpose and nature of assessment and examination of students registered with the University. This is a matter that lies at the heart of ensuring the quality and reputation of the programmes delivered in the University's name. The maintenance of universally high standards is in the interests of all parties involved in these validated educational programmes. The following notes are intended to provide general guidance regarding the conventions that shape the pattern of assessment and examination of UoW courses. The precise rules for examining particular programmes are contained in the programme regulations, contained in the definitive programme document. These rules will conform to the University's Regulations and Academic Protocols.

### 2. Purpose of Assessment

The purpose of assessment is to measure student knowledge, understanding or skills. Good assessment practice is designed to ensure that students can demonstrate that they have met the intended learning outcomes of the module / programme of study and achieved the standard required at the point of assessment for the award / award of credit being undertaken. Assessment can also promote and support student learning by providing the student with feedback to help improve his/her performance.

### 3. Forms of Student Assessment

Assessment is usually construed as being diagnostic, formative or summative. These terms are used to mean the following.

**Diagnostic assessment** is used to show a learner's preparedness for a module or programme and identifies, for the learner and the teacher, any strengths and potential gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills expected at the start of the programme, or other possible problems. Particular strengths may lead to a formal consideration of accreditation of prior learning.

**Formative assessment** has a developmental purpose and is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and on how it can be improved and/or maintained.

**Summative assessment** is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria used to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or programme.

An assessment process for a particular module can, and often does, involve more than one of these assessment purposes. Within a programme, using a range of assessment types enables students to demonstrate their capabilities and achievements in meeting different intended learning outcomes. Diversity of assessment practice is to be expected and is welcomed, in order to test a wide range of outcomes. Accepted methods of assessment include:

- Essays
- Examination papers (including open book)
- Objective tests (which may be conducted on-line)
- Direct observation
- Oral tests
- Structured practical assessments
- Self-assessment (which may be conducted on-line)
- Extended dissertations
- Reports on projects

The selection of a set of methods and the balance between the components will be shaped by the requirements of each particular programme of study, in particular the learning outcomes of the module concerned – it is important that the methods of assessment are appropriate to testing the intended learning outcomes for a module fairly and accurately. Assessment should also be at the appropriate level – assessment methods should relate to the appropriate level descriptors within the qualifications framework.

Please note that, although there is no requirement for institutions to provide prescriptive model answers, the provision of broad guidelines on the institution's expectations for a good answer is encouraged.

Every effort should be made to ensure that assessment is of the student's individual performance, and that assessment makes a positive contribution to student learning. It is expected that all students on any module will face the same assessment programme. The methods adopted must also be consistent with any classification scheme associated with the relevant UoW award (see Classifying Student Performances below).

Whatever assessment methods are adopted they must be agreed in advance with both the External Examiner and with the Moderator (see below). The course document, programme specification and student handbook must also clearly present the assessment methods, weighting and schedule.

#### **4. Approval of Assessments**

Examination question papers (in both language of delivery and English translations if necessary) should be prepared in draft some months prior to the examination period. They should be sent (accompanied by model/indicative answers/markings criteria) to the Validation Unit at least 10

weeks before the examinations take place. It is considered good practice to submit the re-sit examination papers at the same time. The draft papers will be forwarded by the Validation Unit to the External Examiner for comment. Any comments and/or corrections suggested by the External Examiner will be returned to the partner institution via the Validation Unit for final drafts to be completed. The same process applies to any form of assessment (e.g. coursework) that contributes 50% or more towards the final module mark. Draft examination paper can be transmitted to the Validation Unit by email, provided that they are password protected and that the password is transmitted separately.

It is recommended that Institutions have in place arrangements to ensure that assessments are internally moderated prior to their transmission to the Validation Unit (or Moderator). Aside from seeking to ensure that the academic level and content are appropriate, this can serve as a check to ensure that there is a consistent 'house style' for assessments and that typographical or other minor errors are corrected. Institutions should also carefully consider how to co-ordinate assessment deadlines in order to avoid clashes and excessive assessment burdens for students and staff. This might even involve combining assessment in cognate modules. Care should also be taken to ensure that students have adequate time to reflect on learning before being assessed.

It is also good practice for institutions to confer with Moderators when drafting their examination papers/assessments prior to submitting them to the Validation Unit, particularly during the early stages of a programme operating.

Institutions must ensure that all examination papers, and associated documentation, are kept and transmitted under strictly confidential conditions. Any possible breaches of security must be reported immediately to the Validation Unit.

### Rubric

Each examination paper or other assessment component will have its own particular duration, structure and detailed regulations, and these should be clearly stated on the instructions to candidates, e.g. Three hour paper. Answer four questions, two from each section. Programmable calculators are not permitted.

Each question should show clearly how many of the total marks for the paper have been allocated to it. In addition for questions which contain a number of individual tasks/requirements, the distribution of those marks between the key elements of the question should be shown.

Not only should the paper format be appropriate for the area of examination but this format should also be known to the students. The student handbook should outline the methods of assessment for each module (e.g. 50% by three hour unseen examination, 50% by 2000 word assignment). It is important that both staff and students are aware of, and understand, the marking criteria that will be used to mark each assessment task. These should be issued with the coursework assessment.

### Questions

Assessment questions must examine the course syllabus and be able to be completed by the average student in the time available. The learning outcomes and the award classification system will be the major determinants of the type of assessment and of the nature of the

questions posed. For basic 'pass/fail' certificate and diploma awards it may be appropriate for questions to test a student's breadth of knowledge and ability to apply relevant problem solving skills.

However, for degree awards such an approach is too limited. University of Wales degrees are classified and examination questions must be consistent with the classification criteria (see below). Perhaps the overriding principle behind the classification system could be captured in the concept of measuring a student's depth of knowledge in key areas and ease with the methods of the discipline. Final year papers, with relatively few questions each requiring an extended answer, are the norm in many subjects.

### Security/Confidentiality

It is of vital importance throughout this process that the greatest possible care be exercised in securing the confidentiality of the question papers prior to the examination. All staff must be made aware of their responsibilities in this area and should ensure that their working drafts as well as completed papers can not enter the public domain whether as hard copy or through a computer network. Examination papers and other assessments are central to ensuring the quality and validity of awards. Any breaches of security will invalidate UoW awards and may result in the termination of the partnership between the UoW and the institution if the latter is found to be at fault.

## **5. Conduct of Examinations/Assessment**

### Superintendent of Examinations

Each institution should appoint a Superintendent of Examinations who has overall responsibility for ensuring that all assessments are conducted in accordance with the University's requirements and who shall ensure the security of examination papers and other assessments – see Academic Protocol 1.

Each Superintendent of Examinations is required to confirm on an annual basis that assessments have been conducted in accordance with the relevant sections of the QAA's Code of practice for Collaborative Provision and should report any problems which have arisen to the University. (see Appendix 25).

Institutions must ensure that examinations and assessments are conducted in accordance with the Regulations and guidelines issued by the University. Where institutions have any doubt over the operation or interpretation of the assessment regulations they should consult with the Validation Unit or their appointed Moderator(s).

### Information for Students

Institutions shall inform all students, in writing, at the beginning of the academic year, of the following:

- (i) methods of assessment to be used in their schemes of study including the weighting given to the assessment components of each module and how the degree classification is decided;

- (ii) information concerning the deadlines for submission of assessed work and the penalties for not meeting those deadlines and for exceeding or not reaching a specified word count;
- (iii) information concerning the University's Verification and Appeals Procedures (final and interim) and Unfair Practice Procedure;
- (iv) that any exceptional or mitigating circumstances, which may adversely affect their performance, must be reported to the appropriate Examining Board;
- (v) that students who, without good cause, absent themselves from examinations, or fail to complete their forms of assessment by the required date, shall be awarded a zero mark for the component concerned.
- (vi) that students requiring special provision (e.g. those with dyslexia) should contact the Superintendent of Examinations as soon as is practicable in order to discuss their requirements. Institutions shall make reasonable adjustments for candidates with special needs, in compliance with the requirements of prevailing legislation. Good practice guidelines on such provision are detailed in Academic Protocol 1.

Students should be made aware well in advance of the time and place for examinations. Wherever possible the examination schedule should provide for adequate breaks between examination papers. Account should be taken of religious holidays and special arrangements made, as necessary.

Institutions shall ensure that all candidates undertaking examinations have access to the University's Directions to Candidates (see Appendix 20).

#### Invigilation

Institutions shall take all reasonable measures (e.g. by checking College ID cards or other forms of identification, ideally photo ID, e.g. passport) that the persons presenting themselves for examination are bona fide registered candidates for the award concerned.

Examinations must be invigilated by responsible members of staff (see Appendix 21 for details) – and each examination should be invigilated by at least two persons. The invigilators' duties range from distributing question papers to ensuring no cheating in examinations. If any form of cheating is suspected, institutions should refer immediately to the University's Unfair Practice procedure, which clearly explains the procedure that should be followed at every stage of the process.

At the end of the examination invigilators will collect all examination answer papers and rough workings from each candidate. They should ensure that candidates have identified their work by placing their name and/or examination number on the paper. If the nature of the examination/assessment deems it feasible, students may retain their personal copy of the question paper – obviously this would not be feasible for a multiple choice examination. Each institution shall ensure that a sufficient number of Invigilators is in place for each examination. Invigilators shall undertake their duties in accordance with University's Instructions to Invigilators (see Appendix 21).

A complete record of those attending each paper should be maintained by the administrative office of the partner institution.

#### Availability of Examiner(s)

The appropriate internal examiner(s) must be available during the conduct of the examination for consultation by the invigilators in the event of any previously undetected ambiguity or error in the examination paper being discovered.

The University shall reserve the right to make unannounced visits to Institutions in order to verify that examinations are being undertaken under appropriate conditions and in accordance with its published requirements.

Institutions must ensure that students' marked examination scripts, together with all other forms of assessment contributing to an award, are kept under secure conditions and made available (with accompanying spreadsheets and internally awarded marks) for scrutiny by External Examiners during the Examining Board visit.

## **6. Examination/Assessment Marking**

### Internal

As soon as possible after completion of an examination/assessment the answer papers should be passed to the Internal Examiner for marking. The marks awarded for each answer should be shown clearly on the paper and comments reflecting why particular marks were awarded should be included. It is worth noting that students have the right to see their scripts if they wish, after an Examining Board has confirmed the results. An agreed sample of papers included in the determination of the class of degrees should be 'double marked', i.e. marked by two internal examiners - see Taught and Validated Degrees Board guidelines on double marking (Appendix 22). Internal moderation is important in ensuring that examiners are applying the marking criteria (see below) in a consistent manner, and that there is a shared understanding of the academic standards students are expected to achieve. Additionally, where possible and practical, consideration should be given to maintaining student anonymity during the internal marking process, e.g. by using student numbers as opposed to names on assessments.

When the marking is completed the answer papers should be returned to the course director. Examiners will draw the director's attention to any papers which pose problems. Such papers may include those which are marginal with respect to classification, fails and, very rarely, those suspected of irregularities. If any form of cheating is suspected, institutions should refer immediately to the University's Unfair Practice Procedure, which clearly explains the procedure that should be followed at every stage of the process.

### Grade Criteria

Grade criteria are useful for staff when assessing and grading candidates' work (as first and second markers), to External Examiners in judging the marking standards applied by internal examiners and to students in obtaining feedback on their performance. The examples below are generic criteria, institutions might choose to develop more specific additional criteria in conjunction with the programme Moderator and if deemed necessary the External Examiner.

Assessed work awarded a mark in the bands listed below should display the majority of the characteristics noted under the headings below:

#### **A Undergraduate Level**

##### **- First Class (70-100%)**

**First class work is relatively rare and is expected to stand out from the work of other students. While it may be the case that within given areas of study a modest number of students might achieve first class marks, it would not be expected that when aggregating the marks awarded for the various elements of assessment that many students will achieve a first class result overall.**

- directly addresses the question or problems raised
- provides a coherent argument displaying an extensive knowledge of relevant information
- critically evaluates concepts and theory
- relates theory to practice
- reflects the student's own argument and is not just a repetition of standard lecture and reference material
- is very accurate
- has an element of novelty if not originality
- provides evidence of reading beyond the required reading
- displays an awareness of other approaches to the problem area
- has an appreciation of methodological concerns and displays an awareness of the limitations of current knowledge
- displays excellent use of relevant data and examples, all properly referenced

**- Upper Second Class (60-69%)**

**This is a highly competent level of performance and students earning this degree classification may be deemed capable of registering for higher research degree work.**

- directly addresses the question or problems raised
- provides a coherent argument drawing on relevant information
- shows some ability to evaluate concepts and theory and to relate theory to practice
- reflects the student's own argument and is not just a repetition of standard lecture and reference material
- does not suffer from any major errors or omissions
- provides evidence of reading beyond the required reading
- displays an awareness of other approaches to the problem area
- displays good use of relevant data and examples, all properly referenced

**- Lower Second Class (50-59%)**

**This is an acceptable level of performance and all competent students should expect to achieve at least this level.**

- addresses the question but provides only a basic outline of relevant arguments and evidence along the lines offered in the lectures and referenced readings
- answers are clear but limited
- some minor omissions and inaccuracies but no major errors

**- Third Class (40-49%)**

**This level of performance demonstrates some knowledge and an element of understanding but is weak. Students attaining this level of performance should be in a small minority of those on the course and could not expect to progress to higher degree work.**

- points made in the answer are not always well supported by argument and evidence
- relevant points have been omitted from the answer
- there are some errors in the answer
- parts of the question remain unanswered
- answers may be unduly brief and possibly in note form

**- Marginal Fail (35-39%)**

**Students in this category have not quite done enough to persuade the examiners that they should pass<sup>1</sup>.**

- answers lack a coherent grasp of the problems and issues raised in the question
- important information has been omitted from the answers and irrelevant points have been included
- answers are far too brief

**- Fail (Under 35%)**

**Failed students have been unable to convince the examiners that they have benefited adequately from academic study.**

- fails to show any knowledge or understanding of the issues raised in the question
- reveals fundamental misunderstanding of the subject matter
- most of the material in the answer is irrelevant

**B Postgraduate Level**

The following generic grade criteria are in place for Postgraduate degrees (taught and dissertation component):

<b>Indicative Grade</b>	<b>UK % Marks</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
A	70%+	Very high standard of critical analysis using appropriate conceptual frameworks Excellent understanding and exposition of relevant issues Clearly structured and logically developed arguments Good awareness of nuances and complexities Substantial evidence of well-executed independent research Excellent evaluation and synthesis of source material Excellent use of relevant data and examples, all properly referenced
	<b>Distinction 70% and above</b>	
B	69-60%	High standard of critical analysis using appropriate conceptual frameworks Clear awareness and exposition of relevant issues Clearly structured and logically developed argument Awareness of nuances and complexities Evidence of independent research Good evaluation and synthesis of source material Good use of relevant data and examples, all properly referenced
C	59-50%	Uses appropriate conceptual frameworks Attempts analysis but includes some errors and/or omissions Shows awareness of issues but no more than to be expected from

<sup>1</sup> In line with the relevant Academic Protocols, candidates for Initial Degrees may be awarded a 'Pass Degree' where their overall mark falls between 35 and 39%.

<b>Indicative Grade</b>	<b>UK % Marks</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
		attendance at classes Arguments reasonably clear but underdeveloped Insufficient evidence of independent research Insufficient evaluation of source material Some good use of relevant data and examples, but incompletely referenced
D	49-40%	Adequate understanding of appropriate conceptual frameworks Answer too descriptive and/or any attempt at analysis is superficial, containing errors and/or omissions Shows limited awareness of issues but also some confusion Arguments not particularly clear Limited evidence of independent research and reliance on a superficial repeat of class notes Relatively superficial use of relevant data, sources and examples and poorly referenced
	<b>UW Pass Mark = 40%</b>	
E	39 – 30%	Weak understanding of appropriate conceptual frameworks Weak analysis and several errors and omissions Establishes a few relevant points but superficial and confused exposition of issues No evidence of independent research and poor understanding of class notes Poor or no use of relevant data, sources and examples, and no references
F	29% and below	Very weak or no understanding of appropriate conceptual frameworks Very weak or no grasp of analysis and many errors and omissions Very little or no understanding of the issues raised by the question No appropriate references to data, sources, examples or even class notes

NB: Distinction marks (70% +) are awarded only to exceptional pieces of work.

## 7. Plagiarism

Institutions should encourage students to adopt good academic conduct in respect of assessment. However, a major problem in assessment nowadays is ensuring that a student's work is his/her own and that the student has not engaged in plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the act of claiming the work of others as your own work. "Others" in this context can include fellow students and the authors of books, journals and internet material. Plagiarism is regarded as a form of cheating and is unacceptable. Students will be penalised for plagiarism, usually by the loss of marks and in extreme cases may be deprived of any UoW award.

Students learn from the work of others and may quote from it without penalty, but students should receive guidance as to accepted forms of academic referencing and citation. Where direct quotation appears to a student to be appropriate s/he must ensure that quotation marks and reference to the original author is clear within the text. Essays, projects and reports will also show the referenced works in the bibliography.

It is essential that students and staff are made aware of the University's definitions of plagiarism and other unfair practice, the possible consequences of unfair practice - this is contained in the University's Unfair Practice Procedure. If any form of cheating is suspected, institutions should refer immediately to the University's Unfair Practice procedure, which clearly explains the procedure that should be followed at every stage of the process.

## **8. Disclosure of Marks and Feedback to Students**

It is important to distinguish between unconfirmed marks and confirmed marks.

Unconfirmed marks are those that have not been confirmed by a full Examining Board including the relevant External Examiner(s).

Confirmed marks are those that have been confirmed by a full Examining Board including the relevant External Examiner(s). The arrangements for releasing confirmed marks to students need to be carefully considered – the practice of publishing results on noticeboards is no longer very widespread, and even if this is done, students' anonymity should be protected by using ID numbers rather than students' names. Many institutions now release confirmed marks to students electronically.

It is good practice for students to be given individual feedback on their performance to date (e.g. coursework, semester one examinations) as this promotes learning and facilitates improvement. Any feedback should be constructive and timely, in order for a student to benefit from the feedback and to improve their performance. It is good practice to establish a clear timescale for providing feedback to students as well as establishing guidance on the level of feedback to be provided. If unconfirmed marks (or indicative grades) are provided, students should be made aware that any marks are subject to final confirmation by an Examining Board. As mentioned previously, students can ask to see their examination scripts, but this should only be permitted after a mark has been confirmed by an Examining Board. Generic feedback can also be provided for a group of student which can help students to improve their individual performance by learning from the cohort as a whole.

## **9. Examination Boards**

Examination Boards are part of the quality assurance process that applies to all university degrees in the UK. Award Boards are examination boards which determine the entitlement of students to receive awards and the classification of those awards.

One of the purposes of quality assurance processes in higher education is to ensure that standards for a given UK degree course are comparable with those of any other degree course within the same university and, by extension, with those of other UK universities.

## Objectives

The main tasks of Examination Boards are to:

- ensure that the diet of assessment established in the course scheme has been duly administered by scrutinising examination scripts, projects, course work, and any other evidence of assessment;
- ensure that marking has been fair, internally consistent, and consistent with marking in UK higher education institutions (UKHEIs);
- adjust marks, if necessary, to comply with the above objectives;
- ensure that students have satisfied the course and university regulations in order to either progress or qualify for an award of the University of Wales;
- determine appropriate action, such as re-sits, for students who have not satisfied the conditions for progression or qualification;
- take into account any special circumstances that may have affected student performance in any element of assessment and apply appropriate measures if necessary;
- take decisions on any borderline cases;
- decide final degree classifications
- discuss any cases of unfair practice or other breaches of the regulations;
- make recommendations for future assessment exercises.

## Internal Examining Board

Prior to the formal Examining Board visit by the External Examiner and Moderator, an internal examining board should have been held to discuss the results, including any inconsistencies, borderline cases and special circumstances, and to make recommendations to the formal Examining Board. The minutes of the internal Examining Board should be made available to the External Examiner and Moderator.

## Scrutiny of Assessed Work

All assessed work should be available for scrutiny by the External Examiner(s) prior to the formal Examining Board taking place. Ideally this should all be held in a 'base room', which should also include the assessment questions, model answers and module reports.

Where a programme is taught and assessed in a language other than English or Welsh, a sample of translated assessed work may be required, depending on the linguistic capabilities of the External Examiner(s) – see Appendix 43 for the Taught and Validated Degrees Board's requirements in this respect. The External Examiner may also request that comments on assessed work are translated.

Prior to the Examining Board, the External Examiners will have been provided with a spreadsheet of results, the minutes of the internal examining board and will have scrutinised a sample of the marked assessed work. Often they will pay particular attention to students who are borderline pass or fail or close to the dividing line between degree classifications. They will look for consistency in marking standards, patterns and anomalies in the marks received by individual students or by whole classes in a given module area and look at the profile for the cohort as a whole, hence providing a comprehensive and accurate spreadsheet is essential.

The External Examiner's role is not to act as a third marker (only in exceptional circumstances and for postgraduate dissertations and theses), but to ensure that the standards being achieved by the students on the programme are in line with the expectations for a UK award.

## Composition

Examination Boards will normally consist of:

Chair: A senior member of the academic staff at the institution concerned.

Course Teaching Team: All staff involved in the teaching and assessment of the students should be members of the Board of Examiners and are required to attend the Board's meetings. The purpose of the Board is to discuss and determine individual student performances as well as reflect on the pattern of results for individual courses within a study programme. As mentioned above, an internal Examining Board should also have been held prior to the External Examiner' and Moderator arriving at the institution. See appendix 24 for requirements for attendance by internal examiners at final Examining Boards – an Examining Board can be cancelled if it is felt that the level of attendance is not quorate.

External Examiners: The appointment of **an External Examiner is required for all UoW degree courses** whether conducted at one of the University's Accredited Institutions or at a partner institution. The examiner is external in the sense that s/he cannot be a member of staff of the UoW. A Code of Practice for External Examiners is available from the Validation Unit. The participation of the External Examiner is crucial as no results sheet is valid unless they sign it. Final awards can only be determined by an Examination Board at which the External Examiner is present (or, if they have difficulty in attending, their written views are presented to the board)

Moderator: The University will also appoint a Moderator for each validated programme. Moderators are drawn from the academic staff at the University's Accredited Institutions. Moderators are charged with defined specific responsibilities intended to help foster and develop the relationship between UoW and the partner institution. Moderators attend Examining Boards in an advisory capacity rather than as full members Full and open exchange between the partner institution and the External Examiners and Moderators is key to the smooth functioning of the latter's role as mentor and advisor. For institutions new to the examination classification system the advisory role will be of great importance.

The following list indicates some of the key duties of the External Examiner and Moderator:

<u>External Examiner</u>	<u>Moderator</u>
Written comments on draft examination papers	Liaison with Validated Institution over the drafting of examination papers prior to their submission to the External Examiner (if required)
Attending annual examination board meetings; reviewing a sample of students' work; agreeing final results and signing the pass list	Attending annual Examination Board meetings in an advisory capacity
Verbal comments for the examination board on the course and on overall student performance	Submitting an annual and where required a mid term report to the University
Submitting an annual report to the University	Ensuring adherence to relevant UoW Procedures, Regulations and Academic Protocols
For degree schemes, ensuring that graduate standards are achieved and maintained.	Ensuring aggregation of marks and classification of awards follows agreed UoW practice

Providing academic advice and a point of contact to facilitate the continuing development and (where relevant) upgrading of the validated programme

Providing a quality assurance role in terms of implementing UoW procedures on, for example, staff development and the Quinquennial Review.

Ensuring that resources at the Validated Institution are of an appropriate standard.

Examination Boards are normally attended by a representative of the Validation Unit who will record the results on a Notification of Results Form (NORF), be in charge of any accompanying paperwork, and advise on questions concerning University regulations, Academic Protocols and other procedures.

### Conduct of Examination Boards

Examination Boards are usually chaired by the partner institution's head of school or course director with a formal agenda (an example agenda is available from the Validation Unit) . The partner institution will also appoint a member of staff to act as secretary to the board. The secretary will be responsible for recording the Board's decisions and any other relevant matters. The institution will be responsible for ensuring that Examining Board decisions are communicated to the students in good time.

The Chair will ensure that awards are made in accordance with the established guidelines for aggregating performance in individual areas of assessment, as contained in the programme regulations contained in the programme document. It is considered good practice to ensure that all members of the Examining Board are provided with a copy of the specific regulations covering the programme.

As noted previously, an internal Examining Board should have been held prior to the formal Moderation of assessed work. As a result of this, the course team should have already developed a consensus on any special circumstances (absence due to illness, etc.) or borderline cases and will be able to advanced reasoned proposals, supported by evidence or arguments, for consideration by the other members of the Board.

All members of the Examining Board should have a set of spreadsheets detailing overall student performance in the modules being considered, as well as a final weighted average and recommended degree classifications (if appropriate). It may well be the case that students being considered for a final award will have marks for modules approved by a previous Examining Board - these marks should be included on the consolidated mark sheet. It is useful to have a consolidated mark sheet in descending order of merit, as this will enable all borderline cases to be easily identified. This sheet should also show the average mark and the standard deviation for each module, as this will help the Board to identify any anomalies or inconsistencies.

Examples of spreadsheets are available from the Validation Unit.

The consolidated mark sheet should be supported by information on the weighting of the different forms of assessment for each module (coursework, examinations, etc.). This information can be crucial to decisions on progression and/or compensation. It can also be vital when establishing the profile of students who are on the borderline between two degree classifications or the pass/fail divide. The presentation should assist the Board of Examiners to determine the classification of students' performances, i.e. to establish class boundaries. Rank ordering all students' performances means that those students who are marginal between two particular classes (and between pass and fail) will be discussed at the same time. This will help promote efficiency and consistency in the Board's deliberations. The mark sheet should have been amended to take account of any recommendations made by the External Examiner prior to the meeting.

Each institution should have a clear policy in place in respect of the rounding up and down of marks (e.g. whether this happens by module, at the end of a level or at the end of the programme). The Taught and Validated Degrees Board would not expect to see rounding up/down by more than 0.5% (e.g. 59.4% becomes 59%, 59.5% becomes 60%, 59.6% becomes 60%).

All Board members should also be provided with a copy of the Examining Board agenda, the minutes of the previous meeting and the internal Examining Board meeting.

Issues to be resolved by the Examining Board include:

Special Circumstances: The University's Regulations and Academic Protocols specify what constitute special circumstances, these include (documented) illness, accident, close bereavement or on closely related compassionate grounds. Candidates who have brought forward special circumstances that have affected their performance in an examination/assessment, or which has caused absence from an examination /assessment need to be carefully considered in order that the appropriate action can be taken. This might include allowing a candidate a further attempt at an examination previously failed, with no penalty applied.

It is considered good practice to have held discussions regarding special circumstances prior to the Examining Board taking place – this might include a special circumstances committee that makes recommendations on each case or by holding a separate discussion with the Moderator to discuss each case. Holding discussions beforehand ensures that cases are discussed in full beforehand and that confidential matters can be discussed in a separate forum, ensuring that any cases are given appropriate consideration whilst ensuring that the business of the Examining Board can proceed at a reasonable pace.

Unfair Practice: In certain instances, cases of alleged unfair practice can be resolved by the Examining Board (see the University's Unfair Practice procedure for further details).

Progression: The pass mark for a module at undergraduate and postgraduate level is 40%. However, each programme should have clear criteria on the requirements to pass a module - this might vary from requiring each individual component that contributes to the module mark to be passed to calculating a weighted average of the component marks. Whichever approach is operated, staff, students and Examiners need to be clear on the rules being operated – in the staff and student handbook and in the course document. Students should be made aware of the impact of individual marks and results on their ability to progress and complete a programme.

Students are normally required to successfully complete the full assessment programme for that particular level before being permitted to proceed to the next level of study, and students who pass all modules will automatically progress to the following year/ level of study. However, this does not necessarily mean that students are required to pass every individual element of the assessment. The cases of those who have failed some modules will be considered individually and in the light of the course regulations. These can include the following:

**Trailing:** which allows students to carry forward (or 'trail') failed modules forward to the following year (the UoW advises that no more than 40 credits can be trailed from one level to another).

**Compensation:** means that a student is awarded a pass grade, in exceptional circumstances, for work which was not of the expected standard or for non-submission of work. The practice of compensation would only be operated in exceptional circumstances as agreed by the appropriate institutional mechanism.

**Condonement:** means that a student would not be penalised in terms of progression or award for failure in elements of assessment equivalent to a stipulated credit value.

Typically, programme regulations will limit the number of modules that may be compensated or condoned and will establish a minimum mark in the module failed to qualify for compensation/condonement. The University's Academic Regulations set defined limits on the number of failed credits that may be condoned at any academic level however in general terms the University would not normally expect more than 20 credits worth of modules to be condoned at any level, and no condonement operated in a module awarded a mark of below 30%. Certain key modules may be excluded from the possibility of compensation, especially where they are pre-requisites for later modules. Compensation is usually not automatic but at the discretion of the board, which will normally consider overall student performance and the benefits or otherwise of compensation against re-sits or the resubmission of coursework.

**Re-assessment:** As stated above, the pass mark for a module is 40%, and there need to be clear rules on the criteria to pass a module. Most programmes will allow candidates who have failed a module to be re-assessed at the next available opportunity, once the failure has been confirmed by an Examining Board. The University's regulations and the programme specific regulations will detail the number of re-sit opportunities allowed (three re-sit opportunities at undergraduate level, one at Master's level). It should be noted that modules recovered after a re-sit or resubmission can normally only achieve the bare pass mark (40%) in the module concerned (as opposed to the component), regardless of the mark actually obtained. A candidate at Master's level who has failed and re-taken a module cannot be eligible for Distinction in the degree.

Many programme regulations limit this option to a maximum number of failed modules – a candidate who failed a large number of modules for instance might be required to leave the programme or repeat the academic year/level. Candidates can be allowed to repeat an entire academic level, and therefore the marks for the repeated level would not be capped. However, the marks for any modules in the level concerned that were passed have to be forfeited. This cannot be applied to candidates in the final level of their studies.

In summary, the principal options for progression are:

- Progress with no modules pending
- Progress after compensation or condonement (with or without modules pending)
- Progress with modules pending with re-sits at the next available opportunity
- Re-assessment with progression dependent on passing a certain number of modules
- Repetition of the whole year if the number of failed modules is so large that re-assessment at the next opportunity is not permitted under the regulations
- Exclusion from the course if the number of failed modules is so large as to require a student to withdraw from the programme, the student has run out of time to complete the programme or has run out of re-sit opportunities under the regulations.

### Classification – Undergraduate Degrees

One of the primary functions of an Examining Board is to determine the final awards degree made to undergraduate candidates and to determine progression from the taught element to the dissertation element for Master's degree candidates.

The full honours classification is described in qualitative terms below, with generic grade criteria for the different degree marks bands and classes available – see above. Understanding the classification system is central to understanding the system of higher education in Wales and staff who are new to the UK assessment system should bear the grade criteria in mind when drafting assessment criteria and when marking student assessed work.

Guidelines showing how individual elements of the assessment are to be aggregated must be agreed with the UoW as part of the validation process. They should be operated, with discretion, at the Examination Board. The overall degree classification is frequently based on the average marks obtained over a period, normally Levels 5 and 6. This is often a weighted average. Within a level/year, modules are usually weighted according to their credit loading. While some degree schemes give equal weight to each of the last two years, most will weight the final year over the penultimate one (e.g. 60%/40%). The actual weighting to be applied will be shown in the programme document and in the student handbook validated by the University. The marks required for each classification are defined by the University and listed in the University's Academic Protocols and are as follows:

First Class Honours	70-100%
Upper Second	60-69%
Lower Second	50-59%
Third	40-49%
Marginal Fail <sup>2</sup>	35-39%
Fail	0-34%

### Taught Master's Degrees: Completion of Part One

In order to progress from Part One to Part Two of a taught Master's degree, a candidate should have achieved an overall average mark of 40%.

NB: In order to be awarded a Master's degree with Distinction, candidates should have been awarded a Distinction grade in both components (taught and dissertation) or have been more successful in the dissertation component than in the examined component, provided that the

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<sup>2</sup> In line with the relevant Academic Protocols, candidates for Initial Degrees may be awarded a 'Pass Degree' where their overall mark falls between 35 and 39%.

aggregate mark obtained is 70% or greater and no modules have been failed. It follows therefore that candidates achieving a mark of 70% or greater in Part One, but 69% or lower in Part Two cannot be considered eligible for a Distinction overall. The following may be of assistance when considering eligibility of a candidate for the award of a Master's degree with Distinction:

Part One mark	<i>Candidate is eligible for the award of Distinction:</i>
65%	Where the Part Two mark is 75% or greater;
66%	Where the Part Two mark is 74% or greater;
67%	Where the Part Two mark is 73% or greater;
68%	Where the Part Two mark is 72% or greater;
69%	Where the Part Two mark is 71% or greater;
70%	Where the Part Two mark is 70% or greater;

Borderline cases: When a student is on the borderline between two degree classifications or pass/fail, the External Examiners will normally look at all the evidence, including the student profile, but will pay particular attention to any arguments put forward by the teaching staff in favour of moving a particular student into a higher category or maintaining the classification indicated by the marks.

The Taught and Validated Degrees Board has agreed that a borderline candidate be defined as one whose classification falls within the 'window of opportunity', i.e. within 2% of the next category of award available (e.g. 58% for consideration as a borderline 2.i/2.ii), before any rounding has taken place. Examining Boards should consider all students falling within the 'window of opportunity' and should ensure that any decisions are fully minuted.

There are two main methods used when discussing borderline cases on the basis of a candidate's performance:

#### Exit Velocity

Where a student's classification falls within 2% of a classification boundary (before any rounding is applied), the Examining Board shall consider the candidate's performance in the final year of study. Where the student's final year average is in the higher classification band the Examining Board shall normally award the higher class of degree.

#### Preponderance Principle

Where a student's classification falls within 2% of a classification boundary (before any rounding is applied), the Examining Board shall consider the proportion of marks obtained by the student in each of the classification bands. Examining boards shall only consider those marks which are used to calculate the classification. In order to be awarded the higher classification, marks in the higher classification band must have

been achieved in modules attracting a credit weighting equal to half or more of those contributing to the degree classification.

The Examining Board may also choose to look at a candidate's performance in a major piece of assessed work (e.g. dissertation or project).

#### Comments by the External Examiner/Moderator

Following the consideration of students' results the Chair of the Board should request the External Examiners and Moderator to comment BRIEFLY for the attending staff on matters covering the course - teaching, examinations, marking standards, student performances, possible developments, and where appropriate allow brief response from staff, usually for purposes of clarification. It should be noted that a Joint Board of Studies is normally held during the Examining Board visit at which a number of issues relating to the programme are also discussed. Examiners and Moderators will of course submit a formal report to the University in due course. The report is sent to the institution, which is required to formally respond to any recommendations made by the Examiner/Moderator, via the Annual College and Course Review Form.

#### Recording decisions/signing the Notification of Results Form

For an undergraduate degree award Board or for a Board at the end of the taught component of a Master's degree, all decisions of the Examining Board will be recorded on the Notification of Results Form (NORF). The Form is supplied by the Validation Unit and should be signed by all members of the Board present, including the External Examiner (though not the Moderator). NORFS are then returned to the Validation Unit for processing and (where appropriate) issuing of pass lists and certificates.

#### Re-sit Boards

Where re-sit Examination Boards are held, arrangements should be made either for the External Examiner(s) to attend the Board or to be provided with the spreadsheet of results and a sample of assessed work, if deemed necessary by the External Examiner. In any case a NORF will need to be produced and signed by the relevant members of the Board. The arrangements for re-sit candidates and Examining Boards should be agreed at the main Examining Board.

#### Retention of Assessed Work

Institutions should ensure that assessed work is retained for an appropriate period of time. The University would expect that all student work is retained for a minimum of three years and that a sample of assessed work is retained for a period of up to ten years.

### **10. Appeals**

An Examining Board decision with respect to any student is usually final. However, students can invoke appeals procedures (the relevant procedure depends on the stage of study that a student has reached). Details of the appeals procedures (final award and interim) are available from the Validation Unit and should be included in the Student Handbook.

It should be noted that candidates cannot appeal against the academic judgement of the Examiners.

## **11. Review and Training**

Institutions should ensure that assessment practice is internally evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis. This might also include an analysis of marking and marking trends, to enable comparison within a programme. The Annual Report and Quinquennial Review provides an opportunity for the University to evaluate assessment practice within each validated programme. The University's assessment regulations are also reviewed and updated on an on-going basis and analysis made of results from across institutions.

Institutions should also ensure that staff development opportunities are available for staff in respect of good assessment practice. This might range from induction of new staff to enabling staff to learn about new approaches to assessment and best practice in assessment. The Moderator can play a role in sharing good practice with colleagues at partner institutions.

## **12. Conclusion**

These notes are intended to give general information and guidance concerning the conventions that underpin assessing student performance within the University of Wales. Our experience is that this is an area where practices between institutions can legitimately differ; based on variations permitted within the University's Regulations and Academic Protocols. However, to preserve the standing of the University's awards it is not an area where misunderstanding can be tolerated and all institutions are required to ensure that their own internal regulations are clearly stated (for staff, students and external scrutiny) and that these are approved in advance by the University. Any variations on what the University believes to be best practice can only be permitted after full disclosure, consideration and agreement by the Taught and Validated Degrees Board.

We believe that the education and development of individual students is well served by attempts to meet the assessment criteria made explicit in these notes. For partner institutions to take full advantage of the University's wealth of expertise in designing courses of study and forms of assessment, close cooperation between the two parties along the lines indicated here must be pursued.

Any comments on these notes are most welcome and should be forwarded to:

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