

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

22 October 2019

Agenda Item 7

CLASSIFICATION OF MASTER'S DEGREES

COVER SHEET

Presenter: Mr A G Faulkner

To consider the standard model for the classification of Master's degrees of a value of 200 credit points or more.

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CLASSIFICATION OF MASTER'S DEGREES

1. BACKGROUND

Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Committee at its meeting on 17 June 2019 approved proposals from the Faculties of Computing, Engineering and the Built Environment and Life and Health Sciences to depart from standard regulations in order to classify certain Master's degrees of 240 credit points or more in value on the basis of all Level 7 modules.

The Committee agreed to discuss further the standard approach for such longer Master's degrees (min 19.43 refers).

The University's first Master's degrees of more than 180 point value were introduced in 2007/8: Master of Fine Art (MFA) and Master of Architecture (MArch), each with 240 credit points. At that time Senate approved an amendment to Regulations to determine the overall grading of such degrees on the basis of the final 120 credit points only. This was in keeping with the prevailing principle of exit velocity at that time.

2. DISCUSSION

In view of the recent increase in the number of Master's degrees with 240 credit points or more at Level 7 – eight in Dental disciplines and a pathway introduced in MSc Data Science, which allows students to choose between a 60 or 120 point dissertation/project - and that Faculty's comment that it expects to introduce this option in other Master's degrees, and the change to the standard Honours degree classification algorithm which now has a Level 5 contribution (5 and 6 in integrated Master's), it is timely to consider a new standard model for such Master's degrees.

3. OPTIONS

The options for the calculation of the final grading of longer Master's degrees are:

- a) the inclusion of all Level 7 modules;
- b) the maintenance of the current rule: final 120 credits at Level 7.

An option to allow course teams to choose between two standard models is not proposed, in order that the University may maintain its expectation of consistency in awards through classification processes which are 'fair, transparent and reliable' (UK Quality Code expectation for standards).

4. IMPLICATIONS

For those courses which do not meet the chosen model, there are no immediate implications. If (a) is chosen, course teams which currently make the final grading

on the basis of 120 credit points will be required to review this at the time of revalidation and make a special case if they wish to retain it. If (b) is chosen, those which wish to use all Level 7 will make a special case at the time of revalidation, as currently.

If (a) is chosen, from the year in which the change is given effect, continuing students should benefit from the new regulation regarding the duties of Boards of Examiners recommended to Senate by ASQEC in March 2018 (min 18.37 refers):

'If regulations regarding the classification of final results have been revised during a period of registration, to apply the regulation which gives the most favourable outcome.'

The University currently has a small number of Master's degrees with more than 200 credit points:

Classification on basis of all Level 7 modules

MSc Dental Disciplines (three at 360 and five at 540), variation approved by ASQEC in June 2019, min 19.43

MSc Data Science (240), variation approved by ASQEC in June 2019, min 19.43

MSc Dietetics (300), variation approved by ASQEC in March 2019, min 19.16 (this course comprise Level 6 (105 credits) and 7 modules; 135 points' worth are pass/fail)

MBA, MSc International Business, MSc Marketing, MSc Management (240), which include an optional additional named Advanced Practice specialism of 60 credits

(the two Extended Master's degrees in International Business and Marketing, which include 60 credits at Level 6 and have a lower entry standard) and Graduate Certificate exit award are classified on the basis of all the Level 7 modules (180 credits).

Classification on basis of final 120 credits at Level 7

Master of Fine Art (MFA)

MFA Design

MFA Photography

Master of Architecture (MArch)

5. CONSULTATION WITH FACULTIES

The views of Associate Deans have been sought and the consensus is for all Level 7 modules to count. Those courses which currently only count the final 120 credits (the current norm) would be expected to review this at the time of next revalidation. It was noted that they might then change their regulation, make a special case to ASQEC or grade earlier developmental modules on a pass/fail basis to ensure that they do not contribute to final grading.