

11 April 2000

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON REGULATIONS TO THE SUB-COMMITTEE
ON TAUGHT COURSES

MEMBERSHIP: Dr C W Mulholland (Chairman), Mr A G Faulkner, Dr E M Lillie,
Professor G McAleavy, Mr D McLarnon, Mr T O'Neill, Mr A E
Walbridge

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr E J Friel

The Working Group met on four occasions – 8.2.00, 29.2.00, 9.3.00 and 29.3.00.

1 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Working Group was established by the Academic Policy Committee (29.11.99) in the light of concerns raised during Subject Reviews in the Autumn semester 1999. The Committee noted that the complexity of Course Regulations, in particular rules for condonement, and the consequent opportunities for misinterpretation and inconsistencies in application by Boards of Examiners, were raised during both review visits. The major concern was that regulations had been inconsistently applied to the detriment of some students. Neither review team was able to fully substantiate this although both seemed to believe it either occurred or was a real possibility. The Committee noted that the Academic Office was developing standard templates for awards and that there were a number of areas of discretion left to faculties.

The Group was asked to consider:

- (a) whether the existing flexibility within regulations should be reduced and University-wide standards set in relation to the current areas of discretion, where feasible
- (b) whether University regulations should be completely reviewed to reduce the risk of inconsistent application through the production of simplified standard regulations.

2 REVIEW

The Working Group noted the importance of accuracy in course regulations and other information provided to students. Regulations should be fair and easily understood by students and staff. They should not however be so restrictive as to prevent the course and modules objectives being met.

The Group noted that confusion regarding course regulations largely arose from infrequent usage, inconsistency with University regulations, the frequency of changes and differing interpretations. Regular changes in Course Directors and a lack of training in this area were also factors. The development of Course Directors' handbooks by some Faculties was considered relevant.

The Group recognised the contribution of regulations to

- the maintenance of standards for University and other awards
- equitable treatment for all students for the same award and course.

The Group noted that the increasing external demands placed on students (finance, employment, etc) could impact on student performance. The 'extenuating circumstances' clause allowed Boards of Examiners to take account of such matters. However, it was considered that provision of greater flexibility within course structures and delivery would serve to support students in the changing learning environment.

3 FORMAT AND WORDING OF REGULATIONS

The Working Group noted that the University has general regulations for awards and in some awards detailed principles relating primarily to assessment and final award (degrees, DipHEs, postgraduate awards). Such principles are incorporated into regulations for HND/Cs, Diplomas, Certificates, Advanced Diplomas, Advanced Certificates and Graduate Diplomas.

The Group reviewed in detail a draft template for degrees and outline templates for other awards. In order to achieve greater clarity and consistency, it **recommends** the adoption of standard templates for all awards. A proposed template for degrees is attached (Appendix 1).

These will be made available on the University's website. Course directors complete relevant sections.

4 REGULATIONS AND PRINCIPLES, AREAS OF DISCRETION

The Working Group reviewed the University's general course regulations and areas of discretion.

The Group confirmed that Faculties should retain discretion in the following areas:

- the extent to which the results obtained in the assessment for each module and year/level contributes to the overall grading (with the exception of level B results and the minimum contribution of the final year in Degrees and DipHEs)
- the method of assessment for each module
- the distribution of marks within modules (for each assessment element)
- the non-condonement of specific modules
- the option to require specific modules to be passed at a stated level to qualify for Commendation/Distinction (appropriate courses)
- the dates by which coursework must be submitted
- additional/specific entry requirement
- attendance requirements

The Group has recommended a consistent approach for the minimum level of performance at which condonement should apply (see 4.3 below). The current discretion available to faculties in this area should be removed.

The Group considered a paper from Mr C J Copeland, Faculty of Informatics, who had raised concerns at Senate about the operation of current condonement rules, particularly with reference to the application of weighting. No change is recommended.

In general, the current provisions and penalties in regulations and principles have been retained. The Working Group's **recommendations** are in the following areas (detailed in Appendix 2).

4.1 Admission to undergraduate courses (a)

The current regulations state that, with regards to admission, no subject may be counted at more than one level. It was noted that, while appropriate for A levels and GCSE, this should be revised for GNVQ.

4.2 Exemption (b)

Students must register for the final third of the course at the University, an amendment in wording is **recommended** to extend this general rule to cover exemptions in validated courses in other institutions (where practice should follow the University rule).

4.3 Contribution of final level to award (Degree and Honours degree) (c)

The relevant principle requires the whole of the final level to contribute at least 50% to the calculation of the overall result for the award, but this relates in practice to the Honours degree. In view of the fact that University Degrees comprise a minimum of only 40 credit points at level D (Honours degree 120), the **recommendation** is made that the credit points at this level contribute at least one third to the calculation of the overall result for non-Honours degrees.

In addition the Group notes that in practice no course regulations attribute a 50% weighting from the level D result to the calculation of the classification of the Honours degree and **recommends** that the minimum be raised to 60%.

4.4 Condonement (d)

The Working Group considers that the current 30% minimum for condonement in undergraduate courses is set too low for 'a near miss' and **recommends** 35% (45% Master's) as the standard. This would also ensure greater consistency across the University as some Faculties already set condonement at this level.

4.5 Consequences of failure (e)

Principles are revised to introduce greater consistency, and (to a minor extent) generosity in the spirit of CATS. Currently where failure is in modules to a value greater than 50 credits, all semester written examinations have been required to be repeated. It is **recommended** that only failed assessment is required to be repeated. In addition, it is **recommended** that the requirement for such failed examinations to be repeated '*once only*' in pre-final years in Degrees, DipHEs, HNDs, HNCs and part-time access courses years should not apply until the second attempt. (In Diplomas, Certificates and Advanced Diplomas, Certificates and Graduate Diplomas and full-time access courses only one attempt is allowed.)

4.6 Award of Distinction in Master's degrees (f)

It was considered that the current regulation is ambiguous and a revised wording is proposed to reflect the expectation of a Distinction level of performance in at least 90 credit points. The current wording could be interpreted as 90 or 120 credits.

Other Matters

The Group also considered the position of students admitted with advanced standing to the final level in courses where earlier levels contributed to the final award. The Working Group was of the view that such students' final result should be assessed in accordance with the standard course regulations, using the evidence from the accredited prior learning, ie marks in previous assessment.

The Group noted one area which needed consideration within Faculties but was not an issue for general course regulations. In some circumstances, effectively the 'same' module contributed to more than one course. The assessment weighting between coursework and examination was the only area of difference in modules which were the same in all other aspects – aims, objectives, content, teaching and assessment methods. It was considered that the assessment strategy should be consistent with the aims of the module and not determined by an overriding course assessment policy in this regard.

5 TIMING OF CHANGES

In the interests of clarity and fairness, the Working Group recommends that, in general, any approved changes to regulations are applied from the following academic year, unless they are to the advantage of students, when they might be introduced from the current session, if practicable. Consequently it is **recommended** that 4.5 above apply this session and 4.4 from 2000/2001.

Amendments should continue to be permitted following a student's registration in order to ensure that, as far as possible, only one set of regulations apply to a particular course.