General Comments on the Draft Degree Regulations – External Examiners

I have now read the draft regulations and they are very comprehensive. In my experience (which is fairly limited) I have always appreciated having very clear guidance when in an exam board meeting and faced with having to make decisions which ultimately impact on individual students. So I think these regulations will be very useful. (CEL)

Thank you for your email. I am content with all the paperwork. (LY)

I have no problems with the proposed regulations. (DB)

Thank you for the updated postgraduate taught regulations (February 09 2012). As I do not examine on any undergraduate programmes for The University of Manchester I will limit myself to commenting only on the postgraduate element.

For me the post graduate regulations were clear and relatively short (always a joy) and I have no other comments to make about them than I appreciate the effort that has gone into their construction. (MR)

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I reviewed the documents sent to me. All seems reasonable to me. I have no comments to add. (COG)

Thank you for all the documentation that you have sent through to me recently. As new external examiner to Manchester (this is my first year in this role) I find it difficult to comment on the efficacy or otherwise of the changes in regulations. Having looked at them they appear to be clear and reflect some internal consistency. (SW)

UG regulations; I fail to see the justification (at 45) for no reassessment at all in the final year – some institutions (for reasons that remain obscure to me) do not allow reassessment in the final term, however to my mind having allowed reassessment earlier in the degree I do not support its withdrawal in the final year – there may be some discussion of progression, but as students have been inculcated in years one and two to the availability of reassessment, to make it unavailable in year three seems to me to be inequitable and un-justified for anything but administrative reasons related to getting all students graduated (or not) at the same time – I have worked in the past at a institution which allowed reassessment throughout and it did not seem to me to be the end of the world; (CM)

Thank you for your recent email postgraduate taught regulations and mark review by submitted work. I commend both papers and have no further comments to make. (LY)

Since this is my first year and hence I am finding my feet, I have NO real comment to make on the documentation (other than to say, it all seems clear and useful to me). (AH)

Thank you for your message and attachments below, and for the opportunity to comment on the new regulations. I would like to comment on situations where a student's marks for a postgraduate taught programme are in the "boundary zone" between two degree outcomes e.g. between "Pass" and Merit", or between "Merit" and"Distinction".

The background to my comment is a situation that arose last November for a student in the ************ MSc course (student ref. **********) - for which I am an external examiner. This student achieved >70% in both the taught-average and dissertation components of the MSc,
but their overall result was reduced to a "Pass" because of one failed exam. My fellow external examiners and I considered that this "Pass" result was almost certain to under-represent the true value of the student (e.g. to an employer) and that consequently the student could be justifiably aggrieved. I recommended in my External Examiner's report that the achievement of Distinction-level marks in both components should be used to offset the failed exam - so that the student should be awarded at least an overall result of "Merit".

I note that under the new regulations student XXXXXX would have received a "Merit" by virtue of achieving an average mark of >60; however, they would not have received a "Distinction" because they could not have passed all course units at the first attempt without compensation. It follows that the new regulations would have the effect of awarding student XXXXX a "Merit", which is what I recommended in my External Examiner's report. I therefore consider that the new regulations would deliver a more just outcome for students like XXXXX, and I am therefore in favour of this particular new provision within the regulations. (RT)

Thanks for this. I've looked over the attached documents, and I have no comments on the Postgraduate Regulations, other than to say that if I am correct in my interpretation, then the new regulations seem to suggest that students who have an average below a critical threshold (70.0, 60.0) in the taught elements of their masters, but an overall average above that threshold would now gain a higher classification (e.g. 67 average in taught element, 80 for a dissertation would produce a distinction overall). This seems to me different from the practice in the last ***** board, where if I recall correctly students were being expected to perform at the higher level in both taught AND dissertation elements. If this is the case, then I strongly feel that the new regulations are better in that they allow students who have made significant improvements in their level of performance over the year to be credited accordingly. (GW)

Further to your email related to the above, I can confirm that I am happy with the proposed changes and welcome the opportunity for students to be offered a viva opportunity where appropriate. (RA)

I am not entirely clear about 'rule H36' (referred to in the taught PG documents): if this refers to point H.36 in the draft PG regulations, then the table at the end of that document seems to say something different from the wording of the entry above. Or am I misinterpreting something? (LP)

Thank you for the draft documents for the new Taught Degree regulations. My only comment is that the Postgraduate Taught Degree Regulations do not appear to contain mention of the possible use of viva of Postgraduate Masters students within the boundary zone (Appendix A, Stage 2: Mark Review). This seems to be different from the equivalent section in the Undergraduate Degree Regulations (Appendix A, Stage 2: Mark Review and use of Viva (Optional)). I apologise if I am overlooking or failing to understand something, but does this mean that the use of viva is to be discontinued for postgraduate Masters degrees? (JW)

I have had a close look at the regulations and would welcome clarification on the following:

UG - Reg 3 - I cannot see the justification for allowing students 'to take credit at a ... lower level in order to achieve the minimum credit for the award'. Surely all credit must be at or above the required level.

UG - Reg 32 - Should this not read 'Failed credit for...'?

UG - Reg 46 - A 'have' is missing from before 'passed'
UG - Appendix A (Consideration of bachelor degree students within the boundary zone by mark distribution) - should this not read '... 2/3 of the level 6 credits must be at 70% ...'?

PG - Reg 3 - I cannot see the justification for allowing students 'to take credit at a ... lower level in order to achieve the minimum credit for the award'. Surely all credit must be at or above the required level.

PG - Reg 7 - I must admit that I have never come across a 'rescind' option before. I would welcome further details of what a 'rescind' entails. Does it require the student to return to the University any certificates/diplomas or to sign a declaration rescinding the original qualification?

PG - Reg 9 - Should the reference to 'Professional Bodies' be extended to cover PSRBs (as in Reg 13?)

PG - Reg 12 - there is reference here to 'options', but only one option is listed

PG - Reg 35 - I am not clear why a School should be allowed discretion any further requirement for a distinction if the award is a University award

Stage 2 Review (UG/PG)

It is unclear why there should not be the viva option at PG level. I would also suggest that as an intial step the School should review the student's work and if it thinks there is a case to raise the student's mark this case should then be presented to the external examiner to confirm or otherwise. This would be more in line with existing practice where the external examiner confirms School decisions. (DP)

I am satisfied that the programme developments and revised regulations are a positive step forward and agree with the changes. (SP)

E16 - I can see why you are proposing this but am anxious that this might penalise overseas students who are struggling to get to grips with the British way of studying. I take this to mean that fails in the compensation zone cannot be compensated if there are any fails below the compensation zone. My preference would be a simple requirement that those students with fails below the compensation zone, taking into account the limit on the amount of credit that can be compensated, be required to retake the below-compensatable fails.

E22 - I am sympathetic to the spirit of this in that 'time-wasters' should not have the capacity to resit. Clearly operational rules will need to be formulated to indicate what level and form of warning is required. My slight anxiety about this rule is that it is possible to envisage cases where students are in some kind of distress that is not recognised until after the right to resubmit has been refused. (AP)

I am happy with the regulations for ug taught programmes. I would just make two comments:

1. It seems to me that there are sufficient criteria to make a clear recommendation for a degree class at the boundaries without also having the option for a viva.

In my experience examining students by a viva exam often fails to distinguish between for example a good 2 I and a first class student due to largely personality issues that arise from some students at this stage of their careers being too nervous to interview well. I note that the regulations recognise this in that vivas will have to be approved by the Faculty and that provision will have to be made for students to be given prior accredited training in what to expect in a viva exam. This seems to me to add very little to the problem and I would therefore recommend that vivas not be an additional option because you now have
sufficiently robust regulations to be able to make clear and defensible decisions for students at the borderline.

2. I suggest that there should be an opportunity for students to meet independently with the external examiner to discuss any concerns that they have about the course – e.g. at some point half way through the final year. This is a common mechanism used by many universities which do not have viva exams to ensure that students have a voice in their examination process.

A minor typo needs correction in section F, point 29 – omit “is”. (CE)

As external examiner for the MA programmes of the Nazarene Theological College, I have reviewed the revised regulations (3 docs.) and write now to express my admiration for the well-considered measures being put in place for the maintenance of appropriate undergraduate and master's-level procedures and standards. (SB)