Report of APC Progression Harmonisation Working Group

Brief description of the paper

This second report of the APC Progression Harmonisation Working Group sets out their recommendations as to progression criteria harmonisation and further work indicated.

Action requested

APC is asked

• To consider and endorse one of the Group’s general recommendations (sections 2.1 and 2.2) and
• To approve the progression policy recommendation for “Incremental” Masters programmes

Resource implications

Does the paper have resource implications? Yes. If progression criteria harmonisation changes are adopted there will be administrative costs both centrally and in Schools and Colleges associated with updating and clarifying course and programme documentation, including DPTs. If the option that further work be undertaken is endorsed this will require significant interaction from colleagues across the University.

Risk Assessment

Does the paper include a risk analysis? Not directly, though the identified need to clearly identify a University standard of practice indicates underlying risks of differential practice potentially leading to differential outcomes.

Equality and Diversity

Does the paper have equality and diversity implications? Yes. Progression criteria, and permitted flexibility of Boards of Examiners in applying these, must be clearly stated so that equitable standards are applied for all students.

Freedom of information

Can this paper be included in open business? Yes.

Originators of the paper

Professor Larry Hurtado, Convenor / Ms Judith Miller, Head of Academic Affairs
11 May 2009
1 Background

Following the earlier work of the APC EUCLID Assessment Group, the APC Progression Harmonisation Working Group was tasked with advising how a significant harmonisation of progression criteria for students could best be achieved. The remit included Undergraduate Honours and taught Postgraduate programmes. The overall aim of the Group’s work was to increase transparency for students and staff regarding progression criteria, and hence progression decisions.

The APC Progression Harmonisation Working Group reported to APC on 4 February 2009, and subsequently was asked by APC to:

- review their proposals and additional variant policy options
- provide further clarification of the practical implementation of principles proposed

The Working Group developed their proposals and sought comments in consultation with Directors of Teaching Organisation and Directors of Graduate Schools. The Working Group is grateful to those colleagues who interacted with the proposals and provided such useful and enlightening comments and feedback. The Group Convenor will be happy to discuss with APC in more detail the feedback received.

2 Outcomes

The Group agreed that the aims of any progression or award policy, and related regulations, must be to clearly state the criteria which students must meet, and against which their academic merit will be judged, in order to achieve the minimum standards required to be permitted to progress to the next stage of their study on a taught programme of study.

2.1 Diversity of Practice

Through the feedback provided the Working Group found that a wide diversity of practice and interpretation of the academic regulations existed, and that this diversity had the potential to significantly impact on progression and award decisions. The Group believes that this diversity of practice demonstrates a strong rationale for there to be further widespread discussion so that a University standard of practice in progression and award decision-making can be agreed. This then could be used to form the basis of revised regulations.

The Working Group strongly recommends that this matter be remitted to the appropriate Committee of Senate, to oversee further work.

2.2 Progression Criteria Recommendations

In light of the diversity noted above the Group considered whether it could usefully make any recommendations at this time on progression criteria harmonisation. We have chosen to do so, but note that if adopted these will have an impact on the practices of a number of programmes across the institution.
This will be true even though these recommendations are provided in the context of the current Assessment Regulations – that is, in a context where Boards of Examiners retain the discretion to respond flexibly within prescribed limits to approve progression or to award degrees (e.g., where special circumstances and/or incomplete assessment regulations would apply).

The Working Group therefore recommends to APC the adoption of the following harmonisation of progression criteria:

For Undergraduate degrees\(^1\) (including Undergraduate Integrated Masters):
- achievement of a minimum of 40% (pass) in each course counting towards the progression or award decision
- plus the option of an additional requirement that a mark of 50%\(^2\) be achieved in designated (“core”) courses for the specific degree programme (i.e., those courses where a good understanding is deemed essential for progression/award in the particular subject)

For Postgraduate Certificate / Diploma
- achievement of a minimum of 40% (pass) in each course counting towards the progression or award decision

For Postgraduate Masters (Standard)
- achievement of a minimum of 40% (pass) in each course counting toward the 120-credit taught component, plus achievement of an overall aggregate (mean) mark of at least 50%\(^2\)
- plus the option of an additional requirement that a mark of 50%\(^2\) be achieved in designated courses for the specific masters programme

As noted above, the Working Group recognises that current diversity of practice would mean that adoption of these recommendations would require changes to Board practice in at least some areas. The Group again strongly recommends that, if APC feels unable to endorse this recommended harmonisation at this time, the matter be remitted to the appropriate successor Committee of Senate for further work to be undertaken.

2.3 “Incremental” Masters programmes

There is no basis on which progression criteria need be changed to reflect mode of study (full-time, part-time, e-delivery). However, in the past few years PGT programmes have been developed which might be considered “Incremental” Masters.

The fundamental difference is that students on “Incremental” Masters programmes apply for, and are registered for, a series of structured exit awards: a PG Certificate, then a PG Diploma, and finally a PG Masters, often with separate periods of professional practice being undertaken in between each award and registration point.

\(^1\) Excluding professional programmes in the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and the MBChB programme, which are marked and have pass rates set according to the different marking schemes published in Undergraduate Assessment Regulations 8.3 and 8.4

\(^2\) 50% being the only higher mark requirement to be set, except where external/professional accreditation requires achievement of an alternative, clearly stated, mark
This raises a potential issue of students who have successfully achieved the requirements for the PG Cert and Diploma stages (with a minimum pass mark of 40%) then being able to progress to the Masters stage on a different basis from those undertaking ‘standard’ Masters programmes (i.e., progression/pass criteria of a minimum 50% mark).

The Working Group recommends that the documentation and course/programme information for such programmes, including DPTs, be clarified to clearly specify that for those following or potentially following an “Incremental” Masters programme:

- the minimum criteria for the award of PG Cert and PG Diploma are not themselves sufficient for acceptance to the final PG Masters stage, and
- students must achieve a minimum of 40% (pass) in each course counting toward the 120-credit taught component (during PG Cert and PG Diploma work), plus achievement of an overall aggregate (mean) mark of at least 50% in order to be eligible for acceptance to the PG Masters dissertation stage.

No matter what decision is taken regarding the use of average marks in standard programmes, the use of an overall average mark would appear to be appropriate for such “Incremental” Masters because periods of intervening professional practice are, at present, a common requirement for progression through such programmes.

**APC is invited to approve this policy recommendation.**

Professor Larry Hurtado, Convenor / Ms Judith Miller, Head of Academic Affairs
11 May 2009
Appendix 1

Working Group Membership

Professor Larry Hurtado, Convener
Professor Jake Ansell, Dean of Learning and Teaching, CHSS
Dr Nick Hulton, Dean of Learning and Teaching, CSCE
Professor Allan Cumming, Director of Undergraduate Learning and Teaching, CMVM
College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
Professor Simon van Heyningen, Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching
Miss Victoria Heathwood, Administrative support

The following joined the Group for further discussions:
Professor Jeremy Bradshaw, CMVM
Ms Judith Miller, Head of Academic Affairs

Appendix 2

Consultation

Method: Recommendations were drafted and these, with associated paperwork were made available to key users (Directors of Teaching Organisation, Directors of Graduate Schools) via the web. The consultation was opened 7 April 2009 and colleagues were invited by e-mail to post responses to a dedicated Wiki or to send e-mail responses separately. A further reminder e-mail was sent prior to the deadline for responses of 24 April 2009.

Response: Colleges from nine Schools responded directly covering a range of UG and PGT roles. Comments from one College Office colleague were also received. Some comments confirmed that the proposals were sufficiently clear and workable; others offered points requiring clarification or points of concern with respect to current practice. The Working Group had to assume that an absence of a direct response indicated general contentment with the proposals.

Thanks: The Working Group wishes to thank those colleagues who interacted with the proposals and provided such useful and enlightening comments and feedback.