College of Science and Engineering  
The University of Edinburgh  
College Learning and Teaching Committee  
Tuesday 18 October 2016

Resits and Academic Failure Task Group: Consultation document

Executive Summary
This paper summarises the options discussed and approach recommended by the CSPC Task Group on Resits and Academic Failure. It details proposed changes to current regulations, raising a number of questions for discussion and feedback from Colleges.

How does this align with the University’s strategic plans and priorities?
Aligns with the Strategic Goal of Excellence in Education and the Strategic Theme of Outstanding Student Experience.

Action requested
For discussion and to consider recommendations

How will any action agreed be implemented and communicated?
Feedback from Colleges is requested by 28 October 2016. In CSE, this will be discussed with representatives from Academic Services during College Learning and Teaching Committee.

Resource / Risk / Compliance
1. Resource implications (including staffing)
   None – currently at consultation stage
2. Risk assessment
   N/A – any risk assessment to be conducted by Academic Services
3. Equality and Diversity
   N/A – any required Equality Impact Assessment to be conducted by Academic Services
4. Freedom of information
   Open

Key words
Resits, failure, progression, assessment

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(Presented by Tom Ward, Director of Academic Services)
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1. Background

At its April 2016 meeting, Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee approved the formation of a short-life task group to develop revised regulations surrounding resit entitlement and academic failure for undergraduate students. The Task Group included academic and administrative representatives from within each College. The Task Group focused on the provision of resits for non-Honours undergraduate students, and did not consider changes relating to Honours or postgraduate taught students.

2. Existing regulations related to resit entitlement and academic failure

The below provides an outline of the content relating to resit entitlement and unsatisfactory academic progress in the existing (2016/17) Taught Assessment Regulations and Undergraduate Degree Regulations.

**Taught Assessment Regulations**

- Undergraduate students are “entitled to a maximum of four assessment attempts” for SCQF level 7 and 8 courses, or for courses at levels 9 to 11 if they are non-Honours students (TAR 27); the four attempts must take place over no more than two academic sessions (27.2).
- Students may be entitled to fewer than four attempts under Professional and Statutory Regulatory Body requirements (27.1), or visa requirements (27.8).
- “The University may exclude students who do not make satisfactory academic progress or do not engage with their studies” (67); progress requirements will be set out in Degree Programme Tables, programme handbooks and/or course handbooks (67.1).

**Undergraduate Degree Regulations**

- Students must attain credits and other requirements as set out in Degree Programme Tables and programme/course handbooks (36).
- “In order to progress”, full-time students must gain 80 credits by the end of Year 1; 200 by the end of Year 2.
- Students who do not attain 120 credits in any year may be required to take resit exams etc. in order to make good the deficit (37).
- “Students who do not attain sufficient credits within the specified period may be excluded for unsatisfactory academic progress” (38).

**Interpretation**

- The Taught Assessment Regulations can be interpreted as implying that students are, by default, entitled to the maximum of four assessment attempts, provided that there are no PSRB or visa requirements.
- In practice, students may be excluded for “unsatisfactory academic progress” before having had four attempts at any single assessment. There is a lack of clarity within the regulations as to what constitutes “unsatisfactory academic progress”.
- Students may also be offered up to four attempts at one or more assessments having failed to meet progression requirements.
- The regulations are, therefore, contradictory as regards “entitlement” to resits.
3. Issues presented by the existing regulations

The lack of clarity in the existing regulations regarding “entitlement” to four attempts, and what constitutes “unsatisfactory academic progress” raises the following critical issues:

- Confusion among students regarding the academic requirements to continue their studies (especially where they have not met requirements to progress to the next year of programme);
- Inconsistency in treatment of students with regard to whether four or fewer attempts are offered at courses.

The Task Group also raised the issue that there is currently a lack of guidance as to when it is appropriate to offer assessment-only resit attempts, as opposed to resits with attendance of courses.

4. Benchmarking

The Group was presented with benchmarking information regarding entitlement to resits within the sector (Russell Group and Scotland), finding that the current UoE arrangements are broadly comparable to those elsewhere in Scotland, but that it was common at other institutions to include a discretionary element to any entitlement to resits.

5. Data regarding resit attempts

Student Systems provided data relating to numbers of students availing themselves of third and fourth attempts at assessment for courses. While it was unclear whether this data included those students who had been awarded null sits for earlier attempts, it did indicate that a significant number of third and fourth attempts were being utilised. For example, during 2014-15, there were 594 third attempts and 283 fourth attempts.

6. Options for change

The Group was presented with two options for a revised approach to regulation around resits and academic failure for non-Honours students:

1. Offering two attempts as an entitlement, with a discretionary allowance of up to a further two attempts offered by the College or School;
2. Offering four attempts as an absolute entitlement.

The Group dismissed the option of offering four attempts as an absolute entitlement for the following reasons:

- An absolute entitlement to four attempts may prevent meaningful discussion with students about failure at an early stage;
- Some students may spend further years pursuing resits for programmes in which they have no realistic chance of success;
- Students may be encouraged to “game” the system, skipping some assessments in order to tailor their exam diets.

The Group gave consideration to the option of offering two attempts as an entitlement, with up to a further two attempts to be offered at the discretion of the College/School, raising the following points:

- Decisions on discretionary resits should be devolved no further than School level (i.e. not to subject areas), in order to ensure consistency.
The Group agreed that it should not be necessary for the College to exercise a judgement over the discretionary allowance for individual students, but that it should retain responsibility for this, and would likely devolve this as a matter of course to Schools.

Where students have failed courses in two different Schools at the second attempt, a different decision may be made by each School as to whether the student may take advantage of further attempts; the Group agreed that this was tolerable, as is the case for Special Circumstances.

7. Proposed changes

The Group agreed to propose an approach based on the following principles:

- Undergraduate students are entitled to two assessment attempts for courses at SCQF level 7 and 8, but may be offered up to a further two attempts at the discretion of the College;
- Some programmes may operate progression requirements which mean that students are entitled to only one attempt for some courses, if they are to remain on their Honours programme;
- Non-Honours undergraduate students are entitled to two assessment attempts for courses at SCQF level 9 to 12, but may be offered up to a further two attempts at the discretion of the College;
- Honours and taught postgraduate students are entitled to one assessment attempt for courses at SCQF level 9 to 12;
- Where a student has failed a course (or courses) twice, but has met progression requirements, they will progress, and the School will offer up to two further attempts for failed courses in the next session;
- Where a student has not met progression requirements, after failing a course (or courses) twice, they will be referred for consideration under the Procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Studies; if the College (or School, with delegated authority) is content to allow the student to continue, the School may offer up to two further attempts at failed courses in the next session; if the College (or School, with delegated authority) is not content to allow the student to continue, they will be excluded for unsatisfactory academic progress.

Other aspects of the University’s approach to resits would remain unchanged. These include:

- Students may not be offered more than four assessment attempts for a course;
- All permitted assessment attempts for a course must take place over no more than two academic sessions (unless College grants an exemption);
- Students on Tier 4 visas may have a reduced entitlement to resit;
- Where professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) requirements apply, students may have an increased or reduced entitlement to resit attempts.

8. Consultation

The proposed changes are set out in a draft set of regulations (Appendix A). Colleagues are invited to review the draft regulations, and consider the broad approach proposed by the Task Group. The Group would particularly welcome feedback on the following issues:
a) Would the proposals clarify the University’s position regarding entitlement to resits?
b) Do the proposals raise any concerns?
c) In exercising a discretionary entitlement…
   i. Is it appropriate that this be determined at School or College level?
   ii. Should this vary depending on the student’s academic profile?
   iii. Should the default position be to offer additional attempts? If so, in what circumstances should they not be offered?
d) Some colleagues have expressed a desire to set an absolute entitlement at four attempts. Would colleagues be content to allow a student to continue where they had…
   • Failed all 120 credits in Y1 at the first attempt (no Special Circumstances);
   • Failed all 120 credits at second attempt in the August diet (no Special Circumstances), with lower marks across the board than at the first attempt?

We would be grateful to receive any comments on the proposals by 28th October 2016 (adam.bunni@ed.ac.uk).

Adam Bunni,
Head of Governance and Regulatory Team, Academic Services
22nd September 2016
These draft regulations illustrate the proposals in the consultation paper. Key changes to existing regulations are highlighted with comments. Where text is not highlighted, this reflects existing content.

**Teach Assessment Regulations**

**Regulation 27  Resit assessment**

Undergraduate students are entitled to two assessment attempts for courses at Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework level 7 and 8, but may be offered up to a further two attempts at the discretion of the College. Non-Honours undergraduate students are entitled to two assessment attempts for courses at SCQF level 9 to 11, but may be offered up to a further two attempts at the discretion of the College. Honours and taught postgraduate students are entitled to one assessment attempt for courses at SCQF level 9 to 12. Where professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB) requirements apply, students may have an increased or reduced entitlement to resit attempts. Students will not be offered more than four assessment attempts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application of the regulation</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>27.1</strong> Where resit assessment is offered, this must be taken at the next available opportunity.</td>
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<td><strong>27.2</strong> Where an undergraduate student fails an SCQF level 7 or 8 course (or courses) at the second attempt, the School will take the following action:</td>
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<tr>
<td>a) Where the student has met the requirements for progression to the next year of programme, the School will offer up to a further two assessment attempts during the following academic session. The first of these additional attempts may be on an assessment-only basis, or with attendance of teaching.</td>
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<td>b) Where the student has not met the requirements for progression to the next year of study, the School will refer the student for interview under the Procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Studies (see also regulation 67 on Unsatisfactory academic progress). If the College is content to allow the student to continue with their studies, the School will offer up to a further two assessment attempts for any failed courses during the following academic session. The first of these additional attempts may be on an assessment-only basis, or with attendance of teaching.</td>
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<td><strong>27.3</strong> All permitted assessment attempts for a course must take place over no more than two academic sessions.</td>
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<td><strong>27.4</strong> Some Honours programmes require students to pass core courses at the first attempt in the first or second year in order to progress to the Junior Honours year. Any such requirements will be specified in the Degree Programme Table or programme handbook for the relevant programme.</td>
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<td><strong>27.5</strong> Non-attendance or non-submission is considered an assessment attempt.</td>
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Commented [BA1]: Currently "a maximum of four".

Commented [BA2]: This reflects current practice.

Commented [BA3]: Consistent with the existing Procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Studies.

Commented [BA4]: This is additional content to reflect current practice with greater clarity.
27.6 Where an assessment attempt has been affected by special circumstances, a Board of Examiners may set aside an assessment attempt by offering a null sit. Null sits do not count toward the maximum number of permitted attempts.

27.7 Students are not allowed to resit a course or components of a course that they have passed.

27.8 Re-assessment attempts are not generally permitted for courses at SQCF level 9 and above for Honours and postgraduate students since the award of Honours and taught postgraduate degrees permit the award of credit on aggregate. Where resits are permitted for professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements, any award, classification or progression decision must use the result obtained at the first attempt.

27.9 The Curriculum and Student Progression Committee decides whether a programme may offer resits which are required for professional, statutory or regulatory body requirements for courses at SCQF level 9 and above for Honours and taught postgraduate students. This decision is based on a case proposed by the relevant College.

27.10 Students who are subject to immigration control (non-European Economic Area “EEA” nationals) may have restrictions as a result of being in the UK on a Tier 4 General visa. UK government legislation in this area supersedes academic regulations. For example, maximum time limits on how long a non-EEA national can study in the UK are in place which may reduce a non-EEA student’s entitlement to resits. The International Office provides advice and guidance to students and staff in relation to the immigration regulations and may be contacted to verify the implication of a resit opportunity for a non-EEA student: Email: isas@ed.ac.uk

27.11 Boards of Examiners need to publish the requirements for resits for those programmes that they are responsible for, and take the same approach to resits for all students on a particular course, except where a student’s previous attempt is a null sit.

27.12 Boards of Examiners should set requirements at resit that are as demanding as those made of students at the first attempt.

27.13 Students are informed by the Board of Examiners about the requirements to pass the course at a further attempt. Resit methods need not be the same as those used to assess the learning outcomes at the first attempt, but all relevant learning outcomes must be assessed. Resit arrangements must give students a genuine opportunity to pass the course. Boards of Examiners choose between two options to achieve this:

(a) Carry forward the passed component of assessment (coursework or examination) and require the student to retake the failed element, i.e.:

(a.1) Where students have failed the in-course assessment component but performed satisfactorily in the examination

Commented [BA5]: This text has been reworked for clarity.
component, they are allowed to carry forward the examination mark and take the in-course assessment component again. The weightings of the components of assessment remain the same.

(a.2) Where students have failed the examination component but performed satisfactorily in the in-course assessment component, they are allowed to carry forward the in-course assessment mark and take the examination component again. The weightings of the components of assessment remain the same.

(a.3) Where students have failed both the examination component and the in-course assessment component, they are required to resit both the coursework and examination options.

(b) Set an assessment covering all learning outcomes for the course, and weight this as 100% of the course result.

27.14 If repetition of the in-course assessed work is not possible in the vacation, the student, with the permission of the relevant Head of School, may be allowed to repeat the coursework alone in the following year. Students not receiving such permission may be permitted by the relevant Head of School to repeat the course, including examination, in the following year.

27.15 The full range of marks offered by the relevant Common Marking Scheme is available at resit assessment.

27.16 Where a degree programme’s Honours classification is based on the final year only, students are entitled to resit assessment in non-final years, in accordance with 27.1 to 27.4, above.

27.17 In the case of collaborative degrees, where not otherwise stipulated in the collaborative agreement, any permitted second attempt must normally be within two years of the first attempt.

Regulation 67 Unsatisfactory academic progress

The University may exclude students who do not meet requirements for progression within their studies.

Application of the regulation

67.1 Degree Regulations. Degree Programme Tables, programme handbooks and/or course handbooks contain details of the progress which students are expected to achieve within given periods, and warnings that students are liable to be considered for exclusion if these expectations are not fulfilled.

67.2 Students who are at risk of failing to meet the published progression criteria are notified of this before any recommendation for exclusion is made to the College.
67.3 The College is the final judge of the academic basis for exclusion on the grounds of unsatisfactory progress as specified in the degree regulations. The student has the right to appeal to the Appeal Committee on specific grounds. 
www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/withdrawal_exclusion_from_study.pdf

67.4 Some degree programmes leading to a professional qualification include Fitness to Practise considerations. Any issues of unsatisfactory progress in relation to fitness to practise are dealt with according to the University’s Fitness to Practise procedures. 
www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/fitness_to_practise.pdf

67.5 A student declared to have made unsatisfactory progress under professional Fitness to Practise requirements is normally excluded from all further attendance at classes and examinations leading to the professional qualification, but is entitled to apply to the College for permission to re-enter for assessment in a suitable alternative programme not leading to professional qualification.

Undergraduate Degree Regulations

36. In order to be entitled to the award of a specific degree, students must attain the credits and other requirements for each stage of study, as outlined in the relevant Degree Programme Table. In addition, students must meet any other requirements set out in their programme and/or course handbook.

37. Any student who has not attained the required credit points for their year of programme by the end of the relevant session may be required to take resit exams, supplementary or alternative assessments, or additional courses to make good the deficit where permitted.

38. In order to progress to the next year of programme, a student must attain the following minimum number of credits (following the resit diet, where offered):

- 80 credit points by the end of Year 1;
- 200 credit points by the end of Year 2;
- 360 credit points by the end of Year 3;
- 480 credit points by the end of Year 4;
- 600 credit points by the end of Year 5 for Integrated Masters.

Where a programme requires students to attain more than the minimum number of credits in order to progress, this will be specified in the Degree Programme Table.

39. Students who do not attain sufficient credits to progress within the specified period may be excluded for unsatisfactory academic progress. The College will follow the procedure for Withdrawal and Exclusion from Studies: 
www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/withdrawal_exclusion_from_study.pdf