

ASSESSMENT BOARDS: OPERATION OF DISCRETION

The operation of discretion in Assessment Boards requires the application of academic judgement. As such, it is not possible, or desirable, to legislate for every individual case. Consistency and equity must be maintained however which leads us to the development of guidelines. In the interests of consistency, it is important that these guidelines are followed across all programme areas as they are affected unless there are **exceptional** and **compelling** reasons in an individual case for an alternative course of action. Any such case must be the subject of discussion and agreement at the appropriate Assessment Board, agreed by external examiners present where relevant, and fully documented.

1. Second Reassessment Opportunity

The decision to offer a second reassessment opportunity is a Progression/Award Board discretion, informed by any recommendations from Module Boards and the overall student profile. There is a restriction on the number of reassessment opportunities available to students and Boards must be cognisant that the second reassessment opportunity is also the final one. The guideline here is that students who have failed at the first reassessment should be offered a second reassessment opportunity unless there are compelling reasons why not (refusal to refer at this stage will inevitably cause the student to fail). Such reasons might include:

- professional practice modules where it may be inappropriate to offer a further attempt;
- instances where the student has a failing profile overall with no attempt made at the first reassessment.

It is essential that students who are offered a second (final) reassessment opportunity receive appropriate academic counselling and are fully supported. Boards may wish to consider alternative forms of assessment in these instances.

Where a student fails in their second attempt at reassessment, it may be possible for them to continue on course for an Ordinary Degree or to transfer to another course subject to Recognition of Prior Learning regulations and standard entry requirements.

2. Progression with outstanding referral

The regulations allow for a student to proceed with up to 40 credits of outstanding failure. The decision to allow this is a Progression/Award Board discretion which will be exercised in the light of the overall student profile and academic judgement in terms of the student's preparedness for study at the next level. It is important to remember that the permissive regulation to allow progression with outstanding referral is to ensure that students are not unnecessarily impeded in their studies. The guideline here is to allow progression with 20/30 credits of outstanding failure except where there are compelling reasons why not. Such reasons might include:

- Poor performance in core modules (<30%) which underpin further study at the next level

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- A weak overall profile which, in the Board's judgement, would not support the additional burden of carrying outstanding referral and would put the student's likely success at the next level in significant jeopardy.

Progression with 40 credits of outstanding failure is expected to be exceptional and may only be agreed where, in the Board's judgement, the student has the ability to complete successfully.

In determining whether to allow progression, Progression/Award Boards will take into account any outstanding deferrals. Progression with more than 40 credits outstanding is not permitted whether by referral or deferral.

3. Students not recommended for progression

Students who are not recommended for progression at the Reassessment Board, or who have failures (after reassessment) in more than 40 credits, may be referred to part-time study to access their final reassessment opportunity if it is considered they have potential to progress in the future. Such students may re-register for the outstanding failed modules **as part-time students**.

It is essential that all students who are allowed to progress with modules outstanding or to intermit their full-time studies to retake modules with/without attendance, receive proper guidance. This is to ensure a full understanding of the implications of the Assessment Board decision and the options available. All such students will be required to meet with their Programme Leader/personal tutor to complete a Learning Agreement prior to registration for the following year.

It is accepted that, in a small number of cases, discussion with the student may lead to an amended decision through Chair's Action where, for example, a student seeks a part-time registration having identified that progression with modules outstanding would be too burdensome.

A flowchart to guide Progression Boards in making decisions on progression is included under Appendix A to this document.

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4 Condonement

The guidelines are as follows:

- Condonement for non-core modules may be operated after the first sitting in the following circumstances:
 - In the case of marginal failure (35-39.99%) or single module failure down to 25% at Level Four only.
 - Finalists who would otherwise be prevented from graduating¹.

The first line for any other failed student is normally reassessment.

- Condonement after reassessment is a Progression/Award Board discretion which will be based on the higher of the two marks obtained. Given that condonement cannot be applied to core modules, it is expected that the provisions will be otherwise applied unless there are exceptional or compelling reasons for why not. Such reasons might include:
 - A failing profile which does not allow the student to progress even with condonements
 - A weak overall profile where, in the Board's judgement, the student's study at the next level would be seriously undermined by the application of condonement. In such cases a further (final) reassessment will be offered.
- Exceptionally, condonement may be offered against a deferral. In such cases the student will have the right to decline the condonement and take reassessment.
- Condonement at year 2 of a Bachelor degree should be used with care since students can only have 40 credits condoned overall for years 2 and 3 (Stage 2). The opportunity to progress students with outstanding referral will probably be a better option in most instances and it is a Progression Board's responsibility to be cognisant of this.
- Students offered condonement for any module which contributes to their overall classification will have the right to decline the condonement and take reassessment provided the University is notified by the published deadline.
- Where a student is exiting the University due to academic failure, condonement should not be used simply to improve a profile. Condonement should however be applied where this will directly result in the award of the highest exit qualification possible.

¹ Note that these students may choose to take reassessment rather than accept condonement where they may be able to improve their classification.

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5 Finalists: Honours Degrees, Diplomas of Higher Education & Foundation Degrees

Section J3 to the Academic Regulations sets out the criteria for award classification across the range of award types offered by the University. These regulations are absolute and where a student qualifies for a classification, no lesser class can be awarded aside from where malpractice is proven subsequent to the award being made.

Where however a student profile is considered to be borderline, Award Boards may look to use discretion to improve the classification awarded where specific measures for consideration are met. The measures for consideration are:

- Compensation within the Profile which supports a higher class
- A final year Average Percentage Mark (APM) in the higher class

The following examples demonstrate the two discretionary powers:

i. Compensation within the profile

The requirement for 50% of the module marks to be in or above the class awarded can also be achieved by compensating higher band marks against lower band marks eg:

76 66 65 64 63 63 63 59 | 59 58 58 57 54 50 45 45

APM = 59.06. In this example the 76 (first class) compensates for the 59 (lower second) and the student may be awarded a 2.1.

ii. Final Year APM

Where the average of final year module marks lies in the higher classification band eg:

Level 5
60 60 57 56 55 54

Level 6
63 61 60 60 60 59

Overall APM = 59.46%*

Level 6 APM = 60.5%

Student may be awarded a 2.1

**inc lowest mark discard and exit velocity*

When neither of these two criteria are met, a higher class cannot be considered

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If a student meets either of these measures, and the overall APM is within 2% of that class, it is standard practice to make the award of a higher class unless the Award Board accepts that there is a strong and justifiable academic argument against this. .

Occasionally, a student may meet the requirements of either or both of the discretionary measures but be more than 2% away from the overall APM for the higher class. In these cases the discretionary measures cannot be applied and the lower classification will stand.

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APPENDIX A:

Reassessment Board Guidance (Level Four)

- i) Apply condonement in up to 40 credits (down to a mark of 25%) where possible unless there is a compelling reason for why not to do so*;
- ii) Subsequent to the application of condonement, follow the guidance outlined below unless there is a strong justification for why not to do so;

Total Credits Passed	Recommendation
90+	Progress to Level Five ² - to complete Level Four reassessments alongside Level Five
80	Refer to Part Time study unless there is a strong and 'exceptional' argument from the Department for why the candidate should be allowed to continue
50-75	Refer to Part Time study
0-45	Fail and Withdraw

*Given that condonement cannot be applied to core modules, it is expected that the provision will be applied to non-core modules unless there is an exceptional reason for why not to do so. Such reasons might include:

- o A failing profile which does not allow the student to progress even with condonements
- o A weak overall profile where, in the Board's judgement, the student's study at the next level would be seriously undermined by the application of condonement.

² Note that progression will be for an Ordinary Degree where an eligible candidate has irredeemable failure (i.e. module recommendation = FF).

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Reassessment Board Guidance (Level Five)

- i) Apply condonement where appropriate* in up to 40 credits at Level Four (mark down to 25%) and 40 credits at Level Five (mark down to 30%);
- ii) Subsequent to the application of condonement, the Board should follow the guidance outlined below unless there are compelling reasons for why not to do so;

Total Credits Passed	Recommendation
210+	Progress to Level Six ³ - to complete Level Four/Five reassessments alongside Level Six
200 -205	Refer to Part Time study unless there is a strong and 'exceptional' argument from the Department for why the candidate should be allowed to continue
170-195	Refer to Part Time study
90-165	Fail and Withdraw

* The advice to the Board is that condonement should be applied where it will enable a candidate to progress or to remain on the programme. The Board should aim to use as little condonement as possible given that this will impact on the facility for use at Level Six - condonement should therefore not normally be used to lighten the load of reassessment.

³ Note that progression will be for an Ordinary Degree where an eligible candidate has irredeemable

Failure (i.e. module recommendation = FF).

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Owner: Helen Smallbone, Academic Registrar

Contact for queries: Academic Registry t: 7209 e: assessmentteam@edgehill.ac.uk

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Level Six (Award):

- i) Apply condonement where appropriate in up to 40 credits at Level Four (mark down to 25%) and 40 credits across either Level Five or Level Six (mark down to 30%);
- ii) Subsequent to the application of condonement, the Board should follow the guidance outlined below unless there are compelling reasons for why not to do so;

Total Credits Passed	Recommendation
360	Make Award
290- <360	Refer/Defer Nb Refer for Ordinary Degree if carrying irretrievable failure unless the APM for completed Level Six study is 50% or more in which case recommend Qualification to Study for Honours <i>Only in cases where the department can confirm that the student has not engaged with study for a significant period would a Fail and Withdraw be recommended.</i>
200 - 285	Fail and Withdraw - make Exit Award <i>In exceptional cases, where a strong argument is made that the student is engaged with the programme and [in the view of the Department] there is a reasonable prospect of successful completion, candidates may be recommended for continuation.</i>