INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS: 
STAGE 1 FAILURES AND TRANSFERS

Guidance on Stage 1 Failures by Mr Simon Pallett:
The removal of the second resit attempt has highlighted the very difficult decisions that boards of examiners may face where students fail their second attempt at a Stage 1 module. I have been asked to provide some guidance on how boards should deal with these situations, although it cannot and arguably should not prevent our failing some candidates at this very early stage. Indeed it could be argued that it was designed to do this.

The following guidance applies to Stage 1 failures. Different considerations relate to failures in later stages, given that the candidate’s right to an honours’ degree is not affected by 20 credits of Stage 2 or Stage 3 failure.

BoE Options
Boards of Examiners need to consider:

a) Whether any module failures on first or second attempts can be compensated. Compensation applies automatically where certain criteria are met, viz.
   (i) The weighted average mark for the Stage is at least 40
   (ii) No mark is less than 35
   (iii) No more than 40 credits of modules have been failed
   (iv) Core modules have been passed; compensation does not apply to core modules
b) Whether there is a PEC which might justify the use of discretion.
c) Whether there is a case for allowing a failed module or modules to be passed by discretion. This would be most easily justified where the failed module is not essential to progression or is in an outside subject area. Such a decision would also be more easily justified where the overall student performance in the other modules is strong. A key question the Board should consider is what the failure signals for likely future performance on the programme. Where it appears to have no or minimal impact, there would be a strong case for exercising discretion. Clearly this would be hard to allow for a core module or a module judged to be an essential building block. The number of credits of failure is also relevant. The BoE may find it easier to use its discretion where there are only 10 credits of failure, but needs to bear in mind that on many programmes the minimum building block may be 20 credits.
d) Whether there is a case for treating the stage as passed by discretion. This is similar to c) above except that it is marginally less generous and does not condone the module failures, as the failed mark(s) would stand. The same sort of logic would apply as in c) above.
e) If none of the above apply, then the candidate should be treated as a failure. In such circumstances the candidate would have the right to appeal, but only on the normally permissible grounds for appeal (procedural irregularity; bias or prejudice; PEC circumstances which the candidate was for good reason unable to notify before the BoE)

Transfers
There then remains the question of possible transfers to another programme. This can only happen where the DPD of the receiving programme is prepared to accept the student onto his/her programme despite the failed modules. Usually the candidate will have to start again at Stage 1; occasionally the DPD may permit a student to enter Stage 2, but this would only be appropriate where the key modules in the subject had been passed and there were good grounds for believing that the student could complete Stage 2 successfully. This sometimes happens where a student has taken a joint honours degree at Stage 1 and wants to move to single honours at Stage 2.

Such decisions are at the discretion of the DPD, who should consider such issues as:

a) The student’s motivation for the new programme, as it may just be a way of avoiding the termination of studies.
b) The likelihood that the student will be successful on the new programme. This is not easy to assess, but there should be some signs of academic strength.

c) Whether there is capacity to take an additional student.

d) Whether the student’s school leaving qualifications match those of other students on the programme (not necessarily the officially published grades, but those accepted from near miss or clearing candidates).

e) Whether the student might need some adjustments to his/her programme (e.g. modules already taken; key gaps which might be remedied).

f) Whether, in the case of international students, the transfer might break the terms of the student’s visa. In all such cases the case should be referred to the Visa Team for advice.

g) Clearly taking an additional year has financial implications and the student will need to consider how well s/he can cope with this. Student loans are normally available for up to 4 years, but clearly the final debt will be higher, and it would be wise to check the position.

It should be noted that transferring students do not count against core quota for the subject group, as that only applies on initial admission.

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Management of Stage 1 Failure Transfer (Student Progress Service)

Following consultation, which included the Deans for Undergraduate Studies for the Faculties of SAGE and HASS, the following proposal was submitted and agreed by the Taught Programmes Regulations Working Group:

1. A School level member of staff should be nominated to consider year 1 failures and their potential eligibility for transfer to another programme in the same or in a different school. The nominated person could be consulted by PEC committees and Boards of Examiners in their school, as well as by students.

2. It is important that Schools delay reporting such students as ‘Academic Failure – AF’ on the University system. Schools should write to the students and inform them of this situation, giving them the opportunity of discussing their options. (See template email for correspondence with relevant students.)

3. The maximum delay for transfer is up to the Friday before the commencement of ‘Welcome week’ and Registration.

4. A new progress code is now available on the system – AR 1st Yr result awaited, which makes it clear that the student has not passed their stage but is ‘on hold’ whilst they have the opportunity to consider transferring to another programme at the University. This is particularly important for international students.

5. Lists of students, by school, can then be produced by SPS or schools themselves to ensure that all students have been considered and returned to the correct progress code following the opportunity for programme transfer.

6. If students have mitigating circumstances it is of course possible for them to be allowed to repeat the year rather than taking resits in the summer period using normal PEC procedures. This would require powerful evidence of health or personal problems to justify it, as repeat tuition is not a right. The option of taking the resit as a first attempt also exists under PEC regulations. It should be noted that for any International students the Home Office would need to be informed and the student must be taking at least 60 credits or return home and continue as an external candidate.

7. It should be remembered that a student seeking a transfer cannot repeat a module in which they have already been assessed twice. This might render a transfer impossible.

Process

If a transfer to a new programme is considered appropriate and the student wishes to proceed with this option then schools should follow the normal procedure for transferring students, further details are available in the following document –

www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/assets/documents/StaffSPSTransferProc_002.pdf

Schools should ensure that Student Services are notified of the programme transfer by completing and sending the DPD form

www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/assets/documents/StaffSPSCoCDPDForm_001.docx to student.services@ncl.ac.uk
Deadline
The records for any stage 1 failing students must be updated by the Friday before the start of the new academic year (25 September this year). By this date if a transfer has been agreed the end of year progress decision code should be amended from AR to XC – fail stage/transfer and the transfer should be processed on the record to allow the student to register. If a student is deemed to be ineligible to transfer or does not wish to pursue this option then their progress decision code should be amended from AR to AF – Academic failure. Student Progress will identify students coded AF via reports and withdraw the students from their programmes. Any International students in this group will have their status reported to UK Visas and Immigration triggering the process to curtail their visa.

The only exceptions to the above process are where a successful PEC or academic appeal application has resulted in a student being allowed another attempt at any failed modules. In these cases a student’s end of year progress decision code should be amended to XR – repeating year if the student is repeating the modules in residence or XF – External candidate if the student is just repeating the assessments and will not be in attendance.

Please note:
XR – students repeating study will be fully registered for the next academic year on the same stage of their programme as last year and will be charged tuition fees on a pro-rata per credit basis up to and including 60 credits and the full annual fee for the programme for anything above 60 credits. The Tuition Fees Team in Finance need to be notified of any pro-rata fees via a Tuition Fee Adjustment form. International students on a Tier 4 student visa must be studying a minimum of 60 credits to meet the conditions of their visa.

XF – external candidates are not registered for the year, they are recorded as being on a leave of absence. They should not be in attendance at the University other than for assessments and are not required to pay any tuition fees. There is however an administration fee of £220 for external candidates that is collected by the Exams and Awards Team later in the academic year. International students who are due to be external will need to return to their home country as their visa will be curtailed.

Any queries regarding the process for dealing with failing stage 1 students should be directed to the Student Data Team in Student Progress (student-data@ncl.ac.uk, ext. 83423).

Home Office Reporting Mechanism for Transferring International Students
Before approving a transfer of an International student to a new programme (this applies to all transfers not just students transferring after stage 1 failure) schools should contact the Visa Team in Student Progress (visa@ncl.ac.uk, ext. 87133) who will consider the visa implications of the change. In some cases it may be necessary for the student to be referred to the Visa Team in person to discuss their particular circumstances.

Once the change has been approved by the Visa Team, schools should complete the DPD form with details of the transfer, indicating on the form that the Visa Team has been consulted, and send to student.services@ncl.ac.uk. Student Services will process the change on SAP if outside of the academic year and will notify the Student Data Team in Student Progress. The Student Data Team will report the programme transfer as a change of circumstances to UK Visas and Immigration within 10 days of the change being made.

If the change of programme requires the student to apply for a new visa the Visa Team will liaise with that student to ensure the correct process is followed and application is submitted.

Any queries regarding the visa implications for transferring International students can be directed to either the Visa Team (visa@ncl.ac.uk, ext. 87133) or Student Data Team (student-data@ncl.ac.uk, ext. 83423) in Student Progress.

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Template E-mail to Student following Board of Examiners decision
The following template e-mail should be used by schools to contact the relevant students to make arrangements to discuss their options -
Dear Student

Unfortunately, I must inform you that following consideration of your profile of marks by the Board of Examiners you are not recommended for progression to Stage 2 of the XXX programme. The reason for this decision is XXX (or include the extract from the BoE minutes). I wish to discuss options now available to you such as the possibility of transferring to stage 1 of another programme to continue your studies at the University. Please attend a meeting with me at Time on Date in Venue and we will discuss this further. If this date and/or time is not convenient, please contact me immediately and I may be able to rearrange this. You should however, prioritise this meeting over other routine activities.

If you do not wish to consider a transfer to stage 1 of another degree programme, please inform me immediately by return email. Once you have informed me of this in writing, your student record will be updated as Academic Failure and your only option for further consideration will be by submitting an Academic Appeal www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/Regulations/SPS/appeals.htm to casework@ncl.ac.uk. You are required however to give your grounds for appeal and provide any supporting evidence – you should read the procedure and guidance carefully. You should note that once your student record has been updated as Academic Failure, the University must inform the relevant authority such as the Home Office / Student Loan Company of this and that you are no longer a registered student at the University. You would only be permitted to re-register for stage 2 of the programme if your academic appeal was successful.

If you do not attend the meeting or respond to this email by (Date of meeting), your student record will be updated as Academic Failure and the above will be applicable.

I look forward to meeting with you / receiving your response shortly.

Yours sincerely

XXX

Any queries regarding the above information should be directed to the Student Data Team in Student Progress (student-data@ncl.ac.uk, ext. 83423).