

XI. Postgraduate (Taught) Examination Conventions

These conventions apply to all students registered on Postgraduate programmes in academic year 2017/18.

Variations to these conventions, non-standard stage weightings and exceptions to the Qualifications and Credit Framework can only be agreed by University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (ULTSEC), except where the power is explicitly vested in the relevant Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee (FLTSEC) or Degree Programme Director (DPD) in the conventions themselves.

Passmark

The passmark for taught postgraduate programmes is 50, which is also the passmark for level 7 modules. However, any modules of level 6 and below included in a programme as permitted by the University's Qualifications and Credit Framework have a module passmark of 40.

Compensation

Students who started their programme before 2014/15 shall be eligible for compensation under the 2013/14 examination conventions, but there is no compensation available for students who started their award in 2014/15 or later.

A. Introduction

1. These conventions shall be understood alongside the definition of terms in the *Postgraduate (Taught) Progress Regulations*, and in conjunction with requirements laid down in the General Regulations of the University, and shall be read together with any examination conventions specific to the programme as approved by the relevant faculty learning, teaching and student experience committee.
2. These conventions will apply to all taught postgraduate programmes unless there are specific requirements relating to professional or accrediting bodies. Where this is the case, boards of studies should submit separate examination conventions. In such cases the examination conventions should be included in the programme handbook and referred to in the programme regulations.
3. Similarly, these conventions will apply to the taught modules of any research degree programme, unless deviations are approved for individual programmes.

B. The Board of Examiners

4. A board of examiners shall be appointed for each award-bearing programme. A board of examiners may be responsible for a number of programmes. Membership of a board of examiners shall include the relevant degree programme directors, named representatives of the main areas of study involved in the programme and the appointed external examiners.
5. The membership of each board of examiners shall be proposed by the relevant board of studies and names of the chair and secretary reported to the appropriate

faculty learning, teaching and student experience committee and to the examinations office.

6. The relevant degree programme directors and named representatives of the main areas of study involved in the programme shall be present at meetings of the board of examiners. The appointed external examiners shall normally be present at meetings of the board at which qualifications are awarded.

7. Where it is necessary to call an additional or reconvened meeting of the board of examiners, the external examiners shall be notified and, if they are unable to attend, shall be given the opportunity to make known in writing their views on the cases to be discussed.

Chair of the Board

8. The chair of the board of examiners shall be appointed by the head of school and this appointment reported to faculty learning, teaching and student experience committee. The chair is responsible for conducting all meetings of the board, and for ensuring that all decisions are taken by the board in the full knowledge of all the performances for each student. In appropriate cases, the board may delegate to the chair the right to consider and make decisions. In so doing, the chair should consult as many members of the board as possible (including the external examiners). Action taken by the chair must be reported to the next scheduled meeting of the board. The chair shall exercise discretion only in a manner consistent with the normal practices and any additional agreed principles of the board. All agreed mark sheets, confirming decisions taken by the board, shall be signed by the chair.

Secretary

9. The board of studies shall appoint a secretary who shall be responsible for ensuring that all members of the board of examiners, including the external examiners, are informed of meetings. The secretary shall also be responsible for keeping a record of all decisions reached by the board.

External Examiners

10. Procedures for appointing external examiners are outlined in the *Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes* at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/gsh-extexam-policy.pdf>.

This policy also sets out the role of the external examiner and reporting duties.

11. External examiners shall have the right to speak on any matter at the meeting of the board of examiners, regardless of whether their opinion has been specifically invited. The board of examiners shall take into account, but need not defer to, the views of external examiners in taking decisions.

12. Final classification lists shall be signed by the chair, and, normally, by the external examiners. The external examiners shall make an annual report (and a final report at the end of the period of duties) to the University. These reports may include comments and recommendations. In addition, external examiners may make a confidential report at any time on any matter to the Vice-Chancellor.

Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) Committee

13. A Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) Committee shall be appointed by each board of studies to review and consider medical and personal circumstances which may have an effect on a student's performance. These circumstances should be brought to the Committee's attention by the student and relevant evidence should be attached. One PEC Committee can cover a number of programmes. This committee shall normally consist of a chair, secretary and two other senior members of academic staff, one of whom should be selected from outside of the academic unit. The chair should be a senior member of academic staff with experience of sitting on a board of examiners. If the secretary is not a member of academic staff then a fourth senior member of academic staff must be appointed to the committee. The chair of the PEC Committee shall report the committee's recommendations, including a summary of action taken throughout the year by the PEC Committee, members and delegated staff, to the chair of the board of examiners. The board of examiners shall, accordingly, be made aware if medical or other circumstances have been put forward for or by a student; however, no more detail than is necessary shall be disclosed, and this shall include no personal or medical details. All personal information shall be handled by the PEC committee and the board of examiners in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

14. The Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee shall have the power to grant the following, subject to the appropriate evidence being provided by the student;

- a) Extensions within and beyond those permitted as part of the Submission of Work policy;
- b) Exemptions from minor elements of assessed work (normally a maximum of 20% of the module in question);
- c) Deferral of a formal examination or assessment attempt to the next normal occasion (generally August);
- d) Deferral of a formal examination or assessment attempt to a later normal occasion;
- e) Extraordinary examinations, including those outside of the regular assessment periods;
- f) Setting aside previous attempt(s) at a module, semester or stage and allowing repeat tuition if required;
- g) Allowing a student to retake a module, semester or stage with tuition (subject to payment of the appropriate tuition fees);
- h) Allowing a student to proceed to the next Stage of a programme carrying fails

And

- j) To provide boards of examiners with an assessment of the scope and severity of mitigating circumstances affecting a student, which have not been addressed by a-h above (i.e. to recommend the use of discretion).

15. A PEC Committee may, on occasion, need to consider other adjustments in response to a student's Personal Extenuating Circumstance case. Adjustments other than those listed in 14. a-j above must be approved by the appropriate Dean.

Guidance on PEC procedures is provided by the Student Progress Service (www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress)

16. Students shall be reminded annually by notice (in electronic or paper form) of the Personal Extenuating Circumstances procedure and reminded that applications should be made by the deadline given. A student who fails to disclose relevant circumstances to the Committee in time should be aware that this may have a bearing on whether an adjustment can be allowed.

Board of Examiners Procedures

17. Members of the board of examiners should declare any personal (i.e. non-academic) interest relating to any individual students to the chair of the board prior to the meeting. Such declarations are required despite the anonymity of the board of examiners' meeting.

18. Notwithstanding any numerical or other conventions, the board of examiners shall have discretion to pass any student, in the whole (or any part) of the assessment, at any stage. This discretion shall not be exercised to deprive a student of some advantage to which the student would otherwise be entitled under regulations or examination conventions. The board shall ensure that all similar cases are treated consistently. The reason for the exercise of discretion or, where appropriate, the reason for not exercising discretion, shall be recorded by the secretary to the board in the minutes.

19. Where the board of examiners is unable to reach a decision on any issue by common consent, a vote shall be taken and the matter shall be decided by the majority of members then present and voting. The academic members of the board, including the external examiners and the chair, shall each have one vote. In the event of a tied vote, the chair shall have a casting (i.e. second) vote.

20. As soon as possible, following the meeting of the board of examiners, students will be notified of the decisions of the board by the secretary to the board. In the case of final year students, the decisions of the board will normally be released within 48 hours of the meeting of the board.

C. Absence from Examinations, Failure to Submit Assessed Work and Assessment Irregularities

21. Where a student has been absent without formal approval from an examination, a mark of zero shall be returned for that component of the assessment. Where a student has failed to submit any other element of the assessment, a mark of zero shall be returned for that element. Any late submissions must be considered in line with the University's Submission of Work Policy, available at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/governance/policies/>.

22. Where a student has failed to comply with any other assessment requirement, the consequence, if any, stipulated in the programme or module handbook shall apply.

23. The University's procedure for assessment irregularities shall apply to any reported or suspected cheating or plagiarism. It should be clear that sanctions imposed under the Assessment Irregularity Procedure take precedence over boards of examiners, and therefore cannot be overturned. The procedures are available at; <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress/assets/documents/Procedure-for-Assessment-Irregularities.pdf>.

D. Aural and Oral Examinations

24. The details of any aural or oral assessment must be published in the appropriate programme handbook. The chair of the appropriate board of examiners shall be responsible for ensuring that students are informed of the timing and form of any such assessment.

E. Marking Procedures

25. It shall be a duty of all examiners to carry out all assessments in accordance with the published assessment criteria available in programme handbooks.

26. In line with the University Policy and Guidance on Moderation and Scaling <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-assmt-modscal-pol.pdf>, the following shall constitute the procedure and, where appropriate, minimum requirements, for marking throughout the University;

- a) All marking shall be guided by explicit statements of standards, which shall be published in the programme handbook;
- b) Each board of examiners shall have a written Moderation and Scaling policy which should comply with the University's guidance

In line with the University Policy on the Submission of Assessed Work <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-assmt-assessedwork-policy.pdf>:

- c) When coursework is submitted late but remains eligible for a capped mark, the mark that would have been awarded had the work been submitted on time must be recorded and must be available to the Board of Examiners if required.

F. Return of Marks

27. The mark for each module on a Master's degree programme, postgraduate diploma or postgraduate certificate must be returned to the board of examiners and disclosed to students using the University Common Scale for the return of marks below:

	Marking scale applicable to level 7 modules and master's programmes	Marking scale applicable to modules below level 7	Marking scale applicable to postgraduate certificate and diploma programmes
0-39	Fail	Fail	Fail
40-49	Fail	Pass	Fail
50-59	Pass	Pass	Pass
60-69	Pass with Merit	Pass with Merit	Pass
70-100	Pass with Distinction	Pass with Distinction	Pass

28. The final mark returned for the assessment of any module, shall be rounded to the nearest whole number before being returned to the relevant board of examiners.

The rounding of marks shall follow the convention: decimal marks with a decimal component of 0.5 or larger shall be rounded up to the next whole number; marks with a decimal component of less than 0.5 shall be rounded down to the next whole number.

G. Releasing and Adjusting Marks

29. Marks awarded for course work shall be disclosed to students as soon as they are available and within 20 working days. It should be made clear to students that such marks are provisional and will be subject to review, and to possible moderation.

30. Provisional module marks awarded at the end of the Semester 1 assessment period shall be disclosed once they are available, and within 20 working days of the end of the exam period, but it should be made clear to students that the marks are provisional and will be subject to review and to possible moderation.

31. Any adjustment of marks of a cohort shall take place prior to the meeting of the board of examiners. Once marks have been returned to the board of examiners they shall not be adjusted, except that the correction of errors in the transcribing of marks is permitted. It should be noted that the conventions governing the award of classes of degrees and particularly the use of discretion by the board of examiners, shall not result in any adjustment of marks.

H. Credits Required and Using Credit Value

32. Students are required to study 60 credits for a postgraduate certificate, 120 credits for a postgraduate diploma and 180 credits for a Masters degree in line with the requirements outlined in the University's *Qualifications and Credit Framework*. All modules of a programme contribute towards the final award and its classification. The weighting of modules for assessment purposes shall correspond to the credit value of the module specified in the relevant programme regulations. Such weighting of modules may be adjusted in accordance with any programme regulations only to allow for additional weighting allocated to non-modular aggregated assessment.

J. Reassessment

33. A student who passes a module by discretion cannot be reassessed for any component of that module.

34. A student has the right to one reassessment for each taught module failed at the first attempt provided that:

- a) for a student on a 180 credit master's programme or a postgraduate diploma programme, no more than 40 credits of the taught element failed at the first attempt;
- b) for a student on a Postgraduate Certificate programme, no more than 20 credits of the programme is failed at the first attempt.

NB. A master's programme with more than 180 credits may in its programme regulations set a higher number of credits that may be resat if failed at the first attempt, but the proportion of credits available for resit should as much as possible be in line with those on a 180 credit programme. In relation to conventions 34 and 35 a higher number of credits of resit would be allowed in line with the programme regulations.

The form of the reassessment at any stage may vary from the original, at the discretion of the board of studies. Note that the board of studies may delegate this authority to the board of examiners, but that the students who are to be reassessed must be informed of the style of reassessment to be adopted.

A recommendation for an award does not negate the right to reassessment set out in this convention. That is, a student who has been recommended for an award, but who has failed one or more modules at the first attempt (meeting the criteria in a) or b) above), may undertake reassessment in those modules either for the purpose of improving their transcript or with a view to improving their overall average (calculated as prescribed in Convention N44).

35. A Master's or Postgraduate Diploma student who fails more than 40 credits, or a Postgraduate Certificate student who fails more than 20 credits, at the first attempt of the taught element of the programme will not normally be permitted to continue or be reassessed without the support of the chair of the board of examiners (see also Convention L38).

36. In cases where a Postgraduate Diploma student is taking further credit to 'top-up' from a previously awarded Postgraduate Certificate (entry award), only 20 credits can normally be reassessed out of the additional 60 credits taken to gain the higher award.

A student who has the right to a second attempt will automatically be entered for failed modules (and any failed non-modular aggregated assessments) at the next available occasion of assessment (normally in August/September of the same academic year as the first attempt) or at an alternative occasion designated by the board of examiners. The timing of any reassessment will be such that a student's progression is not unduly delayed. The board of examiners may stipulate a period for reassessment which is outside the University's normal assessment and resit periods.

K. Resubmission of Dissertation

37. A Masters student has the right to one resubmission of their dissertation provided they have failed no more than 40 credits of the taught element of the programme at the first attempt. A student who fails more than 40 credits of the taught element of the programme at the first attempt will not normally be permitted to resubmit their dissertation without the support of the chair of the board of examiners. Resubmission should be within a defined period agreed by the board of examiners, normally within 3 months of the board of examiners' decision.

L. Progression within Taught Postgraduate Programmes

38. In addition to a Board of Examiners meeting at the end of a programme, a meeting of the Board will normally be held at the end of the taught component of a Master's programme to consider progression; the Board may also meet to consider progression at other times if appropriate. Internal members of the board of examiners will need to liaise with the external examiner(s) as appropriate.

- a) Students who remain eligible for the entry award on their programme may continue on the programme, subject to the provisions of Conventions J34 and J35.
- b) Students who do not remain eligible for the entry award on their programme, taking account of any rights to reassessment, will not be permitted to continue on the programme.
- c) A Master's student who, at the end of the taught component, is eligible to be reassessed will normally also be permitted to proceed to the dissertation without any delay.
- d) A Master's or Postgraduate Diploma student who, when considered at a progression meeting, has failed more than 40 credits at the first attempt and who is not permitted to continue on their original programme, may nevertheless be permitted to be reassessed solely for the purposes of gaining an exit award; such permission is a matter of discretion for the Board of Examiners. When a student is permitted such reassessment, they will not normally be permitted to continue on their original programme, even if successful in the reassessments.

M. Discretion

39. Notwithstanding the student's results, and without prejudice to the requirements for professional accreditation, the board of examiners may, in its ultimate discretion:

- a) Deem a student to have passed specific modules – including core modules.
- b) Deem first attempt failures on one or more Level 7 modules on a classified programme to be 'condoned fails', provided that the relevant marks are in the

range 40 – 49 and provided that a student does not accumulate more than 20 credits in condoned fails (10 credits for students registered for a Postgraduate Certificate). A condoned fail will be treated as a fail for the purposes of Conventions J34 and K37, but a condoned fail will not diminish eligibility for a Merit or Distinction under Convention P45.

- c) Deem a student to have passed the stage of a programme.
- d) Deem a student to have progressed to the next stage of a programme, despite not meeting a specific progress regulation or examination convention.
- e) Recommend a final stage student, or other student eligible to leave the University with an award, for a higher award or degree classification.

40. The exercise of discretion does not set a precedent as each individual case should be considered on a case by case basis. However, in any discussion regarding the possible exercise of discretion, the board shall ensure that no student in similar circumstances has been treated less favourably.

41. The reasons for exercising or not exercising discretion shall be recorded in the minutes of the proceedings in every case where the exercise of discretion is considered, both those where such consideration is required under Convention 47 d) i or where it is considered on other grounds. The minutes shall record the issues raised and the decisions reached, whilst maintaining, wherever possible, the anonymity of board members contributing to the debate. Boards of Studies are required to report annually on the exercise of discretion as part of the Annual Monitoring and Review Process.

Stage and Programme Averages

42. A Stage average is defined as the weighted average mark over all modules at that stage, where the weighting reflects the credit value of each module. Degree programme regulations may allow for additional credit value for non-modular aggregated assessment. The stage average shall be calculated and rounded to one decimal place. When calculating a stage average the marks used shall be:

- i. The module mark, for modules passed at the first attempt.
- ii. The pass mark (i.e., a mark of 40 for modules up to level 6 and 50 for level 7 modules) for modules passed by discretion or on reassessment (Convention N44).
- iii. The best mark, for modules failed after two attempts (Convention N44).

Note that stage averages will need to be recalculated after the application of discretion and after reassessment.

43. For programmes with a single stage, the **final programme average** will be obtained by rounding the stage average to the nearest whole number according to Convention 28. For programmes with more than one stage the **overall average** shall be calculated according to the programme regulations and shall also be rounded to one decimal place. The **final programme average** is then obtained by rounding the overall average to the nearest whole number according to Convention 28.

N. Use of Marks after Reassessment or Discretion

44. Where a student has achieved a passing mark following reassessment, or has been deemed to have passed in an assessment by the exercise of discretion, the actual mark achieved by the student must be recorded on the transcript, with an appropriate note if discretion has been applied, and a statement that a mark of 50 (or 40 for Level 6 modules) will be used in any calculations. However, in such cases, the board of examiners may, in its ultimate discretion, have regard to the actual mark obtained at the second occasion of assessment. Where a student fails a module after reassessment, the better of the two marks for the module shall be used in calculations.

P. The Award and Classification of Masters' Degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas and Postgraduate Certificates (entry awards)

45. A student is recommended, as of right, for the award of an appropriate Master's degree, Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate if all the requirements for the award are met and all the modules in the programme are passed (at either first or second attempt).

A student who passes all core modules and fails up to 20 credits of non-core modules from the taught stage of the programme (whether after one attempt or two) is recommended, as of right, for the award of an appropriate Master's degree or Postgraduate Diploma, provided that the final programme average is at least 50. Such a student on a classified programme (except as provided by Convention M39) will be eligible as of right only for the award of a pass; a student would only be entitled to a Merit or Distinction, as indicated by their final programme average, if they have passed all modules (at either first or second attempt). The same principle applies to the award of a Postgraduate Certificate to a student failing up to 10 credits of non-core modules.

46. Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate entry awards may be classified if this is stipulated in the programme regulations. In such cases, the classification is determined by the principles in Convention 47 a – d below.

47. Subject to the provisions of Convention P45, the class of award is normally determined as follows:

- a) Students are entitled as of right to the class of award yielded by the final programme average.
- b) Masters students with final programme averages of 48 or 49, 58 or 59, 68 or 69, (after rounding of marks) shall always be considered for the next higher class of award.
- c) Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate students with final programme averages of 48 or 49 shall always be considered for the award of a Pass. Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate students with final programme averages of 58 or 59, and 68 or 69 shall be considered for the next higher class of award if provision for classification is included in the programme regulations.
- d) The board of examiners, when considering the exercise of discretion, shall have regard to the following:
 - i. Any recommendation from the Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee on the effect and scope of medical or other mitigating circumstances that were submitted to the Personal Extenuating

Circumstance Committee, see Convention B13.

In cases where the final programme average is within two marks of a class boundary as defined in clauses b) and c) above:

- ii. The overall profile of individual marks achieved in modules;
- iii. Exceptional performance in any particular module, including, for example, research based modules;
- iv. Progressive improvement in performance by the student.

48. In exceptional circumstances, an individual programme, with faculty learning, teaching and student experience committee approval, on behalf of university learning, teaching and student experience committee, may set additional criteria which must also be taken into account when determining the class of award. The additional criteria must be written into the individual programme regulations and programme handbooks.

49. Any student may be required to take a *viva voce*, at the discretion of the board of examiners, as a means of monitoring standards or for determining whether a higher classification should be recommended.

R. Award of a Postgraduate Diploma (exit award)

50. A candidate for a Master's degree, who fails to meet the criteria for the Master's degree, shall be recommended for the award of a postgraduate diploma by the board of examiners, provided that there are 120 credits on which the candidate's performance would meet the requirements for the award of a postgraduate diploma under P45-49.

51. A student who is not entitled to a Postgraduate diploma as of right may be recommended for a postgraduate diploma by the board of examiners, using its ultimate discretion, following the principles laid down in Conventions M39-41.

52. The award of a postgraduate diploma is not classified under this provision.

S. Award of a Postgraduate Certificate (exit award)

53. A candidate for a Masters degree or postgraduate diploma, who fails to meet the criteria for the Masters degree or postgraduate diploma, shall be recommended for the award of a postgraduate certificate by the board of examiners, provided that there are 60 credits on which the candidate's performance would meet the requirements for the award of a postgraduate certificate under P45-49.

54. A student who is not entitled to a postgraduate certificate as of right may be recommended for a postgraduate certificate by the board of examiners, using its ultimate discretion, following the principles laid down in Conventions M39-41.

55. The award of a postgraduate certificate is not classified under this provision.

T. Mid-year Student Withdrawals

56. A student who withdraws from the University during the academic year will be considered for the appropriate exit award at the next scheduled meeting of the Board of Examiners.

U. Aegrotat

57. The board of examiners may award an Aegrotat degree to a student who has demonstrated postgraduate ability over typically at least 50% of the programme on which they are registered, but who presents sufficient evidence of ill health or any other extenuating circumstance such that, in the judgement of the board, there is no reasonable possibility that the student can complete the programme. When considering the option of recommending this award, boards of examiners should be mindful of the possibility of enabling the student to sit the assessments at a later date, and so be eligible for a classified award. In addition, the board should consider the appropriateness of recommending the award of a postgraduate diploma or certificate exit award.

58. It is not open to the board to grant an Aegrotat to students registered on certain professionally accredited programmes. A student to whom an Aegrotat is awarded shall be deemed to have obtained the award but without classification.

59. The Board of Examiners shall have the power to award a degree posthumously as it sees fit.

V. Retention of Assessed Work

60. All material for assessment, which contributes to 30% or more of a final module mark, should be retained for a period of one year after the award of the degree or other qualification. Further information can be found in the Policy on Disclosure of Marks and Return of Assessed Work at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/governance/policies/>.

Student data relevant to student assessment should be retained as follows:

- i. Component marks on NeSS and PEC Committee and Exam Board minutes to be retained for 6 years after graduation.
- ii. Personal PEC information (Including Stage 1 PEC information for Board of Examiners' discretion usage) to be retained for 2 years after graduation.

W. Exemptions to these Conventions

61. Certain programmes are exempt from the requirements of the *Postgraduate Taught Examination Conventions* which relate to assessment, reassessment and the use of the University Common Scale.

Note that referral to each individual set of degree programme regulations for full information on programme exemptions is required. A complete register of exemptions can be found at: <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/governance/modules/regulations/>