

## **VI. Foundation Degree Examination Conventions**

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

### **A. Introduction**

1. These conventions shall be understood alongside the definitions of terms in the *Foundation Degree 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 relevant degree programme, as approved by the relevant faculty learning, teaching and student experience committee.

### **B. The Board of Examiners**

2. 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.

3. 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. Each board should include the University's Programme Co-ordinator, who is responsible for the day to day academic management and administration of the relationship with the institution delivering the foundation award.

4. 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.

5. 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**

6. The chair of the board of examiners shall be appointed in accordance with the memorandum of agreement for the foundation award 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**

7. 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. In all cases of the exercise of discretion, the reason for the decision shall be recorded.

### **External Examiners and External Assessors**

*Note: Conventions 8-12 also apply to external assessors.*

8. Procedures for appointing external examiners are set out in the *Policy and Procedures for External Examiners of Taught Programmes* at <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-extexam-policy.pdf>. The policy is the definitive source on matters relating to external examining and in the event of any conflict between the policy and these regulations, the Policy would prevail. The duties of external examiners are set out in the policy.

9. The external examiner shall be a member of the relevant board of examiners and have the right to attend any meetings of the board. Normally no decision on the recommendation of an award may be made by a board of examiners unless there is an external examiner present. If, exceptionally, any external examiners cannot be present, they shall be given the opportunity to make their views known to the board.

10. The external examiner shall be a member of the relevant board of examiners and have the right to attend any meetings of the board. In normal circumstances, no decision on the recommendation of an award may be made by a board of examiners unless there is an external examiner present. If, exceptionally, any external examiners cannot be present, they shall be given the opportunity to make their views known to the board.

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. The assessment of the work of students on BA Combined Honours and those Joint Honours programmes specified by ULTSEC is subject to the normal examination processes and scrutiny by external examiners in the relevant subjects. An external assessor shall be appointed by the relevant faculty learning teaching and student experience committee, in line with the criteria laid down for external examiners. The external assessor will not scrutinise the work of students, but is required to report to the University on the reliability and integrity of the processes used in awarding these degrees.

**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 mitigating circumstances which may have an effect on a student's performance. This Committee shall normally consist of the chair and secretary of the board of examiners and two other senior members of academic staff, one of whom should be selected from outside of the academic unit. The chair shall 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 for or 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.

**Notes:**

**i) The PEC Committee must only approve such actions if there is an evidenced case presented for or by the student.**

**ii) Where appropriate, Institutions may convene one School PEC Committee to consider cases for more than one programme.**

**Guidance on PEC procedures is provided by the Student Progress Service ([www.ncl.ac.uk/students/progress](http://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 in a timely manner. A student who fails to disclose relevant circumstances to the Committee at the time of impact should be aware that this may have a bearing on any future case.

**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 (Conventions 37-39).

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.

### **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//assets/documents/qsh-assmt-assessedwork-policy.pdf>.

22. Where a student has failed to comply with any other assessment requirement, the consequence, if any, stipulated in the degree programme 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 precedent over Board 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 degree 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 approved by faculty learning, teaching and student experience committee and normally available in degree 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 degree 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 foundation degree programme shall be returned to the board of examiners, and disclosed to students, using the established scale below:

	<b>Summary description applicable to Foundation Degrees</b>
0-39	Fail
40-59	Pass
60-69	Commendation
70-100	Distinction

28. The final mark returned to the board of examiners for a module, or for any non-modular aggregated assessment, shall be the rounded nearest whole number on the Scale.

*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 once they are available. 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. Progression from One Stage to Another

32. 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. The stage average shall be calculated and rounded to one decimal place.

- a) When calculating a Stage 1 average, whether for the purposes of compensation under Convention J34 or otherwise, the calculation must use the best module marks that relate to the given stage, regardless of whether the best marks are from first or second attempts, except that a mark of 40 must be used for a module passed by discretion.
- b) When calculating a Stage 2 average, the marks used shall be:
  - i. The module mark, for modules passed at the first attempt and for consideration of the first attempt at Stage 2.
  - ii. A mark of 40 for modules passed at the second attempt (Conventions N54, P55).
  - iii. The second attempt mark for modules failed after two attempts (Convention P55).

Note that a Stage 1 average will need to be recalculated after the application of discretion or compensation and after reassessment.

33. A student is permitted to proceed from Stage 1 to Stage 2 of the programme of study if the student passes or is deemed to have passed all the modules in Stage 1, or Stage 1 is passed by discretion (exercised under Conventions 37-39) notwithstanding failures in specific modules.

- a) When Stage 1 is passed by discretion, notwithstanding failures in specific modules, the specific modules are not deemed to have been passed.
- b) A student who has failed a first attempt at one or more modules at Stage 1 and has not yet completed a second attempt may not proceed to the Stage 2 unless granted permission by the PEC Committee (in response to the student submitting a PEC form).

In accordance with Conventions 58, a student not permitted to proceed may be considered for the award of a Higher Education Certificate.

## J. Principles of Compensation

34. At Stage 1 of a foundation degree programme a student shall, on assessment and any reassessment, be deemed to have passed all modules at the stage and to be eligible to progress to the next stage of the degree programme, notwithstanding that marks of less than 40 have been obtained in one or more modules for that stage, provided that each of the following conditions for compensation are met:

- a) the stage average (calculated according to Convention H32), is not less than 40;
- b) no single mark for any module of levels 4-6 assessed is below 35;
- c) the modules for which marks lie between 35 and 39 (levels 4 – 6) do not include core modules (Foundation Degree Progress Regulations B4(c)) and have total credit value at most 40 (out of the 120 credits studied).

The modules in c) above are deemed to be **passed by compensation**.

35. The principles of compensation (Convention 34) shall also apply to any consideration for the award of a Higher Education Certificate.

36. Where the rules for compensation do not apply, the board of examiners may still exercise discretion under Conventions 18, 37-39.

## **K. Principles of Discretion**

37. 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 a student to have passed the stage of a programme,
- c) deem a student to have progressed to the next stage of a programme, despite not meeting a specific progress regulation or examination convention,
- d) recommend a Stage 2 student, or other student eligible to leave the institution with an award, for a higher award or a higher degree classification (See Conventions 51-53).

38. The exercise of discretion does not set a precedent as each individual case should be considered individually. 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.

39. 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 51 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.

## **L. Reassessment**

40. A student who passes a module (including by compensation or discretion), at any stage of the degree programme, cannot be reassessed for any component of that module.

41. A student at Stage 2 of a Foundation degree programme shall, under the conditions laid down in Conventions 46 and 55, have the right to one reassessment of some/ all failed modules.

42. A student at Stage 1 of a Foundation degree programme has the right to a maximum of one reassessment of each failed module (Conventions 45).

43. 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, including identification of the various assessment components and weighting. Boards may specify components for which students may opt to carry forward marks. Changes to the format of assessment must apply to the whole cohort.

44. Exceptionally, a student may be permitted to resit a module that has been passed at University standard, but not to external accreditation requirements. Such resits are for accreditation purposes only and stand outside of the University Examination Conventions. Final module marks and award calculations are not affected. Programme-specific arrangements for accreditation resits are included in the degree programme regulations <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/programme/>.

### **Timing of reassessment at Stage 1**

45. *Second Attempt*

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

### **Timing of reassessment at Stage 2**

46. *Second Attempt*

When a student elects to be reassessed in some or all failed assessments in the final stage of a foundation degree programme (as determined under Convention 55), the reassessment will normally be at the next normal occasion or at an alternative occasion designated by the board of examiners.

## **M. The Award and Classification of Degrees**

47. A student is recommended, as of right, for the award of an appropriate foundation degree (according to Convention 49) if all the requirements for the award are met, and

- a) all the modules in the degree programme are passed, or

b) no more than a maximum of 20 credits at Stage 2 are failed

and:

c) the Stage 2 average (as defined in Convention H32) is not less than 40.

48. Marks from all modules studied at Stage 2 are used to determine degree classification and so the marks for these modules must be returned using the University Common Scale (DC Scale).

49. Students shall be entitled, as of right, to the class of degree yielded by the Stage 2 average (as defined in Convention H32).

50. A final module mark is calculated by using the most recent component marks. In some cases, this may be a combination of second and first attempt component marks, depending on the normal resit arrangements for the module. It is not the case, however, that the best component marks automatically carry forward the final module mark.

### **Use of Discretion**

**The Board of Examiners under Conventions 18, 37 - 39 has a general power to exercise discretion to treat any student more generously than the numerical and other conventions require.**

51. Discretion may be applied to progression (Conventions 37-39) or to classification decisions. The board of examiners must consider whether or not to exercise discretion (including the possibility of awarding a higher classification of degree, if relevant) when:

- a) There is a positive assessment of the impact of medical or other mitigating circumstances by the Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee (Conventions 13 and 14).

In addition, for Stage 2 students, the board of examiners must consider whether or not to exercise discretion to award a higher classification of degree when:

- b) Students have Stage 2 averages of 68 or 69, 58 or 59, 38 or 39 (as defined in Convention H32). The board of examiners shall have regard to the following:
  - i. The overall profile of individual marks achieved in modules;
  - ii. Exceptional performance by the student in any particular module, including, for example, research-based modules or in an oral examination where this is part of the degree programme regulations;
  - iii. The board may also use discretion to recommend the award of a Foundation degree of any class to a student who has not been recommended for the award of a Foundation degree under Convention 49.

52. The University does not permit the use of a viva voce either as a means of monitoring standards or for determining whether a higher classification should be recommended.

53. In any discussion regarding the possible exercise of discretion, the board shall ensure that no student in similar circumstances has been treated less favourably as a result of any particular decision. The reasons for recommending or not recommending a higher class of degree shall be recorded in the minutes of the proceedings. The minutes shall record the issues raised and the decisions reached, whilst maintaining, wherever possible, the anonymity of board members contributing to the debate. Chairs of Boards of Examiners should report in writing annually to the relevant Board of Studies on the exercise of discretion for the recent examination sessions. Reports should then be forwarded to faculty learning, teaching and student experience committees for review. No student shall be identified by name in this report.

#### **N. Recording of Module Marks after Reassessment, Compensation or Discretion**

54. Where a student has achieved a passing mark following reassessment at any stage, including Stage 2, or has been deemed to have passed in an assessment by the exercise of compensation or discretion, the overall module mark used by the board of examiners, shall be a mark of 40 except for the purposes of compensation (J33). The mark achieved by the student must be recorded on the transcript, with an appropriate note if compensation or discretion has been applied, and a statement that a mark of 40 for the module 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 resit.

#### **P. Failing Performance by Foundation Degree Students**

55. A student who, following a first attempt at Stage 2, has not been recommended for the award of a Foundation degree under Convention 47 or by the use of discretion under Convention 51, has a number of options. Subject to any recommendations made by the board of examiners under Convention 58, the student must elect whether to accept a Higher Education Certificate, or to proceed to one reassessment of some or all failed modules, or to withdraw from the programme. The various routes available are:

- a) The board of examiners may recommend the award of a Higher Education Certificate (subject to Convention 58).
- b) Notwithstanding the options described in a) above, a student may elect to be reassessed in some or all failed modules, subject to:
  - i. the maximum recommendation available after reassessment is a pass in the foundation degree and discretion may not be applied to award a higher class than this;

- ii. in the event that the student's performance at reassessment is less than that at the first attempt, the assessment at the second attempt will be used to calculate the entitlement.

56. Students recommended by the board of examiners for the award of a foundation degree after the first occasion of assessment, may not enter for re-assessment.

*Note: The chair of the board shall, in the return of marks to the examinations office, make clear that a student has an automatic right to resit final stage modules, when a Higher Education Certificate is recommended by the board. The chair of the board of examiners shall then consult the student as soon as possible to confirm whether the student wishes to receive the Higher Education Certificate to which he or she is entitled, or to proceed to re-assessment. The student must advise the chair of the board of examiners in writing, and within a period laid down by the chair.*

57. Exceptionally, a student may be permitted to resit a module that has been passed at University standard, but not to external accreditation requirements. Such resits are for accreditation purposes only and stand outside of the University Examination Conventions. Final module marks and award calculations are not affected. Programme-specific arrangements for accreditation resits are included in the degree programme regulations <http://www.ncl.ac.uk/regulations/programme/>.

## **R. Recommendation of other than a Foundation Degree**

### Higher Education Certificate

58. A candidate for a Foundation degree who has satisfied the examiners in at least 120 credits, of which at least 90 are at level 4 or above, may be awarded a Higher Education Certificate in that programme, typically when:

- a) the student is entitled to proceed into Stage 2, but instead elects to withdraw from study; *or*
- b) the student elects to withdraw from study at the University during Stage 2; *or*
- c) the student leaves the programme to transfer to an unrelated programme, without carrying forward any credit; *or*
- d) the student fails to satisfy the examiners in Stage 2 of the programme.

59. The award of a Higher Education Certificate is not classified and, unless specific recognition arrangements are in place, carries no professional accreditation. The certificate will be '*Higher Education Certificate in X*' corresponding to the '*Foundation degree in X*' for which the student was a candidate.

## **S. Subsuming of Awards**

60. A student awarded a Foundation degree will not be eligible for the award of a Higher Education Certificate for the same programme of study.

## **T. Mid-year Student Withdrawals**

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

## **U. Aegrotat**

62. The board of examiners may award an Aegrotat degree to a student who has registered for the final stage of the programme 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 degree 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 degree. In addition, the board should consider the appropriateness of recommending the award of a Higher Education Certificate.

63. It is not open to the board to grant an Aegrotat to students registered on certain professionally accredited programmes.

Aegrotat awards are not classified.

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

## **V. Retention of Assessed Work**

65. All material for assessment, which contributes to 30% or more of a final module mark, should be retained for a minimum period of the current academic year plus one year. Further information can be found in the Policies on Submission of Assessed Work, Feedback on Assessed Work 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.

