

University of Birmingham

**Proposed Changes to the Code of Practice on Taught Programme  
and Module Assessment in relation to the Profiling System**

**Topic and purpose of the paper**

1. APRC is requested to **approve** changes to the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment in respect of the profiling system, and as proposed by the Student Records Team.

**Proposal(s)**

2. That the following changes be made to the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment from the 2010/11 session (additions underlined, deletions struck through):
  - 11.3.3 (c) *The candidate has a weighted arithmetic mean in the ranges as follows:*  
  
*≥ ~~66.0~~ 67.0 and ≤ 69.5 - for consideration for a 1<sup>st</sup>*  
*≥ 57.0 and ≤ 59.5 - for consideration for a 2i*  
*≥ 48.0 and ≤ 49.5 - for consideration for a 2ii*  
*≥ 38.0 and ≤ 39.5 - for consideration for a 3<sup>rd</sup>*
  - 11.4.3 *Classified Bachelors Degree, with exactly 240 units in the classification band above the degree class indicated by the calculation of the arithmetic mean and no fails:*
  - 11.4.3 (a) *A Registered Student whose arithmetic mean mark lies between ~~66.00~~ 67.00 and 69.45, inclusive should be awarded a 1st class degree if they have achieved 240 units in class I, with not less than 80 units in class 2i and they have no fails.*
  - 11.4.5 *Undergraduate Masters Degree, with exactly 300 units in the classification band above the degree class indicated by the calculation of the arithmetic mean and no fails:*
  - 11.4.5 (a) *A Registered Student whose arithmetic mean mark lies between ~~66.00~~ 67.00 and 69.45, inclusive should be awarded a 1st class degree if they have achieved 300 units in class I, with not less than 100 units in class 2i and they have no fails.*

## **Background**

3. A number of comments have been made by External Examiners about the profiling system, which is contained within the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment. The main area of complaint was that the range of marks in which profiling is applied to students between upper second and first class degrees is much broader than that used by comparative institutions.

4. The current rules for profiling, or Distribution of Module Classes (DMC), are set out for information, as follows:

- 4.1 *The starting point is the Weighted Arithmetic Mean mark. If this mark is in any of the following profiling boundaries, the profiling or Distribution of Module Classes procedure will take place:*

$\geq 66.0$  and  $\leq 69.5$  for consideration for a 1<sup>st</sup>  
 $\geq 57.0$  and  $\leq 59.5$  for consideration for a 2:1  
 $\geq 48.0$  and  $\leq 49.5$  for consideration for a 2:2  
 $\geq 38.0$  and  $\leq 39.5$  for consideration for a 3<sup>rd</sup>

- 4.2 *The process will convert credits into Units, with the following weightings:*

*Three year Bachelors degree programmes*

*Year 2 = 25% - 120 credits = 120 units*

*Year 3 = 75% - 120 credits = 360 units*

*Four year Bachelors degree programmes (with a year abroad or a year in industry)*

*Year 2 = 12.5% - 120 credits = 60 units*

*Year 3 = 12.5% - 120 credits = 60 units*

*Year 4 = 75% - 120 credits = 360 units*

*Four year Undergraduate Masters programmes*

*Year 2 = 20% - 120 credits = 120 units*

*Year 3 = 40% - 120 credits = 240 units*

*Year 4 = 40% - 120 credits = 240 units*

- 4.3 *To be eligible for the award of the higher degree classification, the student must meet the following conditions:*

*Three year and four year Bachelors degree programmes*

- *more than 240 units in the classifications bands above the degree class indicated by the weighted arithmetic mean.*
- *if the student has failed units up to a maximum of 60 units, these failed units must be offset by an equal number of additional units in the higher degree classification bands.*
- *if the student has exactly 240 units in the higher classification bands:*
  - *If their arithmetic mean mark is in the range of 66.0 and 69.4, they should be awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> class degree if they have 240 units in 1<sup>st</sup> class, with not less than 80 units in class 2i and no failed units*

- *If their arithmetic mean mark is in the range of 57.0 and 59.4, they should be awarded a 2i degree if they have 240 units in class 2i or above, with not less than 40 units in 1<sup>st</sup> class and no failed units*
- *If their arithmetic mean mark is in the range of 48.0 and 49.4, they should be awarded a 2ii degree if they have 240 units in class 2ii or above, with not less than 40 units in 2i class and no failed units*

*Undergraduate Masters degree programmes*

- *more than 300 units in the classification bands above the degree class indicated by the weighted arithmetic mean.*
- *if the student has failed units up to a maximum of 70 units, these failed units must be offset by an equal number of additional units in the higher degree classification bands.*
- *if the student has exactly 300 units in the higher classification bands:*
  - *If their arithmetic mean mark is in the range of 66.0 and 69.4, they should be awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> class degree if they have 300 units in 1<sup>st</sup> class, with not less than 100 units in class 2i and no failed units*
  - *If their arithmetic mean mark is in the range of 57.0 and 59.4, they should be awarded a 2i degree if they have 300 units in class 2i or above, with not less than 50 units in 1<sup>st</sup> class and no failed units*
  - *If their arithmetic mean mark is in the range of 48.0 and 49.4, they should be awarded a 2ii degree if they have 300 units in class 2ii or above, with not less than 50 units in 2i class and no failed units*

5. The advantages of the current procedure are as follows:

- As the process is purely algorithmic, there can be no accusations of bias on the part of the Board of Examiners. If a more subjective approach was adopted, this could lead to more appeals by those students who felt that they had not been treated fairly.
- The process is fair and transparent and there is no ambiguity about why students have been awarded their degree classification.
- The Stage 2 and Stage 3 weightings reward students whose performance improves from year two to year three.
- As there are over 700 students whose weighted arithmetic mark lies within the profiling boundaries, the purely algorithmic process which has been programmed into KDDB and BIRMS saves a significant amount of time at Board of Examiners meetings. If all these students needed to be discussed individually, there would be a risk of the very tight deadlines for the return of marks and degree classifications not being met.
- Exceptions can be dealt with through the mitigations process.

6. The disadvantages of the current procedure are as follows:

- There is less scope for examiner discretion and academic judgement.
- Students with a lower weighted arithmetic mean mark have been awarded the higher degree classification through profiling while students with a higher weighted arithmetic mean mark have been awarded the lower degree classification. This could be deemed unfair by students and examiners.
- The range of marks in which profiling is applied to students between upper second and first class degrees is much broader than that used by comparative institutions and could lead to a perception that academic standards are being lowered.

### **Argument to support proposal / recommendation (s)**

7. A review of profiling data has been conducted and a representative sample of data from KDDB and BIRMS was used:
  - In 2008/09 there were approximately 700 students per year whose weighted arithmetic mean mark lay within one of the profiling boundaries and for whom the profiling or Distribution of Module Classes procedures took place.
  - Approximately 25% of these students were awarded the higher degree classification.
  - The number of 1<sup>st</sup> class degrees awarded in 2008/09 was 622. We looked in more detail at those students in the 2i/1<sup>st</sup> class profiling band. Profiling information was available in BIRMS or KDDB for 495 of these students (79.5%).
  - There were five students whose weighted arithmetic mean mark was in the range of 66.0% and 66.9% whose degree classification was raised to 1<sup>st</sup> class.
  - There were 22 students whose weighted arithmetic mean mark was in the range of 67.0% and 67.9% whose degree classification was raised to 1<sup>st</sup> class.
  - There were 56 students whose weighted arithmetic mean mark was in the range of 68.0% and 68.9% whose degree classification was raised to 1<sup>st</sup> class.
  - There were 25 students whose weighted arithmetic mean mark was in the range of 69.0% and 69.4% whose degree classification was raised to 1<sup>st</sup> class.

### **Conclusions**

- 8.1 The current profiling system works well. It is fair and transparent and removes the requirement for subjective decision making and possible bias.
- 8.2 The criticisms of the profiling system from some External Examiners indicated that they felt that the profiling system was too generous, while other

examiners felt that the system was not generous enough. Some of the criticisms could be addressed through other means, such as discouraging the approval of 40 credit final year modules, which could have a disproportionate effect, adverse or otherwise, on a student's degree classification. Other criticisms could be addressed by the use of the full range of penalties available (including the award of a lower degree classification) where plagiarism is proven.

- 8.3 The most frequent criticism from External Examiners was that the range of marks in which profiling is applied to students between upper second and first class degrees is much broader than that used by comparative institutions and this could be viewed as a lowering of academic standards.
- 8.4 If the range of marks in which profiling is applied to students between upper second and first class degree was reduced, so that range was between 67.0% and 69.4%, only 5 students would have been affected by the change in 2008/09.
- 8.5 If the range of marks in which profiling is applied to students between upper second and first class degree was reduced, so that range was between 68.0% and 69.4%, 27 students would have been affected by the change in 2008/09.
- 8.6 This proposed change will affect a minimal number of students whilst addressing the main criticism of the profiling system made by External Examiners.

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