

Coursework Deadline Extensions

Topic and purpose of the paper

1. Academic Policy & Regulations Committee is requested to **consider** and, if thought appropriate, **approve** amendments to the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment arising from the findings of the Working Group on Coursework Deadline Extensions and proposals from the Guild of Students, for effect in 2010/11.

Proposal(s)

2. That, in accordance with proposals of the Working Group, the following amendments to legislation be endorsed by the Committee for transmission to APRC:

(a) An amendment to Section 7 of the University Regulations (additions underlined, deletions struck through):

7.7.2 Where a Registered Student submits assessed work that contributes to a final module mark after a prescribed deadline, or after an agreed extension, a penalty in the form of a reduction of the mark shall be imposed in accordance with the Assessment Protocols: Code of Practice on the Assessment of Taught Programmes and Modules.

(b) Amendments to the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment (additions underlined, deletions struck through). Section 9-9.5 of the Code of Practice is attached for completeness as Appendix 1, with amendments highlighted:

9.3 Extensions

9.3 .1 The principal academic unit should have a clear procedure for granting extensions including guidance on circumstances that will and will not be considered acceptable. Each Valid circumstances must normally involve both substantial and unforeseeable disruption, but each case should be considered on its merits and below are examples of acceptable and unacceptable circumstances.

9.3 .1 (a) Examples of acceptable circumstances include: major computer problems (e.g. failure of university IT systems, such as network or server failure), significant medical problems, personal problems, and compassionate matters (e.g., family bereavement).

9.3 .1 (b) Examples of unacceptable circumstances include: minor computer problems (e.g. lost or damaged disks, printer breakdown), lost assignments, desired books not in library, unverifiable travel difficulties, ~~and not realising deadline imminent~~ and failing properly to plan for a deadline.

9.3.2 In addition to the acceptable circumstances under 9.3.1 (a), Registered Students who are standing for election to Guild Sabbatical Officer posts during the main Officer Elections (which are normally held in March), will be eligible for extensions to their coursework deadlines (where coursework is understood as work being submitted where the question paper has been set in advance. This does not include class tests or

presentations or preparation for seminars or online multiple choice questions or equivalent). Registered Students acting as campaigners for candidates will not be eligible.

9.3.2 (a) Under these circumstances, extension to coursework deadlines will be for the purpose of replacing time lost through election commitments. Therefore, the extension period will relate to the deadline and not to the size of the piece of coursework.

9.3.2 (b) The campaigning period for Guild elections is two weeks, with dates confirmed by January of each year. Extension to coursework deadlines will not be granted to Registered Students whose deadline for submission falls before or in the first seven days of campaigning. If the deadline falls within the final seven days of campaigning, the Registered Student is entitled to a two week extension from the expected date of submission for each piece of work. If the deadline falls between one week and two weeks after the end of the voting, the candidate is entitled to an extension of one week from the expected date of submission for each piece of work.

9.3.34 To ensure equity of treatment for all Registered Students, ~~only one person should grant extensions. This would normally be the Head of principal academic unit (or Department) that owns the module, or authorised nominee.~~ extensions should normally be granted by one person from the principal academic unit or Department that owns the module, or authorised nominee, such as the Year Tutor, who has oversight of the Registered Student's programme of study.

9.5.1 It is recommended that, if work is submitted late and no extension has been granted, ~~or there is not sufficiently good cause for work being submitted late~~, then a penalty of 5 marks on the mark actually achieved should be imposed for each day that the assignment is late until 0 is reached. For example, a mark of 67 would become 62 marks on day one, 57 marks on day two, and so on. The days counted should not include weekends, public and University closed days. When setting deadlines, weekends and closed days should be borne in mind to minimise student manipulation of penalties. ~~Principal academic units who wish to adopt a different penalty should liaise with the relevant Head of College. In certain circumstances, for example, where assignments or the content are to be discussed in class shortly after the deadline, other penalties will need to be applied.~~

9.5.2 Those principal academic units that wish to adopt a different penalty from that as set out in 9.5.1 above must seek the approval of the College Learning and Teaching Committee. This may be appropriate for those programmes of study where Registered Students are required to complete assessed work on a regular basis, for example the weekly exercise or problem sheets in numerical disciplines, and when the smaller contribution to the overall module mark of this work, would mean that a 5 mark penalty would not sufficiently discourage the late submission of the assessed work.

9.5.23 Assignments should be marked in the normal way and penalties applied afterwards.

9.5.34 The original mark and the penalty should be clearly indicated in documentation submitted to Boards of Examiners. In exceptional circumstances, Boards of Examiners may modify decisions that have been implemented in accordance with standard procedures, but which seem excessively harsh.

Background to the paper and consultation

Coursework Deadlines Working Group

3. The need to review coursework deadline extensions had been identified during the 2009 institutional audit, when some students raised the issue with the auditors of the variance between Colleges in the manner in which extensions were granted. This issue was highlighted by the University's Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC.09.10.05 refers), which determined that a small working group should be established to review current legislation, guidance and practice with a view to their being greater consistency of the procedures and processes for granting extensions.
4. Accordingly, a Working Group was convened with the following membership to draw on expertise from across the University:
 - Dr Mike Harris, College of Life and Environmental Sciences (Chair)
 - Dr Dave Gunning, College of Arts and Law
 - Dr Ray Jones, College of Engineering and Physical Sciences
 - Professor David Maddison, College of Social Sciences
 - Professor Janice Marshall, College of Medical and Dental Sciences
 - Mr Paul Fantom, Academic and Student Administration (Secretary)
5. Initial enquiries had been made to identify the nature of the issues raised by the students with the auditors. However, it transpired that the interviews between the auditors and students were carried out in the absence of any University staff and that no record of the discussion was held by the University. Since it was not possible to identify with precision where potential issues or problems lay, the Working Group adopted a comparative approach to look at experience across all of the Colleges.
6. The working group systematically examined the relevant University legislation and the associated Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment. This enabled the Working Group to share experience in terms of the practices that worked effectively, to identify any differences that existed between the Colleges and to consider the best response in terms of the wider University.
7. On this basis, a number of possible amendments to legislation and the Code of Practice were identified with the aim of ensuring greater consistency across the University. The proposed amendments, as discussed by the Working Group, are set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 above.

Guild Proposals on Coursework Extensions for Guild of Students' Election Candidates

8. The Guild of Students' Officer Team is elected annually during an intensive two week campaign period in March. Currently, there is no provision within University Codes of Practice for candidates in the Guild Officer Elections to be granted extensions to coursework due during the election period. Subsequently, extensions to coursework are being given to election candidates on an ad hoc basis. This has the potential to unfairly advantage some election candidates over others and the lack of regulatory provision also has the potential to discourage students from candidature.
9. At its meeting on 11th May, University Learning & Teaching Committee approved recommendations from the Guild of Students for granting coursework

extensions to Guild Officer Elections to ensure equity for all candidates (LTC.10.05.03), subject to approval by APRC of detailed changes to regulations.

10. Under the approved proposals, the Guild will bring forward the deadline for nominations to four weeks before the campaigning period, to give time for the Guild and ASA to complete the existing assurance checks and then for the Guild to notify Schools of candidates, and for candidates to plan their work and submit extensions and have them considered before the campaigning period begins. The Guild and ASA will draw up a 'rules' sheet for candidates, which will clarify regulations and related processes.
11. Following approval of the amendments, Colleges will be notified of the changes to the regulations and guidelines so that they can amend their handbooks/ internal forms accordingly.
12. There will be a review of these procedures following the elections in 2011, with a report to U-LTC.

Arguments in Support of the Proposals

13. The following sets out arguments in support of the proposals arising firstly from the working group and, secondly, from the Guild.
14. In reviewing current practices in their respective Colleges, the members of the Working Group noted that:
 - There were no significant anomalies, and that there was already considerable consistency of approach in terms of the requirements for granting extensions, as set out in the University legislation.
 - Whilst the Code of Practice stipulated that extensions should only be granted by one person at programme level, there should be sufficient flexibility to allow for programmes such as the MBChB where this would be impractical due to the large number of students registered on the programme.
 - In the case of joint honours students, the granting of extensions might need to be dealt with by more than one person and that clear communication was therefore necessary.
 - It was reasonable that there should be some allowance for discretion in the handling of requests for extensions, particularly in terms of the extent to which situations could be foreseen by students, for example, those arising from employment or child care arrangements.
 - In terms of the penalty for the submission of late work without an extension having been agreed, the penalty of a 5 mark deduction per day was not always effective, especially in the numerical disciplines where students are required to complete weekly problem sheets, and given that these make a smaller contribution to the overall module mark. Formerly, it had been agreed that in the case of such programmes, and subject to agreement by the relevant Dean, that a higher penalty could be imposed for lateness in such cases. The proposed new clause 9.5.2 seeks to update this provision.

15. In terms of Guild Officer Elections, the Guild put forward the following arguments:

- Within the Code of Practice for Taught Programme and Module Assessment, being a candidate in the Guild Officer Elections is currently not listed as an acceptable reason for the granting of extensions on assessed work that is to be submitted during the election fortnight.
- Anecdotal evidence confirms that in the past extensions have been granted to students on a case by case basis, and not equally across the University. During previous Guild Officer Elections, extensions on various pieces of work ranging in length from two days to one month have been reported for students across different years and Schools. However, some students standing as Officer Candidates have received no extensions at all on their assessed work.
- The University has a responsibility under the 1994 Education Act to ensure that Guild Elections are free and fair, and that the Guild is a democratic organisation. The present system, in which some candidates have the pressures of coursework removed from them by sympathetic tutors and others do not, is not equitable and does not facilitate a fair elections process.
- In addition, not all students have significant coursework deadlines at the same time of year, and in a situation where no extensions are granted students with no course work requirements during the campaigning fortnight gain an advantage, as was the case this year when a blanket ban on extensions was enforced.
- The Guild of Students requires any Sabbatical Officer re-standing for a second term to take the whole of the campaigning fortnight as leave from the Guild and their Officer duties. This can create an advantage over registered students who are candidates in the same election and are required to meet University deadlines.

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