

LTC15D133

Title: *Proposed withdrawal of the Policy on Awarding Marks for Student Engagement*
Author: Dr Adam Longcroft (ADTP)
Date: 27 April 2016
Circulation: LTC – 11 May 2016
Agenda: LTC15A005
Version: Final
Status: Open

Issue

A proposal from the Academic Director for Taught Programmes to withdraw the Policy on Awarding Marks for Student Engagement

Recommendation

The ADTP recommends that LTC authorise the withdrawal of the Policy.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications associated with the proposal.

Risk Implications

There are no risk implications associated with the proposal.

Equality and Diversity

There are no equality or diversity implications associated with the proposal

Timing of decisions

Approval by LTC will result in immediate withdrawal of the Policy from the LTS webpages.

Further Information

Contact: Dr Adam Longcroft e mail: a.longcroft@uea.ac.uk

Background

The existing Policy Note on Awarding Marks for Student Engagement was approved by University LTC 2007, and amended by TPPG in Oct 2010. A copy of the Policy is attached as Appendix 1. It is now 6 years since University LTC considered whether it remains 'fit for purpose'. TPPG discussed the Policy in April 2016. At this meeting the ADTP set-out the more problematic aspects of the Policy and suggested that it should be formally withdrawn as a policy. TPPG was unanimous in its support.

Recommendation to LTC

It is proposed that the policy is withdrawn. The ADTP has set out the rationale for the proposal below.

Note: If LTC members believe, instead, that the policy should be retained, the ADTP has suggested some revisions to the policy in **Appendix 1** which will ensure that it is applied more consistently.

Benefits of the Policy

There are some advantages of rewarding 'engagement' with marks:

- It recognises that there are many ways of demonstrating learning and achievement, other than relying on written submissions or formal presentations.
- It ensures that students engaging in a robust manner are rewarded for doing so, thereby promoting pro-active engagement in subsequent modules.
- It 'empowers' staff to reward students who prepare thoroughly for seminars/lab sessions/practicals and who contribute actively in class sessions.
- It places the emphasis on 'awarding' marks, rather than deducting them – it is therefore a 'positive' means of reward.

Problems with the Policy

There are, however, also some disadvantages of rewarding engagement with marks:

- Enthusiastic 'engagement' – i.e. active participation in seminars, workshops, lab sessions etc – should be taken as a 'given'; i.e. the University should, in keeping with the expectations set out in the *Student Charter*, be able to expect that students engage proactively with their studies. It should not need to reward 'engagement' by allocating marks to this.
- Staff perceptions of students' engagement may be subjective and inaccurate – e.g. a student may have prepared thoroughly by reading seminar papers etc. but choose to say little in the seminar discussion itself.
- Awarding marks for engagement is unnecessary since a student's level of 'engagement' is reflected in the work which students submit and which is formally assessed by other means. An 'engaged' student will therefore normally gain a better mark than one who is un-engaged.
- Defining engagement is extremely problematic and good engagement is not always 'visible' to academic staff. In a 20 credit module there are often only c.36-44 'contact hours'. The other 160 hours are often allocated to 'independent study'. Staff are not in a position to determine how the student applies themselves or 'engages' with the content of the module during these independent study hours. Awarding or deducting marks for engagement on the basis of a very small minority of the study hours associated with a module is inherently problematic.
- Choosing not to award marks for engagement to students who fail to prepare, for example, by reading set seminar readings in advance of a seminar requires the staff member to determine whether a student has or has not read said papers. Establishing this can be problematic – a student may have read but not understood the paper, and a failure to engage in the seminar discussion may reflect a lack of understanding, not a lack of engagement.

Conclusion

The advantages of rewarding 'engagement' explicitly by allocating marks are outweighed by the serious disadvantages and the very real difficulties involved in defining and monitoring it.

Appendix 1

Policy Note on Student Engagement

This policy note must be read in conjunction with General Regulation 13 (Attendance, Engagement and Progress) and the Procedure for Dealing with Matters Relating to Attendance, Progress and Engagement.

1. An underpinning principle of the regulatory frameworks for taught awards is that credit is an indicator of the associated expected volume of study, whilst the mark for the module indicates achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

2. Severe and/or persistent cases of non-attendance or non-engagement should be dealt with not by the refusal of permission to sit examinations or permission to sit an examination, **or by refusal to provide data for an assessment**, or by mark penalisation (as was permitted under previous regulations), but by the disciplinary route.

3. Where a member of staff identifies severe or persistent non-attendance or non-engagement they shall refer the matter to the Head of School for action **under General Regulation 13**. ~~the Procedures for Dealing with Matters Relating to Attendance, Engagement and Progress.~~

4. The University, in common with British Higher Education sector as a whole, is committed to the principle that assessment must be firmly bound to identified learning outcomes. In this context it is not permissible to penalise non-attendance through the deduction of marks which have been awarded for positive achievement of learning outcomes elsewhere in the module. Instead we may actively reward engagement where it demonstrates successful achievement of explicit learning outcomes. Thus, for example, a module that is taught in part through seminars or tutorials designed for discussion might spell out among its intended learning outcomes some which depend on engagement, the demonstration of which is not possible without attendance. Examples of such learning outcomes might include:

- participation in group discussion, at a minimum through regular listening, at best through regular active participation;
- evidence of ability to organise work schedule;
- sound time-keeping;
- good citizenship.

Any and every contribution to a seminar or tutorial should be assessed where such contributions contribute to the learning outcomes of the module. It is not permissible to set a minimum threshold for attendance before marks will be awarded for engagement, nor to deny marks for achievement of some of the stated intended learning outcomes on the basis that others have not been achieved. (In some professional and health-related subjects there are published requirements to attend preparatory classes prior to being permitted to undertake assessment, on the grounds of patient safety. These are excluded from this policy.)

5. Where, then, 'academic engagement' is a desired learning outcome of a module, the following principles should apply:

- the learning outcome(s) should be clearly stated and be compatible with Equal Opportunities;
- the assessment and marking criteria should be published;
- up to and no more than 10%* of the available marks might be awarded on the basis of the extent to which the learning outcome(s) have been demonstrated by 'engagement';
- **marks should not be awarded solely on the basis of attendance since this is not of itself reliable evidence of achievement or positive engagement. Instead, marks should only be awarded in relation to students' achievement of stated learning outcomes.**
- marks are to be positively awarded for demonstration of achievement rather than deducted: a student who does not participate does not receive any of the marks set aside for participation (however that is expressed), i.e. a marks neutral position, whilst

a student who is able to demonstrate participation may be awarded some or all the marks set aside for this aspect;

- where appropriate, the level of reward is likely to depend on the quality as well as the fact of regular engagement, e.g. active participation, constructive contribution.
- due allowance should be granted for instances of nonattendance where students present timely and satisfactory explanation;
- appropriate learning and teaching events in which 'academic engagement' might be demonstrated include: seminars, tutorials, group-work, presentations, projects, fieldwork, laboratory and/or practical classes. Lectures should be excluded;
- Module Organisers assessing such learning outcomes must keep accurate records of student engagement.

** If it is desired that marks for the academic engagement should exceed 10% of the total available, a concession request must be made to the Academic Director of Taught Programmes. In these circumstances, Module Organisers are strongly urged to consider including a student's own assessment of his/her participation ("I attended", "I listened", "I contributed") which would then be moderated by the academic assessor (i.e. the staff member who awards marks for engagement).*

- Module outlines must clearly state where marks for engagement will be awarded, alongside a description of the learning outcomes that will be assessed via engagement and the criteria that will be used to allocate marks for engagement.
- Staff and students should be aware that anonymised marking is not possible where academic engagement is being assessed.

6. To ensure equity, transparency and consistency, Module Organisers who wish to reserve some marks to incentivise engagement are **required**, ~~for all modules taught in or after Semester 1 2007-08~~, to ensure that this is not done in terms of penalising non-attendance but with reference to explicit learning outcomes and in accordance with the principles outlined in Section 5 above.

~~7. The University Learning and Teaching Committee will undertake an equal opportunities impact assessment and review of those units with explicit learning outcomes around 'academic engagement'.~~

In summary, the Learning and Teaching Committee:

- **acknowledges** the desire on the part of some Schools to recognise (reward) academic "engagement";
- **accepts** that academic engagement is likely to enhance both the academic experience of the student concerned and that of co-students;
- **reminds colleagues that** severe and/or persistent cases of lack of academic engagement should continue to be dealt with via the University's disciplinary regulations (General Regulation 13);
- **counsels** that Schools give careful thought to equal opportunity considerations (e.g. part-time students, student with family commitments and international students) when setting learning outcomes for 'academic engagement'.