

LTC09D86

Title: Taught Programmes Policy Group - Meeting of 13 January 2010
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The Policy Group discussed a number of items as set out below. There is only one item for LTC to consider:

- Guidance note on the conduct of viva voce examinations

1. Reporting of Marks and Aggregates to Assessment Boards

The Chair advised the Policy Group that it had not been practicable to implement Regulations revised for this academic year in respect of reporting of marks to Assessment Boards. Prompted by suggestions from external examiners and following consultation with Chairs of Examiners, it had been recommended that module marks be reported to Boards of Examiners as integers and that year and final aggregates should be reported to one decimal place. When the new Student Information System had been implemented it had not been possible to deliver this revised format. It had been hoped that it would be possible to provide reports to Boards of Examiners that adopted the new format, but during the testing process last semester issues had been identified that would require significant resource to address. The Chair had therefore taken the decision to revert to reporting all marks to two decimal places for Boards in 2009/10.

As new Regulations and therefore new progression and award rules would be in place for 2012/13 it seemed sensible to delay the amendments to reporting of marks until then, rather than requiring two substantial rewrites of assessment rules within SIS.

The Chair would be writing to Chairs of Examiners and Secretaries to Boards to advise them of this change. Chairs of Examiners would be asked to brief external examiners as appropriate.

2. Grade Point Average (GPA)

The Chair reported that he had been exploring the adoption of a Grade Point Average (GPA) at UEA. As members might recall, the Burgess Review had proposed in its consultation paper the GPA as a potential alternative to the current classification scheme. When consulted on this matter some years ago Heads of School had overwhelmingly supported a move to GPA, but the final report of the Burgess Review had surprised many by rejecting the GPA with little explanation, proposing the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) in place of classification. An advantage of the GPA was that it was an internationally recognised currency and the adoption of GPA by UEA (initially in parallel with the classification system) might provide students with an advantage in a global education and employment market. The Chair would continue to explore the practicalities of implementing a GPA alongside classification, including the resource implications and would keep the Policy Group informed.

3. Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

The Policy Group was informed that the University would be participating in the survey again in 2010 (its second year). Coordination of the survey had moved from Anne Vallins (DOS/LTQO) to Joanne Ashman (LTQO). In response to the experience of running the survey in 2009, universities were being given a degree of choice in respect of the dates when the survey would be available to students. Associate Deans, the Academic Officer and the President of the Graduate Students Association were being consulted for their views on the optimum survey period. The dates of the survey would, however, need to be fitted into the schedule of work in the Survey Office and would have to be timetabled to avoid other University surveys, such as the survey of the Advising System. It was hoped that response rates for PTES could be significantly improved upon, whilst noting that response rates across the sector had been very disappointing.

4. Feedback on Coursework

The Policy Group reflected on its consideration and discussion of issues associated with feedback over the past few years and considered next steps. The information before TPPG included data from the past three National Student Satisfaction surveys which showed that relative to other Institutions UEA had dropped down the rankings according to the NSS results concerning feedback. While TPPG felt this was not a reflection of poorer feedback at UEA than previously but the incorporation of HE provision at FE colleges in the NSS and relative improvement of NSS scores for other Universities, it was concerned that it underscored the lack of substantive progress on this issue by UEA. The Policy Group were very grateful that Harriet Jones (BIO), who had undertaken a number of UEA and Higher Education Academy sponsored projects on issues associated with feedback, was able to attend the meeting and inform the discussion.

The Policy Group agreed the following action points:

- A sub-group of the Policy Group would develop a set of basic principles for the provision of feedback to students on assessed work. The draft principles will be considered by the Policy Group at its June meeting.
- A sub-group of the Policy Group would, potentially as part of the above, develop a guidance note on appropriate language to use in feedback, taking into account the principle that feedback should be constructive, be detailed enough to inform the student of the nature of the issue, and take into account that the audience might be students whose first language was not English and who might not, therefore understand nuances of language. This guidance note would take account of the outcomes of an HEA funded project exploring what language works best for students.
- Associate Deans would be asked to discuss feedback with Faculty Learning, Teaching & Quality Committees and with Schools, including the following issues, and report back to TPPG at its June meeting:
 - i. Existing areas of good practice in the provision of feedback and managing student expectations;
 - ii. Student perceptions of feedback and mechanisms for discussing with students their expectations of feedback and gaining a shared understanding of the provision and purposes of feedback;
 - iii. Mechanisms for reviewing course and module assessment strategies to identify the purpose of assessment tasks (e.g. as part of a learning process or to test that skills have been learned) and mechanisms for communicating these to students;
 - iv. Existing examples of feedback proformas and how these might appropriately adopted (noting that the Learning Enhancement Team had collated example proformas);
 - v. Action plans in response to these discussions

5. **Draft Policy on the Use of Proof Readers**

The Policy Group discussed a draft policy on the acceptable forms of proof reading. The policy note had been drafted in response to requests for additional guidance from students and academic staff, not least in the context of increasing concern about collusion. The policy document had been informed by comments from international students and staff as part of a survey of perceptions of English language skills, as well as by comments from the Learning Enhancement Team. As it is hoped that a common policy will apply to both taught and research students, the policy note will be referred to the Postgraduate Research Programmes Policy Group before coming to LTC.

It was noted that proof reading represented technical correction of work and that it might be helpful to have additional but separate guidance on formative feedback and the extent to which students could discuss their work with peers and tutors as part of the learning process.

6. **Draft Procedure for Teaching and Assessing near relatives of members of academic and administrative staff**

Whilst there are procedures in place for managing the admissions process for near relatives of members of University staff, a recent case had highlighted the absence of parallel guidance in respect of teaching and assessing such students once admitted. The Policy Group considered and commented on a draft procedure. The discussion identified other issues which needed to be considered and incorporated into the document, including other aspects of the student's experience, such as finance. The Policy Group also noted that further liaison with Admissions would be helpful, including a consideration of whether other relationships should be covered by the procedure. It was also noted that there were separate admissions processes for members of staff and that the procedure might helpfully be extended to them also.

The document will be revised by the Learning, Teaching and Quality Office and will be brought to LTC in due course.

7. **Guidance for Viva Voce Examinations**

Following consultation with the Faculty of Science, which is the only Faculty which currently makes use of the provisions within the Instructions to Examiners (CCS, Integrated Masters and CMF) for a viva voce, the Policy Group **recommends** to LTC the adoption of guidance notes. The notes are intended to supplement the provisions of the Regulations and Instructions to Examiners and provide a framework for providing information to students. The guidance note builds upon and formalises guidance developed within the Faculty.

Joanne Ashman
January 2010

Learning, Teaching & Quality Office

Guidelines for Viva Voce Examinations (Taught Programmes)

This document provides guidance additional to that contained within the Instructions to Examiners on the conduct of viva voce examinations. This guidance does not apply to oral examinations, which are normal assessment instruments attached to a module. The guidance applies to viva voce examinations, which are ad hoc examinations held in accordance with the Instructions to Examiners for taught programmes in order to assist a Board of Examiners in resolving the classification of degrees or other related matters.

Purpose

A viva voce within CCS, Integrated Masters and CMF is intended to provide the Board of Examiners with further information to assist them in classifying degrees or making an award. As such the viva voce aims to test students orally on a range of topics to determine whether their knowledge and ability as demonstrated through their responses to questions suggests a higher classification than that demonstrated by their profile of marks (where the profile of marks places a student in the borderline between classifications or where extenuating circumstances may have affected a student's performance so that marks may not represent actual ability) or where the student may be considered for a starred first.

Where a taught postgraduate student falls on the fail/pass borderline, the Board of Examiners may use a viva voce to determine whether failure should be condoned in up to 40 credits.

The viva voce supplements normal module and stage assessment.

No module or assessment item marks may be changed as the result of a viva voce.

Selection

Students will be selected for viva voce where

- a) they fall within 2% of the threshold for the higher classification (CCS);
- b) they fall within the pass/fail or pass/distinction borderline (CMF); or
- c) there is evidence that extenuating circumstances may have affected a student's performance across a number of modules;
- d) they have been identified as potentially being recommended for a starred first.

It is not appropriate to call a student for a viva voce where there are concerns over the originality or authenticity of assessed work (e.g. plagiarism).

The Chair of Examiners is ultimately responsible for selecting students for viva voce, but this task may be delegated to others in accordance with approved parameters.

As the viva voce represents a further opportunity for a student to demonstrate their academic ability there is no requirement for students to attend (although it is clearly in their interests to do so) and no penalty shall be applied should they be unable or unwilling to attend.

Notification

Whilst the Instructions to Examiners for CCS, Integrated Masters and CMF provide all Schools with the option of calling a student to a viva voce, it is assumed that they will only be

used where it is custom and practice to do so and not on an ad hoc basis to respond to a particular set of circumstances. It is therefore anticipated that Schools will have an established procedure and timetable for selecting students for viva voce and for notifying them in reasonable time. In some Schools this may take the form of the notification of a long list of those who may be called to viva, which is later refined once clearer assessment information is available.

Students who are on the long list will be notified at the earliest opportunity, which for undergraduates should be during normal semester time (i.e. not during a vacation).

Students shall be given at least 72 hours notice of a viva voce. Notification should be by phone if possible.

Students shall not be informed of their provisional aggregate mark / provisional classification before the viva.

Scope

A viva voce examination may focus on

- a) the content of the course as a whole (i.e. the subject matter of all modules enrolled on by a student);
- b) the subject matter of (a) module(s) where a student's performance has been weak or which has been affected by extenuating circumstances;
- c) the subject matter of a dissertation or project module where this is viewed as being a particularly significant piece of assessed work.

A student will not be advised in advance of the viva voce which of the above will be the focus of the viva voce and should prepare themselves as comprehensively as possible.

- d) where a viva voce has been called as a result of extenuating circumstances formally reported to the Board of Examiners in accordance with the Regulations and Instructions to Examiners, the examiners may additionally take the opportunity to explore briefly with the student the extent to which the reported extenuating circumstances have impacted upon their academic performance. Any such discussion must be in addition to the academic matters listed above, which should form the majority of the discussion. It is not appropriate for examiners to seek further information on the extenuating circumstances per se and must restrict themselves to exploring the impact of the circumstances on the student's studies and performance. The examiners must make it clear to the student that the student can decline to answer questions relating to extenuating circumstances and should cease the line of questioning if the student appears to be distressed.

Where a viva voce examination is likely to touch upon the impact of extenuating circumstances in addition to academic matters, the student should be advised of this in advance.

The viva voce should not be used as an opportunity for the external examiner to meet with students and discuss the course in general (although the external examiner will of course gain an additional impression of the course from the process). Other opportunities should be provided for interaction between external examiners and students if the external examiner sees this as desirable.

Examiners

The Instructions to Examiners for CCS, Integrated Masters and CMF state that a viva voce must be conducted by at least two examiners, one of whom shall be an external examiner and one of whom shall be an internal examiner.

Students should be informed of the names of the examiners conducting the viva voce at the same time as they are invited to attend.

If a student has a concern about the examiners conducting the viva voce this should be discussed immediately with the student's Academic Adviser. Students are not permitted to request a change of examiner, but Chairs of Examiners are asked to be sensitive to potential conflicts of interest when nominating examiners to conduct viva voce examinations.

The examiners conducting the viva voce will have had the opportunity to review the student's assessed work prior to the viva voce.

Format

As noted above, the viva voce supplements the formal assessment of the course and provides an opportunity for the student to demonstrate their academic ability.

The examiners will question the student individually on any aspect of the course as outlined in "Scope" above. As the aim of the viva voce is to determine whether the student has met the criteria for a higher classification, questioning should focus upon identifying evidence of higher academic ability (e.g. evidence of an ability to evaluate, analyse and synthesise information rather than recall detailed facts).

A viva voce will normally last for a maximum of 30 minutes.

Recommendation to the Board

As stated in the Instructions to Examiners, the purpose of the viva voce examination is to assist the Board of Examiners in reaching a decision on classification or award of a degree. The outcomes of the viva voce are an additional piece of information, to be considered by the Board alongside other information such as the profile of marks and any evidence relating to extenuating circumstances.

Whilst the views of the examiners conducting the viva voce will be particularly influential due to the nature and purpose of the viva voce, the examiners are only making recommendations to the Board of Examiners, which remains free to use its discretion when making a recommendation to Senate on the classification of a degree.

As a result of the viva voce examination, the examiners may recommend to the Board of Examiners a) that the student's classification remains as suggested by the aggregate, or b) that the student's classification should be raised to the next class.

As specified in the Instructions to Examiners, no student's classification may be lowered as a result of a viva voce examination.

Alternative Arrangements

There may be circumstances where it is impractical for a student to attend a viva voce, for example where extenuating circumstances prevent them from doing so or where a taught postgraduate has returned home by the time of the Board. Where practical to do so alternative arrangements may be made to ensure that such students have the same opportunity to demonstrate academic achievement at a higher level. Alternative arrangements may include teleconferencing or videoconferencing, where facilities exist.

Information to Students

Where the viva voce forms a normal part of the assessment process, information on the purpose and timing of the process should be published to (Final year) students, for example through the student handbook, an information sheet or a Blackboard page. (An example is attached as Appendix 1 for illustration.)

When students are invited to attend for viva voce examination they should be told the location and time of the examination, as well as the names of those conducting the examination.

The notification to students may include the suggestion that they consult with their Academic Adviser for guidance on the process.

Feedback to Students

Students will not normally be provided with feedback on their performance in a viva voce examination.

As part of the informal resolution of a student's concerns about classification (prior to a formal appeal) limited information may be shared with a student about the recommendations of the examiners conducting a viva voce examination. A student may be provided with a summary of issues considered as part of the classification of their degree, including the conclusions and recommendations of the examiners conducting a viva voce, as part of the response to an Academic Appeal (Stage 1 or Stage 2).

Appendix 1

Information on *viva voce* examinations 20xx-20xx For XXX Undergraduate students

A *viva voce* examination is an oral examination (from the Latin "examination by voice"), often referred to simply as a viva.

Vivas may be used to supplement the written and practical assessments that have been conducted throughout all the years of a course. They are offered to candidates 1) whose marks are within a borderline region for classification; 2) who have extenuating circumstances on record; and 3) before considering an award of a starred first.

Candidates will not be told their final aggregate mark before the viva.

The borderline regions for marks are:

Mark Range (Final Weighted Average)	Considered for upgrading to:
Between 68.00% and 69.99%	First Class Honours degree
Between 58.00% and 59.99%	Upper Second (2i) Class Honours degree
Between 48.00% and 49.99%	Lower Second (2ii) Class Honours degree

N.B. There is no borderline region to a Third Class Degree as this automatically denotes that the student has failed one or more Undergraduate modules and will be referred for re-assessment in August.

Before a viva meeting, the external examiner may review any exam script, submitted coursework, project and marks profile and all these elements (including the viva itself) will be taken into account when considering the final degree classification for candidates invited to viva. Assessment of any or all paperwork will occur regardless of whether or not a candidate attends the viva.

Candidates who may be eligible for a viva based on extenuating circumstances

Candidates who have formally reported that their performance may have been adversely affected by extenuating circumstances may be offered a viva at the discretion of the Chair of the Board of Examiners. Any such circumstances **MUST** be supported by documentary evidence, eg a medical certificate, letter from a doctor, hospital appointment card, letter from a solicitor, letter from the police, etc. It is the responsibility of the affected candidate to formally inform the Board of Examiners via [name and contact of administrator] of any such circumstances. **Your academic adviser will be able to help you with this procedure.** Please be assured that any information supplied will be kept confidential and will be shared only on a need to know basis.

Format of the viva

The viva is not intended to be an intimidating experience, and is not an alternative to a written examination. The aim is to give the candidate an opportunity to show what they know and understand. The examiners may wish to discuss your project and/or topics from any module you have taken (including those you took in your 2nd year!). You will not necessarily be expected to display detailed knowledge about these topics, but you should be able to conduct an informed conversation about them. The examiners will be looking for evidence of your ability to understand and discuss the topic at a higher academic level. You will not be told in advance what questions to expect, but your Academic Adviser may be able to help with any queries about the format of the viva.

If you have reported extenuating circumstances the impact of these upon your ability to study and on your academic performance may be discussed in addition to topics covered by your

course. The examiners are not permitted to ask you about the circumstances themselves and you would not have to answer any questions that made you feel uncomfortable.

Candidates will be interviewed individually, by one external examiner (an academic from another university who is a member of the Board of Examiners) and one internal examiner (a member of the School). The viva will last for a maximum of 30 minutes.

Attendance requirements at a viva

Candidates are not obliged to attend a viva. However, the viva is an opportunity for a candidate to demonstrate that he/she is deserving of the higher degree classification. Without the evidence provided by the viva, the candidate's degree classification may be unchanged. We therefore strongly encourage those students who are invited to a viva to attend.

Results of a viva

Based on a candidate's performance during the viva and any notes taken by the external examiners, one of two decisions will be made:

- The examiners may conclude that the candidate performed to a level commensurate with the *original* intended degree classification. Therefore they will recommend to the Board of Examiners that the candidate's degree classification remain *unchanged*.
- The examiners may conclude that the candidate performed to a level commensurate with a *higher* degree classification (above that due to the student's numerical mark). Therefore they will recommend that the candidate's degree classification be increased to the higher one.

The final decision on the candidate's degree classification, however, will be taken at the "Final Assessment Board", at which the viva examiners will present their recommendations to the full School Examination Board.

Please note the following two points:

- In no case will a candidate's degree classification be lowered.
- For those candidates who have been promoted to a higher degree classification on the basis of a viva, the numerical mark will remain unchanged.

Timing for 20XX: VERY IMPORTANT:

Please make sure you make a record of these timings in your diary / on your mobile phone / on your computer / anywhere else you think it would be useful.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Event</i>
Friday X June	5pm	Deadline for notification of extenuating circumstances
Friday XX June	5pm	The Teaching Office will notify students, by phone, who are selected for vivas.
Wednesday XX June	9am – 4.30pm	Vivas
Monday XX June		Pass lists published. The list will be posted in the Registry Reception window by the Examinations Office as soon as the results have been processed. The list will be anonymised by student number.

Please ensure that a suitable telephone number is listed on your SITS record so that we can contact you, if necessary, on the XX June. If you wish to inform [admin contact] of an alternative contact number, please send this by email and we will use these contact details, if necessary, on the day.