

LTC09D057

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Progress report on the review of the Instruction 5 to Examiners of CCS Regulations for 2009/10

1) Background

I have been asked by the Academic Registrar to review the Instructions to Examiners of the CCS Regulations for 2009/10 in respect of Instruction 5 which deals with the conduct of the Module Assessment Board.

To summarise, Instruction 5 gives the Board of Examiners the power to adjust provisional coursework and examination marks upwards or downwards, guided by the mean and the standard deviation to the mean, regardless of whether or not the marks have been published beforehand or not.

The Academic Registrar has recently received a Stage Two appeal from a second year student whose coursework marks (which had been previously published) had been significantly reduced by the Module Assessment Board in June using Instruction 5.1 of the CCS regs to take account of factors such as standard deviation and the overall average mark for the module relative to other modules. The student was unhappy with the Board of Examiners' decision to reduce his coursework marks and argued that he had been treated unfairly as scaling of marks based only on the criteria of the standard deviation and overall average mark for the module relative to other modules was not sophisticated enough to warrant significant downward scaling of his coursework marks and that additional criteria should be used to scale marks up or down. He also maintained that the statistical sample of the module was too small to make any meaningful conclusions as only 12 students took the module.

The Stage Two academic appeal was rejected as the Board of Examiners had acted as laid out in the current Instructions to Examiners. However, in view of this appeal, the Academic Registrar and the Pro Vice Chancellor (Academic) remain concerned about Instruction 5 to Examiners allowing scaling of marks on the basis of only using the criteria of the standard deviation to the mean and the overall average mark relative to other modules.

2) TPPG discussions and further proposals

TPPG discussed this issue at its meeting on 25 November 2009 and TPPG was asked what other measures should be used other than using the mean and the standard deviation to the mean to ensure that scaling of marks is conducted in a fair way.

It was agreed that just using the mean and the standard deviation to the mean for an assessment item or module mark are merely indicators that marking may be too generous or too severe. However, it was also agreed that there should not be any

significant further work imposed on Boards of Examiners which are already operating under tight deadlines during the assessment period.

TPPG agreed that the following issues need further discussion/attention:

- If marks are out of line with expectations, should there be additional sampling of coursework if coursework which has already been internally moderated and also sampled by external examiners?
- Boards of Examiners would appreciate further guidelines from LTQO on how scaling should be conducted as currently the regulations are silent as to what kind of scaling should be applied. Should there be linear or exponential scaling or any other scaling performed by the Boards of Examiners?
- Scaled marks should be clearly recorded and if possible via a flag on SITS

Further feedback was received from a Chairman of Examiners in the Science Faculty who maintains that:

- Marks should not be scaled unless there is reason to suspect a defect in the assessment procedure that is not based solely on the marks awarded
- The input of the markers/module organisers should always be sought before scaling is considered and therefore scaling should not be merely based on the mean and the standard deviation
- Extreme caution should be exercised when considering to scale marks downwards and should only be done in exceptional circumstances where the supporting evidence is unequivocal.

3) Next steps

It is proposed that a revised Instruction 5 to Examiners will be written in due course once the considerations of TPPG have been bottomed out. It is envisaged that a revised Instruction 5 will be in operation for the Module Assessment Board meetings which are supposed to take place in June 2010.