

LTC09D107

Title: TPPG : Review of Instructions to Examiners for CCS/IM/CMF for 09/10
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1) Background

Within the CCS and Integrated Masters Instructions to Examiners and within the regulations for CMF, Instruction 5/Instruction 6, allows the Board of Examiners at the Module Assessment Board meeting to scale marks prior to confirmation of marks.

Instruction 5.1 of CCS/5.2 IM and Instruction 6.2 for CMF programmes says: "...The Board of Examiners shall receive the marks presented for each module; the Board shall resolve whether or not they should be amended to take account of factors such as standard deviation and the overall average mark for the module relative to other modules. Any such adjustments must be made for all students enrolled on the module by either re-marking or the scaling of marks,..."

It goes on to say in Instruction 5.2 of CCS/5.3 IM that after completion of the above process in Instruction 5.1 of CCS/5.2 of IM and in Instruction 6.3 of CMF "...the Board shall confirm all marks. Prior to this confirmation, all marks shall be regarded as provisional, whether or not they have been published or presented on returned work to students, and may be subject to amendments by the Board of Examiners at the relevant module assessment meeting."

To summarise, Instruction 5 of CCS/IM and Instruction 6 of CMF 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 PVC (Academic) and Academic Registrar have recently dealt with 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 2009 using Instruction 5.1 of the CCS regulations 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.

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 PVC (Academic) remain concerned about Instruction 5 to Examiners within CCS/IM and Instruction 6 within CMF 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. I have therefore been asked to review these

instructions by the Academic Registrar with a view to implementing revised instructions for use at the Module Assessment Board meetings in June 2010.

2) **Scaling survey**

I have conducted a survey which has been sent out to all Schools of Study to find out more details about the use of Instruction 5 of CCS/IM and Instruction 6 of CMF. It looks as if there are three groups of Schools at UEA:

- a) Schools which do not scale marks at module assessment meetings;
- b) School which rarely scale marks at module assessment meetings; ;
- c) Schools which frequently scale marks at module assessment meetings.

3) **Proposal to broaden the criteria used by the Board of Examiners to scale marks**

I am concerned that scaling of marks can be justified; particularly should we be challenged by a student via an Academic Appeal or indeed challenged by an external examiner or other outside agency with an interest in standards or quality assurance issues. I am also concerned about how Boards of Examiners handle anomalous marks in an efficient way which will not hold up the business of the University unduly within a rather tight assessment schedule.

I consider the following to be a suitable basis on which we should operate:

1. Principles for dealing with marks that a Board of Examiners regards as anomalous
 - Scaling is an exceptional response to an exceptional situation and not part of the routine QA process.
 - Before requesting permission to scale marks Boards of Examiners should ensure that all appropriate steps are taken (such as moderation) to ensure the marks are a true reflection of the quality of the assessment items.
 - Students should not be disadvantaged. Thus their real mark cannot be reduced by scaling, only increased.
2. Uninformed scaling. This is based solely on the mean and the standard deviation and should not occur. If there is a stage 2 appeal against a mark scaled in this way the Academic Registrar has informed me that it will be allowed to go to a hearing where the Chair of the Board of Examiners will be asked to justify the scaled mark.
3. Informed scaling. The average mark and/or the standard deviation raises concerns and the Board of Examiners seeks other information to indicate whether there are problems with the assessment (e.g. consults markers). Where marks appear too low as a result of the problems scaling may occur so that students are not disadvantaged. Where marks appear too high (e.g. because the examination paper may not have been as challenging as anticipated) scaling will not be allowed.
4. Where scaling up is to be done the method of piecewise linear scaling should be used.

With effect from the June 2010 module assessment meetings, scaling will only be allowed by way of a concession from me, in my capacity of Director of Taught Programmes. A procedure will be developed to ensure as speedy a process as possible given the tightness of Board of Examiners' schedules. A pro-forma will have to be submitted straight after the module assessment board meeting explaining:

- The reasons for why scaling of marks should be considered on this occasion
- The evidence that was considered in arriving at the request for permission to scale marks
- The actual proposed scaling, the reasons for this and the relationship between the actual original mark and the proposed scaled mark
- The consequences of scaling or not scaling the marks

External examiners should be informed of any concession requests and their outcomes prior to Stage Board/Final Board of Examiners' meetings. (It is indeed good practice to send the minutes of the module assessment meeting to all external examiners prior to their attendance of Stage/Final Assessment meetings and concession information regarding the scaling of marks should be included with these minutes.)

4) Revised Instruction to Examiners

LTC is asked to approve the Instruction to Examiners which relates to scaling of marks and it is proposed that the wording of Instruction 5.1 to Examiners for the CCS Degree Regulations/ Instruction 5.2 to Examiners of the Integrated Masters Degree Regulations and Instruction 6.2 (a) for the CMF Instructions to Examiners should be revised as below **(bold text indicating the change to the Instructions to Examiners)**:

“...The Board of Examiners shall receive the marks presented for each module (and where appropriate components of modules) which is being assessed and for which it is responsible. **In reviewing the marks for each module, the Board shall make an informed decision if, in an exceptional case only, the marks should be amended by scaling. Marks cannot be scaled down. The decision to propose piecewise linear scaling up of marks should be informed not only by taking into account factors such as the standard deviation and the overall average mark for the module relative to other modules, but also by any other relevant factors which may justify informed scaling in the opinion of the Board of Examiners. Any proposal by the Board of Examiners to implement piecewise linear scaling up of marks needs to be granted by the Director of Taught Programmes by way of a concession. Any such upward scaling of marks must be made for all students enrolled on the module...**”

5) NEXT STEPS

Following approval of the revised Instruction to Examiners regarding the scaling of marks for CCS/IM and CMF, all Chairs of Examiners will be informed of the revised Instruction to Examiners in good time for implementation for the Module Assessment Board meetings in June 2010. Guidance notes and a pro-forma for concessions will also be issued with the communication regarding the revised Instruction to Examiners.