

## Protocol for UG Boards of Examiners Meetings Autumn 2020

### 1. Background and Principles

- 1.1 This guidance is based on the Framework for Assessment and Progression of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Graduating Cohorts - Summer 2020, which set out the principles and methodology to be implemented for the assessment and progression of Undergraduate (UG) cohorts in 2020, in accordance with the University of Birmingham 2019/20 Regulations for Emergency Situations. This document is focused on UG non-final year students, who will be continuing with their studies in 2020/21.
- 1.2 The emergency adaptations to assessment and progression as set out in the Framework were based on the principles that, wherever possible, students should not be disadvantaged by the situation in which we all find ourselves, and that the academic standards of everyone's degree should be maintained.
- 1.3 In order to ensure that non-final year students were able to progress to the next year of their studies, they were required to engage with a formative piece of Bridging Coursework to prepare them for their next year of study<sup>1</sup>. For students on professional programmes, the Bridging Coursework was also designed to address any PSRB requirements, thereby reducing the amount of additional work students would need to complete the following year. As with final-year students, the approach was designed to ensure 'no detriment' and also 'reduced pressure'.
- 1.4 **Continuing BSc/BEng/BA students**
  - The most positive position will be taken from the second year; it is recognised that some students will not have many credits from their second year and that the University needs to make sure the degrees awarded next summer are still credible.
  - Students with 60 credits or more at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark that will be weighted, as normal, at 25% of their overall mark for degree classification, but only if it improves their result (the final year will be weighted at 75% of the overall mark, as normal; if the Stage 2 mark is not used the overall mark will be based on 100% from the final year). The 60 credits is based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules.
  - Students with <60 credits, and at least 20 credits, at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark that will be weighted at 12.5% of their overall mark for degree classification but only if it improves their result (the final year will be weighted at 87.5% of the overall mark; if the Stage 2 mark is not used the overall mark will be based on 100% from the final year). These credits are based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules.
  - Students with <20 credits at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark, but it won't be used for the final degree classification; in this case the overall mark for degree classification will be based on 100% of the final year mark.
  - Note that the bridging coursework will have credit associated with it in some instances, e.g. for PSRB programmes.
  - In order to inform a judgement on degree classification in borderline cases after the final year (2020/21), a modified profiling system will be used (see Appendix A); the profile of marks as a whole (including second and first year marks) will be considered by Boards of Examiners and 'notwithstanding regulations' can be applied.

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<sup>1</sup> Students who were on an Erasmus year abroad in 2019/20 only needed to take the Bridging Coursework if they had completed less than 50% of the assessment in a module. If they had completed 50% or more of the assessment, it will count as 100%.

- The points above are in line with the no detriment policy outlined in the Framework for Continuing Students.
- Students will be permitted to re-sit completed or partial modules that they have failed at Stage 2 (i.e. where a student had made a first attempt, including the bridging coursework if that contributes to credits, e.g. for PRSB programmes). All assessments should be completed by the end of October 31<sup>st</sup> 2020. Note that there will be no resits for year 1 unless these are needed for professional programmes.
- Resits will be capped in the usual way at the pass mark%.
- External Examiner approval for draft papers/assessments is not required, but they should be part of the Boards

### 1.5 Continuing MSci/MEng students

- The most positive position will be taken from the third year; it is recognised that some students will not have all the credits from their third year and that the University needs to make sure the degrees awarded next summer are still credible.
- For the degree classification after the final year next session, the marks for the credits achieved in this 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the MSci/MEng will be used to calculate an overall mark for the degree classification based on Stage 3 (i.e. years 3 and 4) counting, as normal, 80% of the overall mark (Stage 2 counts 20%). The credits in year 3 will be based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules. However, the marks for year 3 will only be used if they improve the overall mark for degree classification; if not, the final year marks will count 80% of the overall mark and Stage 2 will count 20%.
- Note that the bridging coursework will have credit associated with it in some instances e.g. for PSRB programmes.
- In order to inform a judgement on degree classification in borderline cases in the final year (2021/22), a modified profiling system will be used (Appendix A); the profile of marks as a whole (including second and first year marks) will be considered by Boards of Examiners and 'notwithstanding regulations' can be applied.
- The points above are in line with the no detriment policy outlined in the Framework for Continuing Students.
- Students will be permitted to re-sit completed or partial modules that they have failed (i.e. where a student had made a first attempt, including the bridging coursework if that contributes to credits, e.g. for PRSB programmes). All assessments should be completed by the end of October 31<sup>st</sup> 2020.
- Resits will be capped in the usual way at 40%
- External Examiner approval for draft papers/assessments is not required, but they should be part of the Exam Boards

## 2. Timing and Deadlines

- 2.1 It was recognised ahead of the summer Boards of Examiners meetings that flexibility with the normal deadlines would be helpful, particularly so that Boards could focus on the most urgent task of confirming marks and awards for final year students. The normal deadlines were therefore adjusted, and it was agreed that Boards for continuing students would take place in September. Dates have been confirmed as follows:

Activity	Proposed Deadline for autumn 2020 (NON-FINAL YEAR STUDENTS)
Release of Bridging Coursework details to relevant students	Friday 15 May
Internal Board of Examiners meetings to agree which students may need to take resits	September
Release of resit assessments through Canvas to relevant students (submission deadline 31 October)	Following internal Board meetings (Schools to determine timescales locally)
External examiner report deadline	7 August for main reports following summer Boards; additional comments can be submitted following autumn Boards (by 30 September) if external examiner wishes to raise other issues
Release of new functionality in BIRMS to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• calculate module marks and credits awarded for partially completed modules;</li> <li>• calculate new Proceed 'ART' to progress students to their next year of study;</li> <li>• calculate 'Progression' mark for students progressing from year 2 or above.</li> </ul>	Monday 10 August
Schools to progress all students to the next year of their studies, using new 'ART' which will be available in BIRMS	From 10 August
Deadline for unconfirmed marks entry in BIRMS	By close of business on Wednesday 2 September
Boards of Examiners meet (including ratification of resit and progression decisions)	By Thursday 10 September
Deadline for release of marks and recommendations from BIRMS into Banner  Deadline for any recommendations outside the Framework to be returned to Registry for consideration by PAB  Deadline for return of Board paperwork to Registry (minutes, marksheets, pass lists, Chair's statement, summaries of ECs and recommendations outside Framework, summaries of decisions for non-progression of individual students)	By close of business on Monday 14 September
Students can view marks online via the my.bham portal	From Tuesday 15 September
Meeting of PAB	Not required as vast majority of students will progress. Any individual cases to be considered by circulation or Chair's action.

Appeals deadline	Wednesday 29 September for most students
Conferral of degrees by special warrant	Late August/early September (students may also opt to graduate at the December ceremonies instead)
Degree certificates and transcripts available for students to view online through Verify	21 September
Submission of resit assessments through Canvas	31 October 2020
Boards of Examiners confirm resit outcomes (may be virtual, by circulation or Chair's action)	November 2020
Deadline for release of marks and recommendations from BIRMS into Banner  Deadline for any recommendations outside the Framework to be returned to Registry for consideration by PAB  Deadline for return of Board paperwork to Registry (minutes, marksheets, pass lists, Chair's statement, summaries of ECs and recommendations outside Framework, summaries of decisions for non-progression of individual students)	Tbc
Students can view marks online via the my.bham portal	Tbc

### 3. Role of Boards of Examiners

- 3.1 The role of Boards of Examiners will need to be moderately different in autumn 2020, as it was in summer 2020, to reflect the Emergency Frameworks for assessment and progression.
- 3.2 The fundamental role of Boards remains the same, i.e. oversight and confirmation of marks, progress decisions and awards, in accordance with [QAA guidance](#):
- “For awarding bodies, it is your responsibility to make sound judgements about the circumstances in which credit and qualifications may be awarded. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to make such awards even where students have not completed all planned learning and assessment. Awarding bodies will need to judge the extent to which there is sufficient evidence to determine that outcomes at the appropriate level have been achieved and this may be different for different courses and students. Where a decision is taken to award credit or qualifications to students who have not completed all planned assessment, the awarding body should record the basis for that decision.”
- 3.3 **Module marks and Bridging Coursework:** As normal, the Board should approve all module marks. This year, module marks for continuing students (if not already confirmed at June Boards) will be calculated in line with those for finalists, i.e. if the modules are incomplete, the mark will be calculated using adjusted component weightings and the credits pro-rated.
- 3.3.1 Students on programmes with PSRB requirements will receive a numeric mark for their Bridging Coursework, which will be recorded against a credit-bearing LC, LI or LH Bridging Coursework module as appropriate. Students on programmes without PSRB requirements will receive a pass/fail

mark recorded against a zero-credit Bridging Coursework module.

- 3.4 **Progression Marks for Non-final year students:** In accordance with the Emergency Progression Framework, all non-final year students will be progressed automatically to the next year. The Board will need to approve the pre-calculated Progression Marks for students progressing from year 2 or above. Students who have fails in more than 50% of the modules they have attempted should be provided with tutorial advice so that they can prepare effectively for the following year and/or consider whether it is in their interests to repeat the year or resubmit assessments (either in autumn 2020 or in 2020/21 as an external student). The pre-calculated Progression Marks for students progressing from year 2 or above will be displayed in Online Results.
- 3.5 **Extenuating circumstances:** Boards should consider and approve ECs recommendations as normal, but should be aware that ECs Panels have been advised to balance the need for flexibility regarding availability of evidence with the need to ensure that ECs decisions are taken in the context of maintaining academic standards. In addition, it is recommended that programme leads highlight any particular COVID-related issues that may have affected student performance more generally.
- 3.6 **Recommendations ‘Notwithstanding Regulations’ normally referred to Progress & Awards Board (PAB):** The principle of Notwithstanding Regulations is replaced this year with the principle of ‘Notwithstanding Emergency Frameworks’ (where the latter supersede Regulations). PAB consideration of any individual cases will take place by circulation or Chair’s action as appropriate, and any cases should be submitted to Marcelle Cobbold (Head of Taught Student Administration) as soon as possible once they are identified. Advice on individual cases can be sought from Registry as normal.
- 3.7 **Programme sign-off forms (‘Determination of Students’ Eligibility to Graduate Spring 2020’):** Any completed forms not previously submitted to the Board should be received and ratified by the Board, and confirmed as such in the minutes. There is no need for approval of these forms by other School or College committees.
- 3.8 **Chair’s Statement:** The Chair (and external examiner) will need to sign off a statement as normal to confirm that the Board has operated appropriately and all degree classifications have been agreed by the external examiner. A revised statement will be provided by Registry to reflect the current arrangements.

#### 4. Determination of Resit Assessments

- 4.1 Any continuing student who has failed a completed or partially completed module in 2019/20 will, as normal, be permitted to resit the same assessment (i.e. a second attempt of the same, previously submitted assessment). Resits are expected to be capped at the pass mark as normal. Uncapped ‘first sits’ can still be offered as a result of ECs (but not on a ‘blanket’ basis to all students).
- 4.2 Decisions about which students may need to take resits should be taken at Board meetings in September. Timings are set out in section 2, above.

#### 5. Role of External Examiners

- 5.1 While the external examiner role remains broadly the same in principle (i.e. they scrutinise and endorse outcomes of assessment processes, confirming results and progress decisions), there are some important differences this year.

- 5.2 **Framework arrangements:** External examiners are not asked to give retrospective approval to the emergency Frameworks. They have been informed of the broad approach, and their role this year, as in all years, is to quality assure the application of the Regulations (i.e. Frameworks) rather than approve the University's legislation.
- 5.3 **Moderation:** External examiners will be required to moderate samples of work in accordance with their normal duties. There is no need for externals to review samples of Bridging Coursework completed by non-final year students, given that this coursework is formative rather than summative.

As normal, External Examiners should not normally be expected to adjudicate between internal markers. Disagreements between internal markers should be resolved before a sample of work is seen by the External Examiner. This may be through the use of a third marker, or consultation with senior colleagues within the School. In all cases it should be transparent to the External Examiner how the final mark was decided. If, in exceptional cases, a mark has not been agreed internally, the views of the External Examiner can be taken into account in determining the final mark. External Examiners are not permitted to alter the mark of any student.

- 5.4 **Meetings with students:** External Examiners should be provided with the opportunity to meet with students, as normal, and meetings should be arranged virtually by Skype or similar.
- 5.5. **Attendance at Board of Examiners meetings:** As normal, an external examiner should attend all Board meetings (virtually, if face-to-face Boards are still not possible) or, if this is not possible, a consulting mechanism should be in place before marks and decisions are released. If there are any difficulties with securing external examiner input, please consult with the DPVC (Education).
- 5.6 **Confirmation of module marks and checking standards:** External examiners should check on standards by scrutinising module marks statistics to confirm that they are not seriously out of line with previous years and that standards have been maintained. The external examiner should be asked to endorse all progression decisions. This is essential in order to evidence the maintenance of academic standards and that students have been treated fairly and not disadvantaged by the situation. We may need to produce this evidence in response to academic appeals or complaints from students.
- 5.7 **Annual report:** By the time of the autumn Boards of Examiners meetings, external examiners will already have submitted their annual reports. If there are any additional issues external examiners wish to raise at that point, they may submit further comments by 30 September.

## 6. Practical Arrangements for Virtual Board of Examiners Meetings

- 6.1 **Virtual meetings:** Meetings may be held virtually using Skype for Business, Zoom, Teams, Canvas Conferencing or similar. If the meeting cannot take place face-to-face and holding a virtual meeting is problematic for any reason, Schools may wish to consider email circulation (but should be aware of data protection and confidentiality considerations if discussion is effectively on record through email correspondence).
- 6.2 **Number and timing of meetings:** As indicated in the timescales above, Schools may wish to hold internal Board meetings for non-final year students. However, beyond this, it is not envisaged that there will need to be an increase in meetings.
- 6.3 **Quoracy:** The normal quoracy arrangements apply, i.e. a minimum of three academic staff plus an external examiner (see above regarding the role of the external examiner). If this is not possible for

any reason, please consult with the DPVC (Education).

- 6.4 **Agenda:** For the benefit of the external examiner, agenda items should include a brief summary of the Emergency Frameworks. A template for the Agenda as well as a summary document will be provided by Registry, either for circulation to members in advance, or to be read out by the Chair. The summary will emphasise that the key principle is to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by the situation while ensuring that academic standards are maintained.
- 6.5 **Minutes:** It is important to ensure that Board decisions are minuted clearly and accurately, and that minutes are returned to Registry to form part of the formal record of the exceptional arrangements this year. Minutes may need to be used as evidence should students appeal or complain, or should the QAA or OfS decide to scrutinise the University's arrangements (note: a template for the Minutes will be provided by Registry).
- 6.6 **Support available:** Once agreed, the various sections of this document will form part of an updated version of Registry's 'End of Session' guidance pack. For this year only, in order to provide additional support for colleagues and emphasise the University's commitment to Quality Assurance, each College's Academic Policy Partner (or delegate) will be available to attend Boards of Examiners in an advisory capacity should there be any queries in relation to the application of the Emergency Frameworks.

## Appendix A: Determination of Degree Classifications at 2021/22 Exam Boards

Marks will be calculated based on the Emergency Framework and process set out below to determine an initial overall weighted mean mark that will be used to determine the final degree classification. Note that the procedures outlined below are subject to approval by UQAC and UEC.

1. Each UG/Integrated Masters finalist student to be graduated will be required to have (in addition to marks from previous years) marks for at least the equivalent of 100 credits (as normal) of successfully completed work from the final year of their programme, and sufficient evidence that they have met the overall Programme Learning Outcomes.
2. The module marks profile will need to be reviewed for each (anonymised) student, including final year marks (and Stage 3 for MSci/MEng students), second year marks, and first year marks (if appropriate), to determine:
  - (i) whether there is evidence of a negative impact on 2<sup>nd</sup> year marks for BSc/BEng/BA students, or 3<sup>rd</sup> year marks for MSci/MEng students, gained for work submitted during the COVID-19 disruption (i.e. from 20 March 2020, when the University moved to Restricted Campus Operations, until autumn 2020) compared to marks gained for work submitted pre- or post-disruption;
  - (ii) whether there is evidence of a negative difference between the marks awarded pre- and post-COVID-19.
3. This information will then be used to inform decisions on degree classifications, particularly for those students who fall into borderline categories.
4. The Board of Examiners will apply the following principles and criteria to decide on the degree classification of individual students as follows (note: this example is for the award of a 1st class honours degree for a BSc/BA/BEng); the same principles apply to the other degree classifications (apart from a 3rd Class degree, in which case only 'Notwithstanding the Emergency Framework' should be used for students with <39.49% overall). These principles and criteria have been designed to ensure that there is consistency in the determination of degree classifications for individual students in a cohort and between different cohorts.

### BA/BSc/BEng

- Students with 60 credits or more at Stage 2 will have received a formal progression mark that can be weighted at 25% of their overall mark for degree classification if it improves their result (the final year will be weighted at 75% of the overall mark); if the Stage 2 mark is not used the overall mark will be based on 100% from the final year
- The 60 credits at stage 2 is based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules.
- Students with <60 credits at Stage2 will have received a formal progression mark that can be weighted at 12.5% of their overall mark for degree classification if it improves their result (the final year will be weighted at 87.5% of the overall mark); if the Stage 2 mark is not used the overall mark will be based on 100% from the final year These credits were based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules.
- Students with <20 credits at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark, but it won't be used for the final degree classification; in this case the overall mark for degree classification will be based on 100% of the final year mark.
- Note that the bridging coursework will have credit associated with it in some instances for PSRB programmes.

- In normal profiling for a classified Bachelor's degree, >240 units in the classification bands above the degree class indicated by the calculation of the arithmetic mean are required (final year is 360 units; 2<sup>nd</sup> year is 120 units).
- For this cohort of students, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year results will vary from student to student, so it is not possible to include the 2<sup>nd</sup> year credits in a formula for profiling in a consistent way. However, the overall profile of marks can be used to support a case for uplifting the grade notwithstanding regulations.

For students completing their degree next session 2020/21:

### **First class**

- (i) If a student has obtained an overall weighted mean mark of at least 70% (69.50%) they will be awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours.
- (ii) If a student achieves <70% (68.0-69.49%), in order to take into consideration that some marks in the second year may have been affected by the Covid-19 situation, an award of a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours will be made if all of the following conditions are met:
  - at least 68% has been achieved overall (and not just in the final year);
  - at least 60 credits (50% of the module marks) in the final year are 1<sup>st</sup> class standard;
  - of the remainder, at least 40 credits are 2.1 standard;
- (iii) There might be situations in which a student has an overall mark of <70%, but is not awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> class degree because the above criteria are not fulfilled. In such cases, if the Board of Examiners decides that a student with <70% should be awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours, based on the full profile of marks across all years of study, an award can be made (without recourse to PAB) Notwithstanding Regulations as long as the external examiner is supportive. The decision and rationale must be clearly minuted.

### **MSci/MEng**

- For the degree classification after the final year next session, the marks for the credits achieved in this 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the MSci/MEng will be used to calculate an overall mark for the degree classification based on Stage 3 (i.e. years 3 and 4) counting, as normal, 80% of the overall mark (Stage 2 counts 20%). The credits in year 3 will be based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules and the marks for year 3 will only be used if it improves the overall mark for degree classification.
- Note that the bridging coursework will have credit associated with it in some instances for PSRB programmes.
- In order to inform a judgement on degree classification in borderline cases in the final year, a modified profiling system will be used, since normal profiling will not be possible as students; the profile of marks as a whole (including second and first year marks) will be considered by exam boards and 'notwithstanding regulations' can be applied.

### **First class**

- (i) If a student has obtained an overall weighted mean mark of at least 70% (69.50%) they will be awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours.
- (ii) If a student achieves <70% (68.0-69.49%), in order to take into consideration that some marks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year may have been affected by the Covid-19 situation, an award of a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours will be made if all of the following conditions are met:
  - at least 68% has been achieved overall (and not just in the final year);

- at least 50% of the module marks at Stage 3 (i.e. year 3 and 4) are 1<sup>st</sup> class standard; note that the third year is based on completed modules and partial credits;
  - the majority of the remainder of the module marks at Stage 2 and 3 are 2.1 standard (up to 20C can be <2.1 standard)
- (iii) There might be situations in which a student has clearly been adversely affected by the Covid-19 situation in year 3 and has an overall mark of <70%, but is not awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> class degree because the above criteria are not fulfilled. In such cases, if the Board of Examiners decides that a student with <70% should be awarded a 1<sup>st</sup> Class Honours, based on the full profile of marks across all years of study, an award can be made (without recourse to PAB) Notwithstanding Regulations as long as the external examiner is supportive. The decision and rationale must be clearly minuted.