

ASSESSMENT, PROGRESSION AND AWARDING: TAUGHT PROGRAMMES HANDBOOK

7. Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APAC)

7.1 Introduction

- 7.1.1 In accordance with Ordinance 5, every assessment for a Degree, Diploma or Certificate of the University, whether taken at one sitting or in parts, is directed by an Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee (APAC).
- 7.1.2 Where required, APACs may take place throughout the year to consider those programmes with non-standard start/ finish dates. Such APACs must adhere to the membership and quoracy guidelines stipulated in the guidance below and must be clearly minuted.
- 7.1.3 For each programme, an APAC should be held at least once per academic year. Additional APACs may be held when awarding or progression decisions need to be made. APACs held following referred/deferred assessments shall follow the same rules as for other APACs, except where specific regulations apply.
- 7.1.4 Where a nominee Chair is appointed, as set out in sections 7.4, 7.11 and 7.18, they **should** have academic/professional qualifications appropriate in the level and subject of the areas being reviewed by the APAC. Additionally, their standing, expertise and experience **should** be such as to enable the fulfilment of their responsibilities, normally, the University would expect such experience to be demonstrated only by those of Senior Lecturer level (or equivalent) status.
- 7.1.5 Where programmes are designed to allow new students to enrol at multiple points in the year, it may be appropriate to hold APACs to reflect these multiple entry points, to ensure that students are not waiting unduly for confirmation of results and degree awards. The rules for referral and deferral also require APACs to confirm marks on a regular basis.
- 7.1.6 For Nursing programmes offered by the Medical School, please see 'Special Provisions for Healthcare Programmes' for further guidance.
- 7.1.7 For Special Provisions for Degree Apprenticeship programmes, please see 'Special Provisions for Degree Apprenticeships' for further guidance.

7.2 Definitions

- 7.2.1 The University has a three-tier system for Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees. The three tiers are:
- 7.2.2 Tier One: Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees whose primary responsibility is to safeguard academic standards for the particular programmes under consideration; this applies to all stages of a programme. An APAC may cover an individual programme, multiple programmes or groups of modules delivered by an academic department. All students, including those on partnership programmes and International Summer School programmes, must be included in an APAC. All module results should be received by an APAC.
- 7.2.3 Tier Two: Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees whose primary responsibility is to assure that academic regulations are applied consistently and equitably across departments within the Faculty (or delegated School).
- 7.2.4 Tier Three: University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee whose primary responsibility is to identify areas where policy clarifications or enhancements are required, to consider patterns of degree outcomes and academic standards and make associated strategic recommendations. Tier Three meetings will normally take place after the release of results, reflecting back on completed APAC processes and the fulfilment of responsibilities by APACs, but in exceptional circumstances may be brought forward for quality assurance purposes.
- 7.2.5 A summary of the purpose, membership and documentation for the meetings associated with each Tier can be found in Appendix A.

7.3 Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees – Terms of Reference

- 7.3.1 Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees are primarily responsible for safeguarding academic standards for the particular programmes under consideration and establishing and enacting principles of fairness and impartiality. This includes:
- a. Taking an overview of the assessment processes that operate for the programmes and modules in the subject area, including:
 - i. Setting examination papers, essay titles, and other assessments
 - ii. Marking processes (including moderation, sampling, etc)

- iii. Application of regulations.
 - b. Ensuring that appropriate and clear marking criteria have been set and applied consistently to identify threshold standards and that classification boundaries are clear.
- 7.3.2 To exercise this responsibility Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees have the following terms of reference:

- a. To be responsible for finalising and approving module marks for all students on modules overseen by the APAC:
 - i. To review module-level data on academic performance, to comment upon the performance of module cohorts and to recommend scaling in either direction to particular modules as required.
- b. To receive confirmation that Mitigation Committee decisions have been applied.¹
- c. To be responsible for confirming and approving progression decisions for all students on programmes overseen by the APAC, including the application of condonement in accordance with Chapter 8.
- d. To make recommendations for awards, classification and consequences of failure for students on programmes overseen by the APAC.
- e. To error check (including condonement, degree titles, classifications, core modules, level of credits).
- f. To consider External Examiner(s) reports.
- g. To consider assessment processes e.g. moderation and any assessment changes.
- h. To identify student exceptions that require further scrutiny or advice from the Faculty APAC, including:
 - i. Individual student adjustments (in exceptional year).
 - ii. Dean for Taught Students' exceptions to be requested e.g. Aegrotat awards.
 - iii. Irregular occurrences or instances where University regulations were difficult to adhere to in relation to consequences of failure.

7.4 Membership of Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees

- 7.4.1 Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees **must** have the following core membership:

- a. The Chair **must** be the Head of Department / Director of Education and Student Experience (or equivalent for the Medical School), or, with the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education's approval, a nominated representative.
- b. At least one member of the academic staff of the University with responsibility for the oversight of assessment and examinations. Where this member is also the Director of Education and Student Experience, an alternative academic should be present as agreed by the Chair. (INTO APACs must include a University of Exeter Director of Education and Student Experience or appropriate representative.)
- c. An Education Support Team member to act as secretary.
- d. An additional Education Support Team member to oversee procedural elements.
- e. External Examiner(s).

In addition, the following membership is optional, at the discretion of the Chair:

- f. All relevant module conveners for the Department.
- g. Other relevant professional services and academic staff.

7.4.2 The membership of preparatory meetings is to be agreed by the Chair of the Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee, but should include the following:

- a. Academic with responsibility for oversight of assessment and examinations (Assessment Officer / Assessment Lead / Programme Director).
- b. Education Support Team member to act as secretary.

7.5 External Examiner Attendance at Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees

7.5.1 External Examiner(s) are expected to attend any meeting of the Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee at which module marks are finalised and recommendations are made for the award of degrees, diplomas or certificates.

7.5.2 Attendance for all participants, including External Examiners, can be online/virtually or in-person/physically, as appropriate to the meeting, including for Referral / Deferral APACs.

7.5.3 As per the External Examining Handbook, External Examiners can provide written comments instead of being in attendance in an APAC, including Referral/Deferral APACs, provided that, on at least one occasion in the academic year, they attend

online/virtually or in-person/physically. This must be agreed in advance by the Chair. This written report must include a record of the External Examiner's remarks and recommendations on classifications and failures, and approve any proposals to scale module marks, and/or changes an individual student's module marks, progression status or award (except when made for the purposes of error correction).

7.5.4 When, exceptionally and for good reason, the above attendance on one occasion is not possible, the External Examiner's absence, where it is known in advance, **must** be approved in advance by the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education. Under such circumstances, the Chair **should** ensure that the External Examiner has been fully involved in agreeing marks and that there is, at the meeting, a written record of the External Examiner's remarks and recommendations on classifications and failures **in advance of APAPCs**. Further information about what an External Examiner should do in the event of absence is not known and approved in advance, including for Referral/Deferral APACs, is found in the External Examining Handbook, sections 5.2–5.7.

7.5.5 The following actions of a Programme/Department APAC can only be made in consultation with an appropriate External Examiner (whether in person or in writing):

- a) Scaling of module marks.
- b) Changes to an individual student's module marks, progression status or award, except when made for the purposes of error correction.

All decisions **must** be clearly recorded in the minutes and **must** include details of the rationale for any changes to marks, any noted objections (and any responses to these objections) and the impact on marks.

7.5.6 More information on the role and responsibilities of External Examiners can be found in the External Examining Handbook.

7.6 Quorum of Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees

7.6.1 The quorum for the attendance of members at a meeting of a Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **must** be a minimum of five individuals, including the core members as set out in section 7.4.1.

7.7 Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee Meeting

7.7.1 Meetings of Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees should have the following items on the agenda as a minimum. Where items are to be covered by a preparatory meeting or delegated to a subsequent meeting, this should be made clear on the agenda of the main meeting. Any reports from preparatory meetings should form part of the meeting papers.

- a. Introductory meeting requirements:
 - i. Confirmation of attendance, apologies for absence and quoracy
 - ii. Terms of reference
 - iii. Declarations of interest
 - iv. Minutes of the previous meetings (Tier One, Tier Two and Referral/Deferral) and matters arising.
- b. Receipt of confirmation that Mitigation Committee decisions have been applied.
- c. Receipt of programme rules (as specified in Chapter 8 of this Handbook and in programme specifications), including:
 - i. Condonement and referral rules for all programmes under consideration
 - ii. Specific programme rules affecting degree titles (where applicable)
 - iii. Specific programme rules related to PSRB requirements.
- d. Consideration of module marks and recommendations for module scaling.
- e. Consideration of individual student records of attainment:
 - i. Ensuring accuracy with regards to condonement, degree titles, classifications, core modules and levels of credits
 - ii. Determining recommendations to Senate around awards, progression, classification, condonement (as set out in Chapter 8) and consequences of failure, in line with University regulations
 - iii. Identifying exceptions requiring further scrutiny or advice from Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees including cases of:
 - i. Individual student adjustments
 - ii. Dean for Taught Students' exceptions to be requested such as repeat study and Aegrotat awards
 - iii. Irregular occurrences or instances where university regulations were difficult to adhere to in relation to consequences of failure.

- f. Confirmation from the External Examiner(s) that he/she is in agreement with the decisions taken.
- g. Oral review from the External Examiner(s).
- h. Any other business.

A template for recording the minutes of the meeting can be found in APA Handbook Annex C: Programme/Discipline APAC Minute Template.

7.7.2 These agendas are not exclusive and further items **may** be added for a particular meeting as Committee business requires (e.g. Prizes and Dean for Taught Students' Commendations). Where exceptional circumstances prevent the APAC from following the proposed agenda or format, or where quoracy has not been achieved, the APAC meeting may continue, however, this must be reported in writing as a matter of urgency to Education Policy. If it is known in advance that quoracy cannot be achieved (for example, if the external examiner cannot attend), approval must be sought in advance for the meeting to proceed.

7.7.3 The External Examiner(s) is expected to confirm the decisions taken by the Committee with an appropriate minute made. More information on the role and responsibilities of External Examiners can be found in the External Examining Handbook.

7.7.4 The following actions **must** be approved by the External Examiner:

- a. Any scaling of module marks.
- b. Any changes to an individual's module marks, progression or award (except when done as error correction).

7.7.5 The full Committee may delegate some responsibilities to a group smaller than the Committee ('Subsequent meeting'). Similarly, at the discretion of the Chair, a preparatory meeting ('Preparatory meeting') may be convened in advance of the main Programme/Department APAC.

7.7.6 The membership of subsequent meetings or Preparatory meetings should be agreed by the Programme/Department Chair and must include:

- a. An academic staff member with responsibility for oversight of assessment and examinations (normally Assessment Officer, Assessment Lead or Programme Director).
- b. An Education Support Team member (to act as secretary).

7.7.7 The main Programme/Department APAC meeting is expected to accept the recommendations/actions of the Preparatory meeting or Subsequent meeting, as long

as those recommendations/actions have been approved by the Programme/Department APAC Chair. Any actions requiring the approval of the External Examiner (see 7.7.4) must have their explicit approval.

- 7.7.8 All Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees, including Preparatory or Subsequent meetings **must** keep formal minutes of their proceedings, recording results (as an attachment if more appropriate) and the reasons for recommendations relating to cases of condonement and consequences of failure. The minutes of Preparatory or Subsequent meetings must be reported to the full Programme/Department APAC, either at the main meeting, or by circulation afterwards. Minutes of the meetings will be approved by the Chair prior to submission to Faculty. A copy of all minutes and supporting documentation **should** be submitted to Quality and Standards for monitoring and review no more than three weeks following the date of the meeting.
- 7.7.9 Mitigating evidence considered by a Mitigation Committee or equivalent **should** only be presented to the Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee, if relevant and with the explicit permission of the relevant student.

7.8 Exceptional Years

- 7.8.1 Certain powers of Programme/Department APACs are only able to be exercised in Exceptional Years. These powers include:
- Ability to make individual adjustments to student module marks.
 - Ability to make individual adjustments to student degree classifications.
 - Ability to offer and student who has a referral or deferral as a result of an Exceptional Year, which takes them into a subsequent year and so prevents their normal progression, the choice to Resit Without Attendance (RWA) OR repeat study.
- 7.8.2 It is at the discretion of the Dean for Taught Students to determine if a year is exceptional. A year would normally only be judged to be 'exceptional' when circumstances have had a significant impact on student academic performance, or it has not been possible to assess student academic performance in the usual manner. Reasons that a year may be judged to be exceptional include (but are not limited to):
- Natural disaster
 - War
 - Disease outbreak

- d. Industrial action
- e. Widespread/ significant IT failure.

7.9 Exception Reporting at Programme/Department APACs

7.9.1 Although the APAC is responsible for ensuring there has been a review of all modules results and the performance of all students on the programme, this does not necessarily need to be achieved by having all the relevant data reports scrutinised in the main APAC meeting. It is acceptable for the main APAC meeting to consider exceptional cases provided that a preparatory meeting has taken place to scrutinise all reports.

7.9.2 Decisions must be minuted on whether or not to scale any module outliers. Minutes would be received by the Programme/Department APAC.

7.9.3 Exceptional cases are those including where:

- a. A student is unable to progress or will receive an award other than the one they were expecting.
- b. The case is likely to be referred to the Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee.
- c. A module is proposed to be scaled (module reports).
- d. Some noteworthy occurrence means that the membership of the APAC would reasonably expect that it be brought to their attention.

7.9.4 Where a preparatory meeting has scrutinised the appropriate paperwork and made recommendations it is expected that these decisions will be accepted by the Programme/Discipline APAC, provided that they have been approved by the Chair of the APAC and the External examiner (when involving actions requiring External Examiner approval). When a preparatory meeting has recommended scaling of a module, the module convener should be consulted.

7.10 Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees – Terms of Reference

7.10.1 The primary responsibility of Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees is to ensure that academic regulations are applied consistently and equitably across departments. To exercise this responsibility Faculty APACs have the following terms of reference:

- a. To receive reports on module scaling exceptions with rationale.

- b. To consider student exceptions that require further scrutiny or advice (as identified in the Programme/Department APAC) to include:
 - i. Individual student adjustments
 - ii. Dean for Taught Students' exceptions to be requested such as Aegrotat awards
 - iii. Irregular occurrences or instances where University regulations were difficult to adhere to in relation to consequences of failure.
- c. To ensure the consistent application of the Academic Regulations across Programmes/Departments.
- d. To identify areas where policy clarifications or enhancements are required.
- e. To identify and share good practice from Programme/Department APACs.

7.11 Membership of Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees

7.11.1 The Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **must** have the following core membership:

- a. The Chair should normally be the Associate Pro Vice Chancellor for Education or their nominee. Normally the Chair **should** not have attended the previous Programme/Department APAC meetings.
- b. Each Programme/Department Committee **must** be represented at the Faculty (or delegated School) Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee by at least one academic representative (normally the Programme/Department APAC Chair, Director of Education and Student Experience or Assessment Lead). The representative **must** have attended the meeting they are the representative of.
- c. An Education Support Manager to act as secretary.
- d. Faculty Senior Education Partner or nominee.

In addition, the following membership is optional:

- e. Other relevant professional services and academic staff as agreed by the Chair.

7.12 Quorum of Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees

7.12.1 The quorum for the attendance of members at a meeting of a Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **should** be a minimum of three individuals plus one representative per Department i.e. the core members as set out above in section 7.11.1.

7.13 Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee Meeting

7.13.1 Meetings of Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees **should** have the following agenda:

- a. Introductory meeting requirements:
 - i. Confirmation of attendance, apologies for absence and quoracy
 - ii. Terms of reference
 - iii. Declarations of interest
 - iv. Minutes of the previous meetings (Faculty APAC from the previous year) and matters arising.
- b. Receive oral reports from Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees to include, where relevant:
 - i. Confirmation that the Programme/Department APAC was conducted in accordance with the Assessment, Progression and Awarding: Taught Programmes Handbook Chapter 7.
 - ii. Incidences where scaling exceptions were applied and the rationale for these.
 - iii. Major concerns expressed or recommendations made by the External Examiner(s).
 - iv. Exceptions requiring further scrutiny or advice from the Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees including cases of:
 - Individual student adjustments
 - Dean for Taught Students' exceptions to be requested such as Aegrotat awards
 - Irregular occurrences or instances where University regulations were difficult to adhere to in relation to consequences of failure.
- c. Discussion of common themes and good practice emerging from Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees.
- d. Identification of requirements for policy clarifications or enhancements.
- e. Any other business.

A template for recording the minutes can be found in APA Handbook Annex D: Faculty APAC Minute Template.

7.13.2 It is not intended that the Faculty APAC will amend decisions made by the Programme/Department APAC, except in cases of actual errors in the application of procedure or policy. Should queries arise, clarification on decisions made **should** be sought from the Chair of the Programme/Department APAC.

- 7.13.3 As decisions relating to standards of awards (i.e. confirmation of marks and appropriate application of threshold and classification standards) are the responsibility of Programme/Department APACs, External Examiners are not expected to attend Faculty APACs.
- 7.13.4 This agenda is not exclusive and further items **may** be added for a particular meeting as Committee business requires. Where exceptional circumstances prevent the Faculty APAC from following the proposed agenda or format, or where quoracy has not been achieved, the APAC meeting may continue, however, this **must** be reported as a matter of urgency to Education Policy.
- 7.13.5 The Faculty APAC **must** be provided with all relevant information to enable appropriate decisions to be made. Evidence of mitigation considered by a Mitigation Committee or equivalent **should** only be presented to the Committee with the explicit permission of the relevant student.
- 7.13.6 This default agenda is not exclusive and further items **may** be added for a particular meeting as Committee business requires.
- 7.13.7 All Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees **must** keep formal minutes of their proceedings, recording outcomes (as an attachment if more appropriate) and the reasons for recommendations relating to cases requiring discussion, including reference to any documentary or other evidence as appropriate. The Chair of the Faculty Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **must** sign the minutes. A copy of all minutes and supporting documentation must be submitted to Quality and Standards for monitoring and review no more than three weeks following the date of the meeting.

7.14 University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee - Terms of Reference

- 7.14.1 The primary responsibility of the University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee is to oversee assessment, progression and awarding from an institution-wide quality assurance perspective. To exercise this responsibility, the University APAC has the following terms of reference:
- a. To receive reports on Dean for Taught Students' exceptions.
 - b. To ensure the consistent application of the Academic Regulations across Faculties.

- c. To identify and share good practice from Programme/Department APACs and Faculty APACs.
- d. To identify areas where policy clarifications or enhancements are required.
- e. To make institution-wide recommendations on quality assurance matters relating to APACs

7.15 Membership of University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee

7.15.1 The University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **must** have the following core membership:

- a. The Chair **should** normally be the Dean for Taught Students.
- b. Associate Dean for Taught Students.
- c. Director of Teaching Excellence and Enhancement.
- d. Head of Quality and Standards.
- e. Member of Quality and Standards, acting as secretary.

In addition, the following membership is optional:

- f. Other relevant professional services and academic staff as agreed or requested by the Chair.
- g. Chief External Examiner (or similar).
- h. Student representatives.

7.16 Quorum of University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee

7.16.1 The quorum for the attendance of members at a meeting of the University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **should** be a minimum of three individuals from the core members set out in section 7.15.1

7.17 University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee Meeting

7.17.1 The University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee meets twice a year, which will usually be in June and November.

7.17.2 The meetings of the University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **should** have the following agenda:

- a. Introductory meeting requirements:
 - i. Confirmation of attendance, apologies for absence and quoracy
 - ii. Terms of reference

- iii. Declarations of interest
- iv. Minutes of the previous meetings (University APAC from the previous year) and matters arising.
- v. Receive a report on Dean for Taught Students' exceptions from the undergraduate and postgraduate taught APACs and referral/deferral APACs.
- vi. Receive Faculty APAC minutes from the undergraduate and postgraduate taught APACs and referral/deferral APACs.
- vii. Discussion of common themes and good practice emerging from Faculty APACs, including oversight of any exceptions approved by the Faculty APVCE, such as those specified within 'Module Completion Timelines and Deferral' in Chapter 2.
- viii. Review of degree outcomes data (*November only).
- ix. Planning for policy clarifications or enhancements.
- x. Any other business.

A template for recording the minutes of the meeting can be found in APA Handbook Annex E: University APAC Minute Template.

- b. The University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **must** keep formal minutes of proceedings. A copy of the minutes and supporting documentation **should** be submitted to the Education Board.
- c. Alongside the minutes of the University Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee, each year (usually in the Spring term) the Education Board will provide a report to Senate and Council on the University of Exeter's degree outcomes, which should include consideration of:
 - a) Institutional degree classification profile
 - b) Assessment and marking practices
 - c) Academic governance
 - d) Classification algorithms
 - e) Teaching practices and learning resources
 - f) Identifying good practice and actions
 - g) Risks and challenges

7.18 Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee for Flexible Combined Honours (FCH)

- 7.18.1 The FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee is nominated by the FCH Board of Studies, reporting to the Humanities Education Strategy Group and the FCH Strategy Board.
- 7.18.2 The FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee **must** be chaired by the Director of FCH or, their nominee.
- 7.18.3 The FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee consists of academic staff representatives from each subject area teaching FCH students. Other members of staff who are members of the Board of Studies **may** attend as observers without voting rights. The Chair of the FCH Board of Studies is an ex officio member.
- 7.18.4 FCH will have an External Examiner appointed by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The function of the External Examiner will be:
- a. To be a member of the FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee
 - b. To advise on the conduct of the FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee and on the operation of the conventions
 - c. To advise on the regulations and processes of the degree.
- 7.18.5 The FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee processes confirmed final marks for modules. Hence Faculties (or delegated Schools) **must** ensure that the marks recorded when the FCH Board meets is final and agreed by the relevant Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee. The mark will not be subject to revision at the FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee. All such cases **should** be fully documented and minuted.
- 7.18.6 FCH will not hold a Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee: Tier One.
- 7.18.7 The FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee will follow the agenda and regulations of the Programme/Department Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee: Part 2 as detailed in section 7.7.1 – 7.7.6.
- 7.18.8 The FCH Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee will feed into the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee.

¹Reports for Mitigation Committees are likely to take the form of spreadsheets, made available to the APAC but not discussed.