

## ASSESSMENT SUB-COMMITTEE

Meeting 6/09

2 December 2009

Not for general publication

**Present:** Professor Susan Hamilton (in the Chair), Mrs Maureen Bowen, Dr Glen Coleman, Professor Sarah Derrington, Associate Professor Julie Duck, Dr Clair Hughes, Associate Professor Peter Sutton. Mrs Teresa Charlton, Mrs Helen Morahan.

**Apologies:** Professor Merylyn Goos.

**Minutes:** The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2009, having been circulated, were taken as read and confirmed.

**Business arising from the minutes:****(a) Items endorsed by the Teaching and Learning Committee at its meeting on 21 October 2009:**

- Revised procedures for non-release of examination papers – trial would be undertaken in Summer Semester 2009/10
- Medical certificates – medical practitioner not to be a relative or near associate – insertion in appropriate HUPP
- Exam durations for written examinations – amendment to GAR

**(b) Item noted by the Teaching and Learning Committee at its meeting on 21 October 2009:**

- Supplementary assessment for non-award students

**(c) Items in progress:**

- Award of Honours
- Approved Calculator Scheme
- Exemption from release of examination papers
- Policy issues requiring further consideration:
  - Anonymous marking in assessment other than examinations
  - Guidelines for the conduct of oral examinations
  - Requirement for multiple forms of assessment
  - Role of chief examiners and course coordinators
  - Prohibited access to examination scripts
  - Medical certificates

**1. Award of Honours**

At the meetings of CAPP held on 26 September 2008 and 24 October 2008, members considered a recommendation to approve changes to HUPP 3.20.14 – *Award of Honours*. The proposal had been considered at some length, in particular the GPA versus weighted percentage method for calculating class of honours. It had been agreed by CAPP that the policy should be amended to specify that, ordinarily, GPA should be used for on-course honours and weighted percentage should be used for postgraduate honours. Members had also discussed the scale of weighted percentages and whether the cut-offs required amendment, and it had been agreed that this matter would be referred for consideration by the Assessment Sub-Committee. Amendments to HUPP 3.20.14 - *Award of Honours* were approved by Academic Board at its meeting on 10 November 2008.

At its meeting on 20 May 2009, members of Assessment Sub-Committee reviewed the current policy and noted the cut-offs would be reviewed annually by Academic Board. Members were of the view that the weighted percentages should not be changed regularly as a set range provided a consistent target for students.

It was noted that, since there were no standard percentage cut-offs for grades in courses contributing to Honours, and no descriptors of the criteria and standards for each class of Honours, there was no link between the standards of Honours awarded by the two mechanisms.

Members had agreed that a set of descriptors should be developed for each class of Honours that would meet the requirements of both postgraduate and on course Honours. A small working group was formed, comprising Professor Hamilton, Associate Professor Julie Duck, Dr Clair Hughes, and Associate Professor Caroline Crosthwaite, to draft a set of descriptors.

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Professor Hamilton reported that the Working Group met recently in an attempt to develop a single set of descriptors for classes of honours, however it was clear that there was significant disconnect between on-course and postgraduate honours. The issues identified by the Working Group included:

- (a) the fundamental difference between what was meant by first class honours for on-course honours and postgraduate honours
- (b) using aggregated percentage cut-offs for classes of honours would require significant additional resources to record percentage marks as well as grades
- (c) GPA would not be acceptable for genuine postgraduate honours
- (d) First class honours was required for APA scholarships, however it was noted that generally all students who applied for a scholarship were awarded one, so the demand for scholarships was not considered to be a contributing factor at present
- (e) Cut-offs for first class honours considered too high versus too low across differing disciplines
- (f) the need to provide students with transparent guidelines on how classes of honours are determined
- (g) the need to maintain stability with cut-offs
- (h) transition arrangements can be very confusing to both staff and students
- (i) use of weighted GPA or weighted percentage marks

The Working Group were of the view that a set of verbal descriptors for each class of honours should be developed, to describe to students the level of skills required to be demonstrated for each class of honours for both on-course and postgraduate. The current policy provided sufficient leeway for faculties to determine honours at the program level, and should incorporate honours rules into the relevant program rules.

Professor Hamilton reported that a summary of discussions at the recent meeting had been prepared and would be distributed to members. A further meeting of the Working Group had been convened for late January 2010.

It was resolved –

that a summary of discussions of the Working Group be distributed to members.

A –  
HM/TC

## 2. Exemption from release of examination papers

At the meeting of Teaching and Learning Committee held on 17 June 2009, members noted the proposed procedures for exemption from release of examination papers submitted by Assessment Sub-Committee.

At the previous meeting of Assessment Sub-Committee, it was recommended that Teaching and Learning Committee support a trial of the revised processes for exemption from release of examination papers be undertaken for summer semester 2009/2010.

At its meeting on 21 October 2009, members of Teaching and Learning Committee considered the proposed procedures and found the provision of no justification for the exemption from release as unacceptable. The Committee agreed to a trial of the new processes during summer semester 2009/2010 on the proviso that compelling justification for exemption from release be provided. It was also suggested that the Assessment Sub-Committee investigate the concept of employing a time limit on how long a sample paper could be used for. The Assessment Sub-Committee had been asked to reconsider the recommendation with a view to making it more difficult to acquire exemption from release.

Members of Assessment Sub-Committee noted that Teaching and Learning Committee was aiming to eventually have all exam papers released to the Library, with exemption from release to be phased out within the next few years.

## 2. Exemption from release of examination papers (cont'd)

Members further noted that the School of Economics and School of Psychology had agreed to participate in the trial for summer semester 2009/2010. Forms and documentation for use in the trial had been distributed to these schools, with the request that both schools provide comment and feedback to the Sub-Committee following the trial.

The Assessment Sub-Committee would review requests for exemption from release for summer semester 2009/2010 at its first meeting in 2010. Sample papers submitted by the pilot schools would be checked against the final examination paper.

It was resolved –

that the recommendations of Teaching and Learning Committee be considered at the next meeting of Assessment Sub-Committee, in conjunction with feedback on the trial of revised processes.

A –  
HM/TC

## 3. Approved Calculator Scheme

At the meeting of Assessment Sub-Committee held on 25 March 2009, members discussed the two schemes currently in use for verification of calculators used in examinations. These included, firstly, the scheme adopted by the School of Economics which permitted use of only Casio fx82 series calculators for courses administered by the School, and secondly, the scheme introduced by the Faculty of Engineering, Architecture and Information Technology (EAIT) which permitted use of calculators which carried the 'EAIT/EPISA approved calculator' label. Interest in adopting the EAIT scheme, or similar, had been expressed by other faculties and schools. The School of Pharmacy, and School of Chemistry and Molecular Biosciences were two schools which had adopted this scheme.

Although limited feedback had been received from schools, the responses received by these schools indicated strong interest in further investigation into a university-wide scheme. It was further noted that the School of Economics was not interested, given its current scheme in use, and the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences was also not interested.

At its meeting on 29 July 2009, the Sub-Committee agreed to the formation of a working party to consider a university-wide scheme for approved calculators. Factors which would need to be considered by the Working Party included:

- the difficulties in managing multiple and varying schemes across faculties and schools;
- the need for university wide acceptance of a policy and procedures if it were to be managed centrally;
- Student Centres would be an appropriate central place for students to apply for approved calculator labels to be affixed, if a university wide approach was implemented;
- the inexperience of administrative staff in assessing calculators as approved for use in examinations.

A meeting of the Working Party, comprising Associate Professor Peter Sutton, School of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering, Dr Kathryn Steadman, School of Pharmacy, Dr Anthony Roberts, School of Mathematics and Physics, and Mrs Helen Morahan, Student Administration, was held on 8 October 2009.

Members of the Working Party considered the proposal to implement a university wide approved calculator scheme. A review of the information gathered by EAIT since the introduction of its scheme showed that 6,539 calculators had been registered. Of these, 3,800 were Casio fx-82 models (several variants).

### 3. Approved Calculator Scheme (cont'd)

The Casio fx-82 was considered to have sufficient functionality for use in the large majority of courses but it was acknowledged that some courses could require the use of other calculators. The Working Party discussed the suggestion of nominating the Casio fx-82 as the university preferred calculator, thus permitting use in examinations without requiring an 'approved calculator' sticker. This would steer students towards purchase of the Casio fx-82 unless their course or program required additional functionality. Students who had alternative calculators would be permitted to have the calculator assessed against the list of approved calculators. If on the list, a tamper proof label would be affixed to permit use in examinations. If a calculator did not appear on the approved list or the non-approved list it would be assessed by two nominated members of academic staff. If approved, the make and model would be added to the list of approved calculators.

The proposed scheme would allow for easy identification of permitted calculators in examinations with the front page of the examination papers listing one of the following options:

- No calculator permitted
- Casio fx-82 series only permitted
- Casio fx-82 series or university approved (labelled) calculators permitted
- Any calculator permitted – unrestricted
- Calculator permitted – coordinator to check calculators during examination

The Student Centres (all campuses) would administer the scheme, applying labels and recording the number of each make and model of calculator labelled. A deadline date for approval of alternative calculator models would be set for each semester.

Individual numbering of calculator labels was discussed by the Working Party. The current EAIT/EPISA scheme used individually numbered labels and recorded these numbers, calculator model details and student numbers when labels were issued. Members of the Working Party decided this should not be continued given the high workload involved and the minimal advantage in doing so.

The Assessment Sub-Committee thanked members of the Working Party, and endorsed the proposal as submitted.

It was resolved –

that feedback be sought from faculties and schools on the proposal for a university wide approved calculator scheme and that the Casio fx-82 series calculators be nominated as the university preferred calculator.

A –  
HM/TC

### 4. Disregard performance at examinations

Members were asked to consider an amendment to the wording of General Award Rules 1A.14.4 and 1A.14.5 to reflect that students must notify examination supervisors before the 'conclusion of the examination', rather than 'before leaving the examination'.

General Award Rules 1A.14 on special examinations states:

*1A.14.4 A student who applies for special examination having attempted part of the original examination must obtain the medical certificate within one business day of the original examination and must notify the examination supervisor of their intention to do so before leaving the examination.*

*1A.14.5 Despite GAR 1A.14.4, the requirement for a student to notify the examination supervisor of their intention to get a medical certificate before leaving the examination may be waived if, in the opinion of the associate dean (academic) or head of school, there are exceptional circumstances.*

#### 4. Disregard performance at examinations (cont'd)

The practice adopted during the conduct of the examinations was to announce to students at the beginning of the examination that “you are required to inform the supervisors before the end of examination working time that you will be applying for a special examination”. On conclusion of the examination, students were then advised that “no more disregard performances would be accepted”. Once examination papers had been collected and collated by examination supervisors, it was extremely difficult to retrieve a specific individual student’s paper given the volume of papers and the anonymous seal on answer booklets.

Members noted that a recent appeal to Student Senate Appeals Committee was upheld on the basis that the student advised the examination supervisor before leaving the examination room.

Members endorsed the amendments to the GARs.

It was resolved to recommend–

that Teaching and Learning Committee endorse an amendment to GARs 1A.14.4 and 1A.14.5 to reflect that students must advise the examination supervisor of their intention to get a medical certificate before the conclusion of the examination.

RC –  
T&L\*

#### 5. School reports on exemption from release of examination question papers

HUPP 3.30.1 *Assessment* contained the University’s policy on non-release of question papers. It stated, inter alia –

*Students should have open access to past examination question papers, following the corresponding special and supplementary examination periods, unless determined otherwise by the Assessment Sub-Committee. Justification for withholding examination question papers must be based on educational grounds.*

Members noted applications for non-release had been received from a number of schools.

The following were approved for non-release –

- School of Business – Semester 2 2009 –  
LAWS1000  
LAWS7017
- School of Civil Engineering – Semester 2 2009 –  
CIVL3140  
CIVL3420
- School of English, Media Studies and Art History – Semester 2 2009 –  
LING1005  
LING6105
- School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences – Semester 2 2009 –  
OTY2206  
OCTY7814
- School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics – Semester 2 2009 –  
PHIL2100  
PHIL7210

**5. School reports on exemption from release of examination question papers (cont'd)**

It was resolved -

that the decision of the Assessment Sub-Committee on requests to not release examination papers be conveyed to the respective schools.

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HM/TC\*

**6. GAR 1A.20.8 administrative actions**

At the meeting on 10 November 2008, Teaching and Learning Committee raised concerns relating to confusion in interpretation of the reference to a marking error in GAR 1A.20.8:

*1A.20.8 A final result may be changed only —*

- (a) by the academic registrar at any time if satisfied the change is needed to correct a patent error; or*
- (b) by the executive dean before the remark finalisation date on being satisfied that —*
  - (i) the original final result reflects a marking error; and*
  - (ii) the university's remarking policy has been followed; or*

Assessment Sub-Committee considered the issue at its meeting on 25 March 2009. It was noted that part (i) of the rule was obsolete and could be deleted to improve clarity of the rule. The Assessment Sub-Committee recommended that Teaching and Learning Committee endorse amendments to GAR 1A.20.8 to read:

*(b) by the executive dean before the remark finalisation date on being satisfied that the university's remarking policy has been followed; or*

Members noted that the Teaching and Learning Committee further considered this issue, and on advice from the Legal Office, it was subsequently determined that the amendment was not necessary.

**7. Mid-semester examinations for distance education students**

Paragraph 4.4 of HUPP 3.30.1 – *Assessment* states:

*Unless the assessment is both the process and the product (e.g. thesis, design project), no single item of summative assessment in a course may contribute more than 70% of the total summative assessment for the course.*

Dr Glen Coleman reported on the difficulties in complying with this policy in respect to distance education students. He stated that it was not feasible to conduct mid-semester examinations for externally enrolled students given the number of different locations, and the logistics and resources required to administer these examinations. He was of the view that externally enrolled students should have access to mid-semester examinations and that central Examinations Section should be sufficiently resourced to conduct these examinations.

The Sub-Committee considered that this matter was part of the broader issue regarding types of assessment, tutorials, administration costs, student/staff ratios, and being more creative with alternative modes such as online assessment.

It was commented that 60% of expenditure by the Open University was on assessment. Members requested information be gathered from other distance education universities on the types of assessment conducted, and the resources available to conduct these assessments.

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**7. Mid-semester examinations for distance education students (cont'd)**

It was resolved -

that information be sourced from distance education universities on the types of assessment and resources available to administer the assessment, and reported back to the Sub-Committee.

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HM/TC**8. Special examinations and medical certificates**

At the meeting held on 23 September 2009, members discussed medical certificates in support of applications for special examinations, and in particular, compliance with GAR 1A.14.3. The rules required the medical practitioner to declare that the student was unfit to sit the examination on the relevant day. It was agreed that a consistent approach to the application of this rule was needed across faculties and Student Administration.

It was the view of the Sub-Committee that it was inappropriate for the University to insist that medical practitioners state that the student was unfit to sit the examination on the relevant day. Students may request medical certificates up to two days after the examination, at which time the practitioner may have to rely on the student stating that they were unfit to sit the examination on that day. Students were required to obtain a medical certificate which covered the date of the examination, within a limited timeframe after that date, and submit it together with their application within a specified timeframe. Compliance with these rules should be sufficient for the student to be granted a special examination.

The less strict application of the rules was applied by faculties and Student Administration in consideration of applications for special examinations for end of semester two 2009 examinations. Professor Derrington reported there had been a significant increase in the number of approved applications in the Faculty of Business, Economics and Law this semester.

Mrs Bowen reported that she had consulted further with Dr Tony Arklay, Director, University Health Services, regarding the issue of medical certificates. It was noted that many practitioners tended to provide certificates based on evidence. As a result, the university should revisit the rules relating to medical certificates and applications for special examinations in general, including consideration of an alternative model.

It was agreed that a meeting of key stakeholders be convened for early 2010 to fully review and discuss the current rules and processes relating to special examinations.

It was resolved -

that a meeting be convened in early 2010 to review and discuss the current rules and processes relating to special examinations.

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HM/TC

It was further resolved -

that statistical data on special examinations and supplementary assessment approved for semester 2 2009 be provided to the Sub-Committee.

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HM/TC**9. Assessment and Student Feedback Workshop**

Dr Clair Hughes reported that the *Assessment and Student Feedback Workshop* conducted by Associate Professor Chris Rust at Queensland University of Technology on 30 November 2009 was very successful, and attended by more than 50 delegates. A summary of the evaluation responses from the delegates at the workshop was tabled to members.

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**10. 2010 meeting dates**

Members noted the tentative meeting dates scheduled for 2010. Meetings were scheduled to commence at 9:00am in room 566 in the Brian Wilson Chancellery.

- Wednesday, 24 March
- Wednesday, 19 May
- Wednesday, 14 July
- Wednesday, 22 September
- Wednesday, 1 December