



# Progression, award and the classification of a degree in taught programmes: mitigating the impact of the industrial action upon academic outcomes at the summer exam boards 2023

## Introduction

- i. This document sets out how the University will determine the academic outcome of students on undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes at the summer 2023 exam boards where assessment and/or the marking process has been affected by the industrial action in 2022/23, particularly where assessment and/or unit marks are missing as a result of the marking and assessment boycott. It does not cover the award and classification of taught postgraduate degrees, which will be provided at a later point.
- ii. The sections on progression, award and classification in the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes are temporarily qualified by this document.
- iii. The actions presented in stage 2 and 3 only apply as academic mitigation where assessment and unit marks are not available to exam boards held this summer due to the marking and assessment boycott. Academic mitigation may be applied at any convening of the initial (school) and faculty exam boards between June – September 2023.
- iv. For the purposes of this document, ‘industrial action’ constitutes any action taken by staff during 2022/23 that has impacted upon student academic outcomes, including missed teaching due to the days of strike action. The ‘marking and assessment boycott’ (MAB) is a specific action undertaken by the UCU within the overall industrial action. The boycott started on Thursday 20 April and according to the [UCU’s FAQs](#), covers: *“all marking and assessment processes that contribute to summative assessment decisions for students/learners, whether final (i.e. graduation/completion) or interim (i.e. progression decisions)”*.
- v. Existing commitments to account for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic when classifying undergraduate degrees at this summer’s exam boards will still apply, as set out in [temporary regulation](#); however, the approach here is necessarily different from the one previously adopted to account for the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## Key principles

These principles and according temporary changes to academic regulation are designed to mitigate the impact of the industrial action (IA), including the MAB, during 2022/23 upon student academic outcomes in undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes at the summer exam boards.

- **PRINCIPLE 1:** Academic standards (as set out in our academic regulations) and professional requirements should be maintained.
  - Any existing decisions already made by an exam board in 2022/23 regarding requirements for supplementary assessment or reassessment for units from TB1 will stand.

- Where a student has failed a 'non-affected' unit in TB2 (including units with a TB4 pattern) and does not meet the conditions for progression or award within our normal regulations, then they should be required to take reassessment in the normal manner.
- Where PSRB accreditation requirements means that academic mitigation cannot be applied, then decisions should be delayed until a later exam board. If a decision cannot be made in a timely way (see principle 6), then the case should be first discussed with the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality and Standards) and then referred to the institutional-level Taught Degrees Exam Board.
- PRINCIPLE 2: The majority of students' academic outcomes will not be significantly impacted by the industrial action, or the academic impact will have already been mitigated before the meeting of the exam board, in which case our normal academic regulations will apply and to the agreed summer exam board timeline for most programmes.
  - We will only deviate from the standard regulations and timeline (e.g. by delaying an academic decision) where there is evidence that the industrial action has impacted upon student academic outcomes and any mitigation in response will improve that outcome. A **first stage** of academic mitigation is available to exam boards to exclude unit or assessment marks that are significantly affected by the IA from academic decision-making.
- PRINCIPLE 3: Where the normal range of unit marks for a student isn't available due to IA such that our normal academic regulations or stage one of academic mitigation cannot be applied, the exam board will apply a **second stage** of academic mitigation at the main summer exam board where doing so will permit an academic decision to be made by:
  - Awarding a unit mark where a student has completed at least 50% of the weighted assessment, including any must-pass assessment and it does not compromise PSRB accreditation (with exceptions approved by the Faculty Education Director).
- PRINCIPLE 4: For the remainder of students who **do not** have a normal range of marks due to IA by the main summer exam board and cannot progress or an award be made under our existing regulations or the first or second stage of academic mitigation, the exam board will also apply a **third stage** of academic mitigation at the main summer exam board notwithstanding missing unit marks by:
  - Permitting progression to the next stage where the relevant programme intended learning outcomes have been demonstrated and the pass mark has been achieved in units unaffected by the industrial action.
  - Making an award with a classification where the programme intended learning outcomes have been demonstrated and the student achieves a pass overall in assessments undertaken in the final year.
- PRINCIPLE 5: Where an award with a classification is made, it will be determined on the basis of the marks available to the exam board at that time. Alternatively, a preliminary award or an award with a pending classification may be made at the main summer exam board to allow a student to graduate, should there not be sufficient evidence (i.e. unit marks) by which an exam board can make the intended award and/or classification.
- PRINCIPLE 6: Any academic decision that otherwise cannot be reached under either stage of academic mitigation should be delayed to a later exam board to allow time for marks to become available either at:

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- A faculty-tier exam board on a later timeline (after the main summer exam board but in advance of the reassessment period) – by which any outstanding final progression decisions will be made.
- The September exam board, by which any outstanding decisions on awards and classification will be made.
- **PRINCIPLE 7:** At all stages, the exam board will seek to apply (in order):
  1. Our standard academic regulations, if it cannot
  2. The agreed supplementary guidance for exam boards (stage one of academic mitigation), if it cannot
  3. The adjusted temporary academic regulations (stage two of academic mitigation), if it cannot
  4. Refer the case to the Taught Degrees Exam Board, with a recommendation on the basis of the evidence available to the exam board.
- **PRINCIPLE 8:** Should any outstanding marks in units within intermediate years of study<sup>1</sup> that contribute to degree classification become available at a later stage, these marks will normally be used to calculate the classification.
- **PRINCIPLE 9:** Where a classification is made on the basis of an incomplete unit mark profile due to industrial action (per principle 5), the classification will be reviewed by an exam board should any missing unit marks become available and, where applicable, the existing classification will be rescinded with a higher classification awarded.

### Determining academic outcomes at the summer exam boards

#### **Within existing normal regulations**

- 1.1. Where a student being considered for progression or award has a normal<sup>2</sup> range of unit marks at the time of the main summer exam board, exam boards will make decisions based upon our normal academic regulations.
- 1.2. Any existing decisions already made by exam boards in 2022/23 regarding requirements for supplementary assessment or reassessment for units from TB1 will stand.
- 1.3. Where a student has failed (including where they have self-certified absence from) a unit that has not been affected by the industrial action in TB2 (including units with a TB4 pattern) and does not meet the conditions for progression or award within normal regulations, then they should be required to take reassessment in the normal manner.
- 1.4. If the impact of the industrial action upon student academic outcomes means that the normal academic regulations cannot be applied, then the initial exam board should consider applying academic mitigation as set out below.

#### **When to take mitigation action to account for the impact of the industrial action**

- 1.5. The initial exam board should take mitigating action to account for the impact of the industrial action where:

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<sup>1</sup> Years of study that contribute to classification that is not the final year

<sup>2</sup> A normal range of marks means there is a complete set of unit marks for a student, or where there are any missing unit marks, they are not missing as a direct result of the industrial action

- a. There is evidence that the industrial action has had a negative impact upon assessment within a unit/s, as indicated by missing marks due to the MAB and/or the internal impact rating, and
- b. The impact upon assessment has not already been mitigated by other action, and
- c. The student/s on the affected unit is being considered for classification or has not met the conditions for progression or award according to the normal academic regulations, and
- d. The academic outcome of the individual student/s can be improved by applying mitigation (i.e. no IA mitigation need be applied if the student has already achieved a first-class degree).

#### **Academic mitigation – stage 1**

- 1.6. Where a student has a normal range of unit marks but there is evidence that the performance of students in assessment has been negatively impacted by industrial action, the principal form of mitigation is to exclude the affected unit or assessment mark/s from progression requirements (if the student failed to progress), award (if the student failed to achieve sufficient credit points for award) and/or classification. The original unit mark should remain unaltered.
- 1.7. The maximum amount of credit points that an exam board can exclude for the purpose of 1.6 is:
  - 40 credit points due to the impact of the industrial action or 60 credit points overall for any reason in 2022/23; and,
  - 100 credit points overall for any reason where the programme contains more than one year of study that contributes to classification.

Where one or both of these thresholds are breached, the case should be referred to the institutional-level Taught Degrees Exam Board, with a recommendation, otherwise the exam board should make the academic decision.

- 1.8 Where a unit mark is excluded from progression, award or classification calculations, the weighting of the remaining unit marks within the year of study or taught component will be scaled up when calculating the year / taught component mark.

#### **Academic mitigation – stage 2**

- 2.1 Where a student does not have a normal range of unit marks by the time of the main summer exam board due to the industrial action, the exam board will undertake the action below, where doing so will allow an academic decision to be made by the exam board.
  - 2.1.1 A unit mark may be awarded for an individual student for the purposes of progression, award or classification providing:
    - i. the student has undertaken / completed at least **50%** of the summative assessment as it contributes to the unit mark, including any must-pass assessment, and
    - ii. any missing assessment marks are not essential to demonstrate the relevant programme ILOs, and
    - iii. the application of this clause does not compromise any PSRB accreditation, and
    - iv. the new unit mark is at or above the pass mark.

In such circumstances, the weighting of the assessment component/s with a mark will be scaled up to calculate the unit mark, with the proportions of individual assessment contributions maintained where applicable. A deviation from the 50% threshold may be agreed by the relevant Faculty Education Director.

### **Academic mitigation – stage 3**

- 3.1 Where a student does not have a normal range of unit marks by the time of the main summer exam board due to the industrial action and an academic decision cannot be reached on the basis of stage 1 or 2 of academic mitigation, the exam board will additionally apply temporary qualifications to academic regulations, as set out below. For the purpose of applying these regulations, the exam board should assume that the student has passed any non-must-pass unit where there is not a unit mark.

In undergraduate modular programmes

#### ***Progression***

- 3.2 Students will be awarded 120 credit points for the year of study and permitted to progress from year 1 to year 2, where they have:
- Achieved the pass mark in each of the units in the year of study that have a unit mark
  - Demonstrated the relevant programme ILOs relating to that year of study in the academic judgement of the exam board as evidenced by passing any must-pass units and any formative and/or summative assessment marks that are available.
- 3.3 Students will be awarded 120 credit points for the year of study and permitted to progress between other years of study, where they have:
- Achieved the pass mark in each of the units in the year of study that have a unit mark
  - Demonstrated the relevant programme ILOs relating to that year of study in the academic judgement of the exam board as evidenced by achieving at least 80 credit points; a pass overall in the year (based on the available unit marks); and passing any must-pass units.
- 3.4 Additionally, in programmes where there is evidence of a substantial impact of IA such that marks are not available for a student,
- Any higher progression requirements (e.g. onto a study abroad or placement year) within a programme are suspended.
  - The conditional progression of a student to the next year of study should not be prevented by missing unit marks due to the MAB.
  - The compensation of a marginally failed unit to award credit and permit progression should not be prevented by missing unit marks in other units impacted by the MAB.
  - The existing requirement for a student to gain at least 40 credit points in the year of study to access reassessment (30.6) should be suspended for affected students.
- 3.5 If a student does not meet the conditions for progression under 3.2 - 3.4 above at the main summer exam board, then:
- The exam board will delay the decision to a later faculty exam board.

- 3.6 If a student does not meet the conditions for progression under 3.2 or 3.3 above by the later summer exam board, then the exam board should refer the case to the institution-level Taught Degrees Exam Board with a recommendation on the basis of the unit marks that are available (and potentially assessment marks in units that do not have a unit mark). It would be the responsibility of the TDEB to ensure decisions are being consistently made institution-wide.
- 3.7 Where any outstanding assessment marks in units within intermediate years of study<sup>3</sup> that contribute to degree classification become available at a later stage (up to a designated date prior to the exam board where the award is made), these marks will be used to calculate the classification. Exceptionally, the pass mark will be awarded for the unit where a unit mark is returned that is below the pass mark and a progression decision has already been made.

### **Award**

- 3.8 The main summer exam board will award 120 credit points for the final year of study and make an award (see 3.12 whether with classification or classification pending) for students who have been affected by IA and do not have a normal range of unit marks but have:
- i. Achieved a pass overall in assessments undertaken in the final year on the basis of the units that have a unit mark, and
  - ii. Achieved the pass mark for any must-pass unit, and
  - iii. Demonstrated the programme intended learning outcomes in the judgement of the exam board.
- 3.9 If the exam board cannot make the intended award under 3.8 above then it may make a preliminary award of an alternative degree or Ordinary degree at the main summer exam board to allow a student to graduate where (ii) and/or (iii) above has not been achieved, and subsequently review and determine the final award (and classification) for the student either at a later exam board or no later than the reassessment exam board should any outstanding missing unit marks become available.
- 3.10 If the exam board cannot make the intended or preliminary award at the main summer exam board, then:
- The exam board will confirm that no award can be made until further marks become available and delay the decision to a later exam board.
- 3.11 If a student does not meet the conditions for award by the September faculty exam board, then the case should be referred to the Taught Degrees Examination Board, with a recommendation on the basis of the marks available to it.

### **Classification (i.e. where a student has met the criteria for award in a classified programme)**

- 3.12 Where the student has met the conditions for award but unit mark/s are unavailable due to the MAB, the exam board will either:
- Award a classification where there is sufficient evidence to do so (i.e. no more than 40 credit points excluded in 2022/23 due to the MAB and no more than 100 credit points overall across the years of study that contribute to classification), or
  - Determine that there is not sufficient evidence to award a classification, but award a degree with a pending classification.

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<sup>3</sup> Years of study that contribute to classification that is not the final year

- 3.13 The exam board will subsequently review and determine the final classification for the student either at a later exam board or no later than the reassessment September exam board should any outstanding missing unit marks become available.
- 3.14 If no further unit marks become available by the September reassessment exam board, then the exam board should make a recommendation to the institution-level Taught Degrees Exam Board solely on the basis of the unit marks that are available (and potentially assessment marks in units that do not have a unit mark). It would be the responsibility of the TDEB to ensure decisions on classification were being consistently made institution-wide.
- 3.15 Where a unit mark is unavailable it should be excluded from progression, award or classification and the weighting of the remaining unit marks within the year of study or taught component will be scaled up to calculate the year mark.
- 3.16 Where a classification is made under the regulations notwithstanding missing unit marks, the exam board will review its decision and where applicable re-award a higher classification should any outstanding unit marks become available.

#### In taught postgraduate programmes

##### **Progression from the Taught Component**

- 3.17 Students will be permitted to progress to the dissertation stage notwithstanding any marks that are unavailable due to the MAB, where they have:
- Achieved the pass mark in each of the units in the taught component that are unaffected by the industrial action, and
  - Demonstrated the relevant programme ILOs relating to the taught component in the academic judgement of the exam board as evidenced by achieving at least 60 credit points; a pass overall in the taught component (based on the available unit marks); and passed any must-pass units.
- 3.18 Additionally, in programmes where there is evidence of a substantial impact of IA upon assessment:
- The compensation of a marginally failed unit to award credit and permit progression should not be prevented by missing marks in other units impacted by the MAB.
  - The existing requirement for a student to gain at least 60 credit points in the taught component to access reassessment (38.7) should be suspended for affected students.
- 3.19 If a student does not meet the conditions for progression in 3.17 at the main summer exam board, then:
- The exam board will delay the decision to a later faculty exam board.
- 3.20 If a student does not meet the conditions for progression under 3.17 at the later summer exam board, then the exam board should refer the case to the institution-level Taught Degrees Exam Board with a recommendation on the basis of the unit marks that are available (and potentially assessment marks in units that do not have a unit mark).
- 3.21 Students should be permitted to continue to engage with the dissertation stage, notwithstanding any outstanding decisions on progression.
- 3.22 The approach to determining the award and classification of degrees affected by industrial action will be provided at a later stage.

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#### Referral to Taught Degrees Exam Board

4. Exam boards should be assured that the combined result of the application of mitigation leads to a fair and reasonable outcome for students. If a faculty board of examiners is unable to apply appropriate or sufficient mitigation to account for the impact of the industrial action upon assessment, it should refer the case with a provisional recommendation to the Taught Degrees Examination Board.

#### *Approved by:*

- *Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality and Standards), Chair of the University Academic Quality and Standards Committee, 11 May 2023*
- *Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students), Chair of the University Education Committee, 11 May 2023*
- *Vice-Chancellor, Chair of Senate, 11 May 2023*