

## Staff guide to the forthcoming changes to the degree algorithm: Postgraduate courses

This document provides an outline of the forthcoming amendment to the change in the algorithm used for the determination of final degree classifications for postgraduate courses. The guide provides the rationale for this change, explains how it will work, and when it will be implemented.

### 1. Background

NTU has been using a grade-based approach to assessment for all courses since 2013. The next phase of enhancements to the assessment framework is currently underway.

These enhancements have been designed to:

- improve the **transparency** of assessment (for students, staff and external examiners);
- further support academic staff in placing emphasis on **assessment of learning outcomes**;
- ensure decisions about final degree classification reflect **NTU values** about student achievement.

### 2. What we are trying to achieve

The model for degree classification determination has been tested against two important values which describe how student achievement is rewarded at NTU through our classification system. These can be summarised as:

1. Students may demonstrate a level of performance in different ways across a course of study.
2. Students may experience a dip in an individual assessment piece and this should not in itself limit the final classification.

An additional principle that has been agreed when defining the model is that we adopt the simplest system at all stages. This will help to ensure that we maintain transparency and consistency.

### 3. The model

Under the current regulations the arithmetic mean of level 7 module grades (and for some courses some level 6 credits) is used to calculate postgraduate students' final award classification. The new algorithm provides for a student's final classification to be based on what grade they have achieved in the *majority* of their modules (irrespective of the arithmetic mean). A student's final degree classification is determined by **either** the arithmetic mean of the contributing grade points (as now), or by the majority grade, whichever results in the higher outcome – as below:

Final classification of the award is determined by the **better** of either:

- (a) the arithmetic mean of all modules that contribute to the final award (*this is current practice, automatically calculated by Banner*) **or**
- (b) the majority grade of all contributing modules, where the majority grade is calculated on the basis of more than half of the credits which contribute to the award achieving a particular classification or higher.

### 4. What we mean by the 'majority grade'

The majority grade is determined by establishing the highest degree classification at which more than half the credits have been achieved. For example, for a student's majority grade to be a 'distinction', then more than half the credits need to have been graded within the 'distinction' grade band; similarly for a student's majority grade to be an 'commended', then more than half the credits must have been graded at a 'commended' or higher.

## 5. Implications

There are several implications to the change in the algorithm. The most significant of these are as follows:

- The new algorithm will mean that there will no longer be any 'borderline' cases that need specific attention at the Board of Examiners. This means that any course or School conventions for decision-making at the borderline will not need to be in operation.
- The examination board spreadsheet will be developed in order to ensure that boards have the appropriate information about student grades (including sub-element performance) and it provides a clear recommendation about the final classification based on the new algorithm.

## 6. Implementation dates

The change to the degree algorithm will be implemented at final Boards of Examiners that take place during the 2018/19 academic year; this will therefore apply to postgraduate students for whom all contributing module grades have been marked using the linear scale.

We will communicate the new algorithm to all incoming postgraduate students in advance of the start of 2017/18 so that they know what the algorithm will be when they graduate. Text for student handbooks has been prepared for this purpose.

Part-time students who have already accrued credits which contribute to their final degree outcome under the old system will be awarded their degree using the old algorithm.

## 7. Further information

For further information regarding the planned changes, please discuss with your School Standards and Quality Manager, or Susannah Lamb in CADQ ([susannah.lamb@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:susannah.lamb@ntu.ac.uk)).