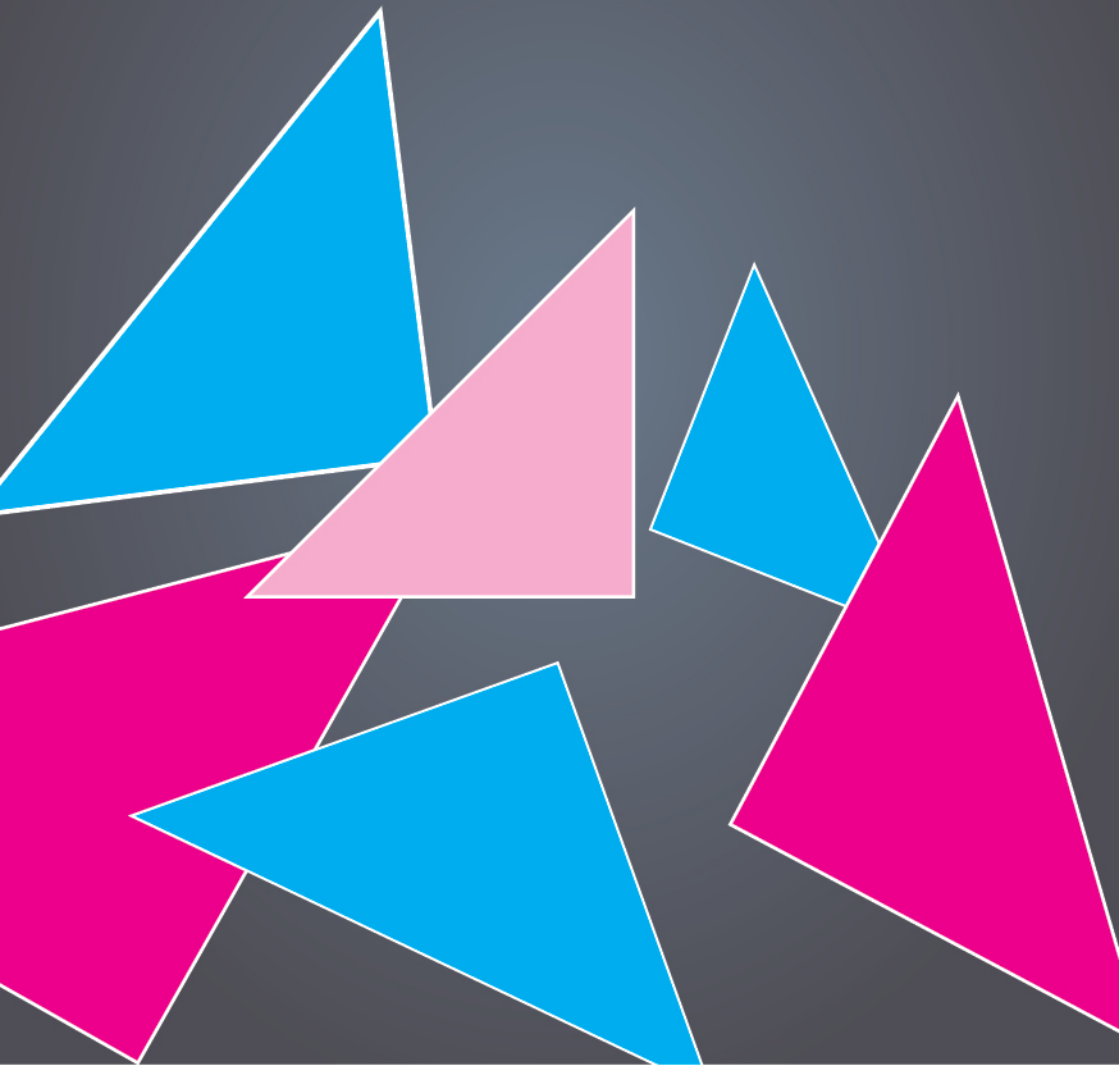
Imperial College Union



ACADEMIC STANDARDS FRAMEWORK RESPONSE

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS FRAMEWORK RESPONSE

Part 1 – Modularisation

Position Statements

We are in support of modularisation and having a common module size throughout the University, but feel that we are not in a position to comment on exactly what ECTS number should be implemented.

Other principles which **we are in support of:**

- **Balanced curriculums based on one system**, not randomly small or randomly large modules varying from Department to Department
- **Fairness between students** – we hope that concrete work will be done to ensure each module will associate with equal workload for students across the College
- Opportunity for students to take **common modules across Departments and Faculties** following modularisation, that can give flexibility for students to integrate a broader insight into an academically rigorous curriculum. Appetite for this can be seen through:
    - Huge popularity of Horizons; many students take courses for 'extra-credit' and 'non-credit' showcasing their eagerness to explore
    - Exchange opportunities such as LSE-Imperial
    - Possibility of exciting programmes e.g. 'science communication' being mentioned through the College's ongoing work in Outreach
- **Compatibility with other UK institutions** (and preferably European and other systems abroad) that gives students more flexibility to do exchange placements and gain a broader perspective

Some principles and outcomes that **we are against:**

- Degrees being **made up of a chain of excessively small modules**, leading to over-assessment and over-teaching
- **Careless approaches to modularisation** that doesn't involve critical evaluation of course and assessment content

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS FRAMEWORK RESPONSE

Part 2 – Assessment & Feedback Regulations

Introduction

Rachael Shuttleworth, RSMU Academic Liaison Officer & Chair of the ASF Working Group of the Education & Representation Board

[Rachael's introduction]

Chun-Yin San, Deputy President (Education)

[Chun-Yin's introduction]

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Executive Summary

1. **Submission of coursework (zero tolerance)**

   100% grade penalties should not be enforced as it is highly disproportionate to minor infractions and perpetuate a negative institutional culture. Any grade penalties should have robust protection for students with mitigating and extenuating circumstances.

2. **Timeliness for feedback**

   Feedback to be returned within 14 days to allow students to effectively reflect and learn from their mistakes, in turn benefitting their educational attainment.

3. **Format of feedback**

   Feedback quality should be ensured through a common framework, and should highlight parts done well alongside parts that need improvement

4. **Issuing of provisional grades**

   A granular breakdown of provisional marks should be provided following each assessment, including examinations. This builds on current practice in some Departments where students have become less scared and felt more in control of their learning.

5. **Access to exam scripts**

   Students who are not in their final year should be able to access and review their examination scripts under supervised conditions, and done according to a practical framework. This reflect practices at other institutions and support students in reflecting and learning from their mistakes.

6. **Feedback on written exams**

   Feedback should be given on all modes of assessment and to a good degree of quality. When it comes to written exams, generalized cohort-wide feedback is acceptable though individualized, constructive feedback is preferred.

7. **Provision of model answers**

   Outline answers should be available to students as part of mock papers, so that students can check their foundational knowledge of course content. Outline answers should also be available as part of the scripts access process, so students can maximize the opportunity.

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8. Provision of past papers

Past papers should be provided to students to support students in maximizing their preparation for upcoming assessments.

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Position Statements

1) Submission of coursework (zero tolerance)

Our View

- 100% penalty on late submissions (a.k.a 'zero-tolerance') should not be enforced at Imperial College London
- Robust protection for students with mitigating circumstances and vulnerable students should be built into any regulation on grade penalties for late submissions (this is a matter for the mitigating circumstances procedure not the late submission)

Our Arguments

- A 100% grade penalty is brutal, disproportionate to cases of minor infractions e.g. if students submit their coursework late by a few minutes, and reflects a 'swim or sink' mentality that perpetuates a negative institutional culture
- While tertiary education should very much support students in developing time management skills and deter late submissions to job and grant submissions, such a lesson can be taught equally as effectively with a lighter – but significant – penalty
- Students with mitigating circumstances will not always acknowledge their problems until late in the coursework cycle or after submission, nor should they be expected to do so. As such, robust protection should be in place to support such students

2) Timelines for Feedback

Our View

- Feedback to be returned within 14 days for all coursework, unless with Faculty exemption, or be returned before exams and the due date of the next piece of like-for-like coursework, whichever is sooner

Our Arguments

- Late, poor and insufficient feedback imposes a massive opportunity cost on the educational achievement of our students
- The need for timely feedback is obvious – feedback enables reflection and 'learning from your mistakes', and late feedback impairs students' abilities to do this effectively and with sufficient time, especially when similar types of assessment and exams are coming quickly around the corner

3) Format of Feedback

Our View

- Feedback should highlight parts done well alongside parts that need improvement

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- Feedback should refer and make use of the marking criteria
- At the very least, markers should follow a common framework of “three good things, three improvements”
- Best practice - a regulator when multiple markers are used

Our Arguments

- Feedback is educationally beneficial when it helps students understand opportunities to improve, and when it helps them understand their errors
- Students look for constructive criticisms and suggestions that support them in critically reflecting on their comments
- Simple percentages without comments, or mundane comments and corrections, are pedagogically useless
- A basic framework – as simple as “three suggestions for development, three achievements to build upon”, would simplify the task of giving quality feedback for staff, and give students material to use when considering how to learn, and develop their understanding

4) Issuing Provisional Marks

Our View

- A granular breakdown of provisional marks (i.e. upper/mid/lower 1st/2:1/2:2 OR A+/A/A-) should be provided following each assessment, including examinations, with clear guidance on what they map to
- Provisional marks should be provided regularly throughout the academic year, and not limited to an end of year release or twice-a-year release
- Marks should be very clearly denoted as ‘provisional’ and subjected to change by the examination board

Our Arguments

- Where Departments have bypassed regulations and released granular provisional marks, students have used the information constructively as a tool for reflection and personal evaluation, asking themselves whether they need to improve and work harder/better (if they are in lower grades), or if they can actually take a break and keep doing what they are doing well in (if they are in higher grades)
- Provisional grades allow students to feel less stressed and scared because they know and feel they have control over their learning. Where students do become obsessed about monitoring their grades, academic staff and personal tutors should help those students understand how to make use of provisional grades effectively
- Provisional grades are used by students for applications to internships and graduate recruitment schemes

5) Access to Scripts

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Our View

- Students should have the opportunity to view their examination scripts
- This should be done under supervised conditions, should not result in students being able to possess the scripts, and done according to a practical framework

Our Arguments

- Lack of exam scripts access removes a valuable opportunity for students to learn from their mistakes and successes. This is especially frustrating for students as it can be argued that the majority of mistakes in exams are skills-based, such as poor time management or lack of clarity in their explanations or structure
- Where Departments have bypassed existing regulations and allowed students access to their exam scripts, students have used the information constructively as a tool for reflection and personal evaluation. Students tell us that they use the scripts to remind themselves what they have written, and that they take time to critically evaluate their answers to identify areas for improvement
    - In some Departments, students sit down with their personal tutors and have structured, reflective conversations based on their scripts. These students often find that the conversations help them see their work and abilities in a different light, and to identify ways of improvement for subsequent pieces of work.
    - In some courses, staff release general cohort-wide comments alongside giving students access to their scripts. They then hold Q&A sessions with students. Students find these opportunities to be useful in a large cohort setting.
- Access to exam scripts is a common practice in many other UK universities which suggests there isn't a significant legal challenge
- We are aware of concerns that this will open a 'floodgate' of logistical challenges, which is why we don't suggest that students access their scripts without some agreed common framework

6) Feedback on Written Exams

Our View

- Feedback should be given on all modes of assessment, including written exams
- The feedback given should highlight where the cohort generally did well in, and not so well in
- In terms of best practice, when it comes to written exams, feedback can be collective instead of individualized i.e. general feedback about the cohort's performance can be given as part of a Q&A session
- Feedback on written exams can be combined with access to exam scripts e.g. in large Departments, students can view their scripts in a supervised environment, followed by a class-wide feedback session and Q&A

Our Arguments

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- The usefulness of feedback in supporting students' learning is obvious.
- Some Departments already has such a practice in place, and is well-received by students.
- Would highlight to staff topics which may require more time spent on in lectures.

7) Provision of Outline Answers

Our View

- Outline answers should be provided alongside past papers
- Outline answers should preferably be made available to students after the exam, when they are reviewing their exam scripts
- For quantitative questions, full answers should be provided. For likes of essay-style questions, skeletal bullet points of key concepts/principles should be provided, but making clear to students that articulation, independent research etc. is the key to high attainment of scores

Our Arguments

- Outline answers allow students to check their understanding of the basic course content. It is highly unlikely that students would see it as the 'only way' to complete questions as many other skills e.g. clear articulation and independent research is needed for high scores.
- May reduce work for lecturer that otherwise may receive multiple questions from students asking if their answer is correct.

8) Provision of Past Papers

Our View

- Past papers should be provided, and if it is a new course then a mock paper should be distributed.
- If format change, then clearly state what does and does not still apply.

Our Arguments

- Allows students to gauge what the learning outcomes of the course should be.
- Maximize students' ability to prepare for assessments.
- Allow students to check their understanding of the course and highlight weaknesses prior to assessment.

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