Reviewing Board of Examiners borderlines policy

At the UG4/5 board of examiners in June 2017 I promised to review our policy for borderlines at teaching committee. This is that item, to be considered ahead of the final-year exam boards this year.

The attached document from Teaching Committee 2016-02-10 is our current policy. I believe it's broadly fine, and has been applied without issue at other exam boards.

The main point of concern in the UG4/5 board was that we should consider "The quality of a student's project" in borderline decisions. Some staff felt that the project already carries a large weight, and is more subject to individual circumstances outside the student's control than the taught courses.

I would like agreement of this issue at teaching committee because we have multiple Board of Examiner meetings for our joint degrees. I don't want us to re-debate this issue in each one, each year, and potentially apply different criteria in each board.

Proposal: we do *not* consider a high mark in a UG4/5 project as one of the possible reasons to push a borderline student to a higher degree classification. Apart from that, we continue with our existing policy.

The MSc degrees

The same policy could be considered for MSc degrees. The situation isn't exactly the same because the project mark does not get averaged with the course marks. A student could be borderline for a distinction on the courses, and no matter how good their project is, will still be borderline for a distinction in their degree. I think most staff would like to award a distinction to a student who has produced a truly outstanding publishable piece of work in this situation.

I suggest we leave the policy as it for the MSc degrees – that is the board will continue to *consider* MSc projects marks in borderline degree classification decisions.

Two points of information:

1. The rounding policy mentioned in the document of 2016-02-10 may need to be revisited with a change to greater use of central University systems this year.

2. It's really hard to find policies like the one under discussion here. I have repeatedly asked, in this committee and outside it, for our policies to be archived on the web. I repeat this plea here: *Please* ITO, reinstate an up-to-date archive of teaching committee policies.

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Iain Murray, April 2018

Informatics Policy on Exam Borderlines

Teaching Committee 2016-02-10

The School of Informatics has agreed a policy across all Boards of Examiners on the treatment of student marks at borderlines. This follows dissemination and open discussion, including contributions from student representatives. The policy is in line with the University Taught Assessment Regulations which set the following constraints:

- Boards of Examiners must consider all students with borderline marks;

- Borderline marks are defined as marks from two percentage points below the class or grade boundary up to the boundary itself;

- Boards of Examiners must publish in advance the factors that will be taken into account for borderline decisions.

To "consider" a student's case does not mean automatic promotion: simply that the Board should take note of it and act where appropriate. This may include taking account of where within the borderline a mark lies.

When students are promoted at a borderline their marks are unchanged but the outcome may alter: passing a course, progression between years, award of a degree, or classification of that degree.

Factors Taken into Account for Borderline Decisions

Boards must base their judgement of borderline decisions on these factors only.

For Course and Programme Borderlines

- Direction of the Special Circumstances Committee

This is binding on the Board.

For Course Borderlines

- Where a borderline decision for a course or course component has a disproportionate impact on a programme-level decision.

- Exceptionally, where assessment of part or the whole of a course is considered less reliable.

For Programme Borderlines (Progression or Award and Classification of Degree)

- A student's individual profile of performance

This may include consideration of the following.

- ➢ The quality of a student's project.

- ➢ Strong performance in courses at a higher level.

- ➢ Strong performance in higher Honours years.

- ➢ Where a student has taken a year abroad, so that their classification is based on a reduced collection of higher-level courses.

- ➢ Where a student has performed well in courses identified as generally low-scoring.

Relevant Borderlines

Course pass mark: 40 for Undergraduate Degree or Postgraduate Diploma; 50 for Postgraduate Masters

Progression: 40 or 50

Degree classification: 40 (3rd class, diploma), 50 (2.2, MSc), 60 (2.1, merit), 70 (1st class, distinction)

Range of the Borderline Region

All marks are returned to the University and reported to students as whole-number percentages. Where a fractional mark has been rounded, that integer is the number considered by the Board. For example, if a student's course mark is calculated as 37.75 that is rounded up to 38 and is within the borderline region for passing the course.

This consideration of only integer marks is specific to Informatics, has been agreed with College, and avoids the situation where a student is given a whole-number mark that is inconsistent with the Board's decision.