FAQ – Regulatory and Procedural Changes from September 2019

This document sets out a number of changes to the regulations, credit conventions and related procedures that the University will implement from the start of the academic year 2019/20. These changes are relevant to taught programmes of study, both undergraduate and postgraduate, and are intended to be of benefit to the student population by simplifying regulatory requirements and by encouraging greater consistency in working practices across our academic Schools. Several of the regulatory changes have been agreed to facilitate the greater standardisation and consistency in practice across of the University's administration, academic Schools and Faculties, a move that is in keeping with the University's Education and Student Experience Strategy and the Kent Union Education Strategy. Such improved consistency of practice will be of benefit to the student experience, not least in terms of the fairness and transparency with which these procedures will be applied across Kent.

The changes fall into three broad categories:

1. **Changes to Credit Conventions Intended to Introduce Greater Consistency in Processes**
   In this category are a number of individual changes that fall under the general heading of amendments to the rules for awarding credit; these are being introduced with the dual intention of improving consistency in process management and transparency of outcomes via the implementation of the new KentVision Student Data Management system.

2. **Changes to the Classification Rules for Postgraduate Taught Programmes**
   The University has already introduced a new set of rules for the classification of undergraduate programmes, with a view to having a single rubric that would apply to all taught programmes of study. We are now in a position to achieve this aim in full by rolling out these changes to postgraduate taught programmes, a plan that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) encouraged Kent to bring to a conclusion in our last Higher Education Review.

3. **Changes to Procedures for Managing Discrete Areas of the Student Experience**
   In this category you will find substantive changes for managing concessionary applications and requests for extensions to coursework deadlines, along with a set of new procedures and principles for managing periods of study spent abroad as part of an undergraduate programme.

**Section 1: Changes to Credit Conventions Intended to Introduce Greater Consistency in Processes**

1. **What are these regulatory changes and why are they happening?**
   The University will standardise operations, so all students benefit from a common and shared experience.

   All of the regulatory changes have been agreed by Senate; these changes involve:
   - The requirement that the overall final weighted average mark for classification purposes for all programmes be calculated and recorded to two decimal places;
   - That the reassessment mode be specified in advance as one of two methods: (i) like-for like; or (ii) by single instrument of reassessment.
• That the rules on which marks should be used respectively for the purposes of progression and for classification should be simplified (Annex 7, Credit Framework);

• An allowance for the classification of Foundation Year programmes (with Merit and Distinction).

These points are explained in more detail below:

1.1 What is the ‘overall final weighted average mark for classification’ and why is it changing?

The ‘overall final weighted mark for classification’ is the sum of all the marks awarded for the assessments taken on modules that contribute to the classification of a certificate, diploma or degree programme of study. It is arrived at via the application of the rounding algorithm for marks that is programmed into the student data system. The change to be implemented from 2019/20 is very simple. At present Kent rounds and displays the overall final weighted average mark for classification to a single decimal point on composite mark sheets. Our new student data system, KentVision, will allow us to apply the rounding algorithm in largely the same way, with the exception that it presents the ‘overall final weighted average mark for classification’ to two decimal places, providing greater granularity of information. This will apply to all taught programmes of study. It is not envisaged that this minor adjustment will prove disadvantageous to any students.

1.2 Why is the mode of reassessment being tied down so specifically?

Again, this amendment is driven by the need to have consistency and standardisation of our processes. Until this year (2018/19) Boards of Examiners had licence at their summer meetings to decide which assessments should be retaken, the format of such reassessments, and by which candidates – with one outcome of this being that the nature and format of reassessment might vary from candidate to candidate at the same Board. These changes not only introduce a greater degree of consistency to these arrangements, but also allows for the format of any reassessment to be known in advance of the summer meetings of Boards of Examiners.

For any module, we have determines that the format of reassessment must take one of two options:

(i) ‘Like-for-Like’, in which resitting students must take a form of reassessment that maps on to those assessments failed at the earlier attempt; or by

(ii) ‘Single Instrument of Reassessment’ in which a single, pre-specified piece of reassessment is taken regardless of the assessments failed at the earlier attempt.

The mode of reassessment (i.e. either i or ii above) is declared as part of the module specification, which means that the information on the format of any reassessment is now available to students in advance of meetings of Boards of Examiners.

In preparation for the coming implementation of KentVision, modules have been adjusted to specify which mode of reassessment applies in each case. This year (2018/19) students may know in advance the format of the reassessment for any module in advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners for their programme of study.

1.3 Why are we changing the rules about which marks should be used respectively for progression and classification?
Under the existing rules there are two related scenarios in which different ‘versions’ of the overall mark for a module are used:

(a) firstly, the ‘version’ of the overall mark for the module as used to facilitate the award of credit via compensation and progression to the next stage; and

(b) secondly, the ‘version’ of the overall mark for that same module as used both for the final classification of the academic award and as a matter of record on the student transcript.

**What are these scenarios?**

These two scenarios where these respective ‘versions’ of the overall module mark come into play are as follows:

(i) **Initial Fail/Pass on Resit or Repeat Attempt:** where a module is failed (without any extenuating circumstances) but is passed at a subsequent attempt, the mark recorded for the module is, for the purposes of classification and for presentation on the student transcript, capped at the pass mark for the module. However, the actual mark achieved at the successful resit/repeat attempt is used for the purposes of helping students to achieve the highest mark possible for the stage.

(ii) **Actual Mark Achieved/MARK Awarded through Compensation:** where a module has been failed with a mark that falls within 10 percentage points of the pass mark, Boards of Examiners may, under the appropriate conditions, elect to award the credit for the module via compensation (compensation is simply this – a mechanism for awarding a limited volume of credit where the earlier attempt at the module has resulted in a close fail.) Under this scenario, the compensated mark equivalent to the pass mark for the module is used for classification, but the actual (failing) mark achieved is used for progression and is recorded on the student transcript.

**Why do these differences in practice exist?**

These variations of practice in recording overall module outcomes were introduced with the Credit Framework and were devised to help students in this position achieve the conditions necessary for progression, or to achieve the best possible result in classification.

Under scenario (i) above, permitting the best mark achieved on resit/repeat to factor into the calculation of the stage average facilitates the award of credit through compensation (the preconditions for compensation require that the student must have an average mark for the stage that is higher than the pass mark for the module that is being compensated) – and therefore assists progression.

Under scenario (ii) above, permitting the compensated mark equivalent to the pass mark for the module to be used for classification allows for the highest mark possible to contribute towards the final outcome of the degree (this is because, where the Board awards credit through compensation, it denies the student the opportunity for recording a mark equivalent to the pass mark by their own efforts via a resit attempt).

**Why it’s changing**

The two scenarios outlined above result in two versions of the final mark for the module go forward for different purposes; these rules are overly complex and result in confusing outcomes. It was therefore agreed that the complicated rules that govern alternative usage under the two scenarios set out above should not continue.

**How it’s changing**

The University’s Credit Framework will be adjusted for 2019/20 to allow for the same mark (i.e. the pass mark for the module) to be used under the above scenarios for
both compensation/progression and for classification. We will also, therefore, withdraw the requirement that the average mark for the stage must be at or above the pass mark for the module concerned in order to allow compensation to take place. In this way, no student will be disadvantaged.

**From 2019/20: Annex 7 of the Credit Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Result</th>
<th>Resit Result</th>
<th>Marks to be used for Award of Credit, Progression and Eligibility for Award</th>
<th>Marks to be used for Classification/Transcript</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Best Mark</td>
<td>Best Mark **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Minimum Pass Mark</td>
<td>Minimum Pass Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Original Mark</td>
<td>Original Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Original Mark</td>
<td>Original Mark</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Where credit for a failed module is awarded via compensation, the mark used for the purposes of progression and classification will be the pass mark for the module (see paragraphs 6.3 and 12.4.1.6 of the Credit Framework). The requirement that the average mark for the stage must be at or above the pass mark for the module concerned in order to allow compensation to take place has been withdrawn (2019/20). The mark shown on the transcript will not be adjusted to the pass mark, but will show the best mark achieved by the student.**

1.4 What is changing about Foundation Year Programmes?

A Foundation Year programme is a year-long programme at Level 3 that some students take in preparation for entry into an undergraduate degree. Because these are Level 3 programmes they do not lead to an academic award in their own right, and to date have not been classified. However, from 2019/20 the University will allow for student performance over the Foundation Year programme to be classified according to the same classification rubric as certificates and diplomas. While we cannot provide an academic award for Level 3 study, the achievement of students on the FY programme will be recognised in this way from next year (2019/20).

Section 2: Changes to the Classification Rules for Postgraduate Taught Programmes (‘PGT’)

2. Why are the changes to Taught Postgraduate Programmes (‘PGT’) of study being made and what are they?

Several years ago, the University introduced a number of changes to the way in which UG degree programmes are classified. Subsequently, in the interests of consistency and fairness, it decided to extend these changes to cover PGT programmes also. In fact, the University was encouraged to take this step by the QAA during Kent’s most recent ‘Higher Education Review’, in which it was recommended that we bring our work in this area to its planned conclusion and by doing so “ensure consistency of implementation across all provision.”

In short, the changes involve:
Changes to the rounding algorithm for marks contributing to PGT awards, to be made consistent with that in use currently for UG programmes;

The cessation of the ‘Two More Marks’ rule for all PGT students enrolling from 2019/20;

That the preponderance method of classification be made compulsory for PGT programmes;

That viva voce examination for the purposes of determining classification be withdrawn for students on PGT programmes of study.

These points are explained in more detail below:

2.1 What is the rounding algorithm for marks?

The rounding algorithm sets out the formula though which the various components of assessment for a module are aggregated and expressed as an overall final mark for the module in the form of a whole number. It is also plays a critical role in the calculation of the overall final weighted average mark for the programme as a whole that is used to determine the classification of the award.

2.2 How is the rounding algorithm changing?

As part of the current set of changes it has been agreed that with respect to all marks awarded as part of a taught postgraduate (‘PGT’) programme in 2019/20 and thereafter, the rounding algorithm should be adjusted to incorporate the amendments set out below:

(a) where the aggregated overall mark awarded for the module falls within one mark of the boundary for a higher class band (i.e. an overall module mark of 39, 49, 59 or 69) it should not be rounded to the nearest integer as was previously the practice, but should be rounded up to the nearest integer: and

(b) where the final weighted average mark for classification is within 0.5 percentage points of a higher classification boundary, it should be rounded up for classification purposes (e.g. a mark of 59.5% would be rounded up to 60%).

These changes will make the rounding algorithm for PGT programmes and their constituent modules consistent with the algorithm that has been in use for UG programmes for some time. While it is clear that the new practice treats raw PGT marks more generously than has been the case under the present system, this development is intended to offset the removal of the use of the ‘Two More Marks Rule’, which hitherto allowed PGT Boards of Examiners to exercise their discretion and consider raising candidates to a higher classification where their marks had placed them in the borderline zone. Whereas Boards of Examiners had exercised their discretion variously and, therefore, potentially with inconsistent outcomes for similar sets of marks, the use of the revised rounding algorithm produces similar outcomes overall, but on a consistent, standardised basis (see 2.3 below).

One further minor change will also be introduced into the rounding algorithm for marks from September 2019 and will be applied to all taught programmes of study (UG and PGT). At present, the overall final weighted average mark for classification is expressed to a single decimal point on the composite mark sheet and the student transcript. From 2019/20 it will be expressed to two decimal points (see 1.1. above).

2.3 What is the ‘Two More Marks Rule’ and why is it going?

The ‘Two More Marks Rule’ was an element of the classification conventions that allowed Boards of Examiners to exercise their discretion and consider raising the
degree results of borderline candidates to a higher class band where such an outcome could theoretically be achieved by the addition of two more marks to every module for that candidate. The key word here is ‘discretion’, as in practice the exercise of this discretion by Boards of Examiners was highly variable and potentially allowed for different degree outcomes to be recorded for similar mark profiles depending on which Board had considered them. This practice was removed from the UG classification conventions in 2011/12, and now the PGT conventions will be following suit, from 2019/20. As noted above, the rounding algorithm has been adjusted to allow for a similar degree of uplift overall in terms of degrees awarded as would have been achieved through the exercise of examiners’ discretion. However, this is being achieved through a more equitable means that will be applied consistently for all students regardless of School or Faculty.

2.4 **What is the ‘preponderance method’ of classification and why is its use being made compulsory for PGT programmes?**

For many years the University has operated two methods for the classification of taught degree awards: the average method and the preponderance method. As its name suggests, under the average method the overall final mark for classification is reached by simply calculating the average (weighted) mark achieved for all the contributing modules and making the award relevant to where that mark falls in the respective classification bands.

The preponderance method, on the other hand, is slightly more complicated and requires the achievement of a qualifying average mark and a set volume of credit in a specific class band (Merit / Distinction) in order to be considered for an award in that class band. To date, use of the preponderance method of classification has been optional for Schools for PGT programmes (however, its use has been compulsory for UG programmes since 2011/12). From 2019/20 all programmes of study will be classified by both the average and preponderance methods and students will be awarded a degree according to the better result achieved via the respective methods. In this way, a greater consistency of degree outcomes for all students will be achieved.

2.5 **What is viva voce examination and why is it being withdrawn for PGT candidates?**

Some Schools currently use viva voce examination as a means of making decisions about candidates whose overall performance falls close to the borderline for a higher classification. However, many Schools choose not to use this form of examination at all and, where it is used, this has been inconsistent and often for reasons other than to resolve a borderline decision. Given the other measures set out in this document, the University is now withdrawing use of this form of examination for taught postgraduate degree students admitted in 2019/20 and thereafter. Once again, this action brings the PGT procedures in line with those that have been in use for UG programmes for several years.

**Section 3: Changes to Procedures for Managing Discrete Areas of the Student Experience**

3. Along with the changes detailed above, the University will also be introducing amendments to other processes and procedures in several discrete areas in 2019/20. These include:
• The rules governing the award of credit and progression for period of study spent abroad;
• The procedures and rules for managing student concessions (i.e. mitigation of extenuating circumstances);
• That, under specified conditions, students be permitted to be deferred (i.e. have a further ‘as if for first time’ ['AFT'] attempt) at a module that they have passed;
• The arrangements for managing and agreeing extensions for assessments.

The changes are set out in more detail below:

3.1 How are the rules changing with regard to periods of study spent abroad?

Many students at the University spend either a term or a year studying on placement at a European or international institution as part of their programme of study. The precise arrangements for the volume of study and other related matters undertaken abroad are quite various, depending on the host institution, the country and the purpose for which the period of study is undertaken (e.g. for some Kent Schools the purpose of the time spent abroad is about language acquisition or cultural immersion, whereas for other Schools their students are taking an alternate version of a taught stage of the programme as delivered at Kent). All such periods attract the award of University (UK) credit, but the structure of the study undertaken elsewhere does not map well to Kent’s Credit Framework. This has led to some issues about defining consistently the requirements for progression, about retrieving failed credit and how to apply mitigation to extenuating circumstances when students are studying abroad.

In response to these issues the University has devised a common, flexible framework for governing the award of credit, determining the requirements for progression, retrieving failed credit and managing extenuation. We are confident that this framework will allow for these matters to be managed equitably and to the benefit of students. The detail of this common framework for managing period of study spent abroad will be published in the Credit Framework for 2019/20.

Please note that these changes do not apply where study at the partner institution is taken as part of a programme leading to a dual or joint award (i.e. where the degree award is made by both Kent and the partner institution). Such collaborative programmes tend to have bespoke regulatory arrangements. The current set of changes apply only to programmes that offer a term or year abroad as a placement element of the Kent degree.

3.2 Why are the arrangements for managing student concessions (i.e. mitigation of extenuating circumstances) changing and how?

As you may be aware, the University has a set of rules and procedures that govern applications from students requesting that extenuating circumstances be taken into account when considering their (negatively impacted) performance in certain assessments and modules. The existing set of rules for managing such concessionary applications are based on a long-standing definition of what constitutes a relevant concessionary submission and a set of rules that are very complicated and, therefore, not easily understood by staff or students. There is also at present some variation in the administration of the process by respective Schools.

Two things have happened to address the matters noted above. Firstly, the University commissioned a review (with Kent Union representation) of the rules and procedures with a view to benchmarking them against practice nationally, reducing their complexity and making them easier to navigate for all users. This review took
place in 2017/18 and resulted in a redrafted definition of concessionary/extenuating circumstances and a far less complex set of procedures that map more closely on to best practice elsewhere. Secondly, the administrative procedures for managing and processing applications have been incorporated into the KentVision system, a step that will go a long way to ensuring much greater consistency of practice in this area between Schools.

The revised set of procedures will be published as an updated Annex 9: Mitigation of Extenuating Circumstances (‘Concessions’) of the Credit Framework for 2019/20.

3.3 What is meant by ‘Deferral’ and what about it is changing?

This change also resulted from the review of concessions referenced at 3.2 above. At present, the result of a module is said to be ‘deferred’ where it has been failed and the Board of Examiners accepts that the failure has occurred due to the negative impact of extenuating circumstances on the student's performance. In such cases, the Board can decide to give a student a further 'deferred' attempt at passing the module, and this attempt would not be capped at the pass mark and nor would it be counted towards the maximum of three attempts permitted. What's changing from 2019/20 is that a module need not necessarily be failed as a precondition for Boards of Examiners' considering whether or not a decision to defer would be appropriate. This will not mean, however, that it would be appropriate for any failed module to be deferred. This is likely to only apply under concessionary circumstances to modules for which there has been a narrow pass and a result that was significantly out of line with the marks recorded for any unaffected modules taken by the student. The precise conditions under which ‘defer-on-pass’ might be allowed will be set out in the University's Credit Framework for 2019/20.

3.4 What is changing with regard to the arrangements for managing extensions for coursework assessments?

As with the arrangements for managing concessions (3.2 above), the process for submitting and approving requests for extensions to assessment deadlines was reviewed in 2017/18. The principal change in 2019/20 will be the implementation of a standard requirement across all Schools that such requests must be submitted no later than 24 hours (i.e. one working day) in advance of the deadline for the piece of work concerned. When it goes live, the new process will be managed in KentVision and so ensure consistency of practice across Schools. The details of the new procedure will be published in the Credit Framework for 2019/20.

4. What if any of the changes outlined in this document result in a worse outcome for me than under the regulations that were in place before their introduction?

Please be assured that in the unlikely event that any individual students should be disadvantaged by the in-course introduction of the revised processes and procedures, the University will intervene to correct any such unintended detrimental impact. The intention is, after all, to improve the student experience, and safeguarding your interests remains our primary concern.