

ACADEMIC QUALITY



Learning and Teaching Policy

Policy on Discretionary Award of Credits (Taught)

1. Purpose and Summary

This document incorporates policy and procedural information to support Boards with the implementation of [University Regulations](#) for the discretionary award of credits. The discretionary award of credits is available to Boards as an *optional and discretionary* device, to deal with cases where students have not satisfied the requisite credit points but have otherwise satisfied the overall criteria for award (all taught students), or progression (First Degree students only). The policy and procedures comply with Regulation A6 Progression, Regulation A7 Awards and the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#).

NB: Where students are following programmes of study accredited by the Engineering Council, guidance is available for meeting the Engineering Council's Condonement and Compensation Policy.¹

2. Scope

2.1. Discretionary Award of Credits: For Individual Students

- The policy on the Discretionary Award of Credits is applicable to all students registered on taught programmes and taught components of a postgraduate research degree programme of study.
- Discretionary Award of Credits can be used only for individual students; for mitigating or exceptional circumstances for an entire cohort or part of an entire cohort, Exceptional Award of Credits should be used. See Section 10 for further details.

2.2. Exceptional Award of Credits: For Whole Cohorts or Part of an Entire Cohort

- In accordance with Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances, Exceptional Award of Credits can be used for mitigating or exceptional circumstances impacting an entire cohort or part of an entire cohort. Discretionary Award of Credits should not be used where a number of students have been affected by the same circumstances. See Section 10 for further details.

3. Key Principles

3.1. Academic Standards and Learning Outcomes

- The standards and learning outcomes of the award shall not be compromised by the discretionary award of credits.
- The student must have satisfied the overall criteria for award (all taught courses) or progression (First Degree students only), despite not having satisfied the requisite credit points.

3.2. The Discretionary Award of Credits MAY be applied:

- for Foundation Programme students, by the Award Board.
- for First Degree students, by the Award Board or Progression Board as appropriate. (*The Progression Board should be mindful of using discretionary award of credits for progression in the case of students whose performance has been unsatisfactory, since such students may end up using the maximum allowed and, therefore, be 'credit light' at a subsequent progression stage or at the point of award; see 3.4 'Maximum Discretionary Award of Credits' below*).
- for postgraduate/graduate taught students, only when the Award Board is making recommendations for the award and not as a means to facilitate progression of a student through a programme of study.
- for taught elements of a research programme of study, at the award stage only (not to facilitate progression).

¹ [Learning and Teaching Policy Bank | Heriot-Watt University](#)

NB: if a student is prevented by illness or other sufficient cause from preventing themselves for, completing, or fulfilling the requirements of, examinations which form part of a Programme of Study leading to an award, the Award Board may consider applying discretionary credits, assuring itself that the overall award criteria have been met.

3.3. The Discretionary Award of Credits must NOT be applied:

The following outlines circumstances under which the Discretionary Award of Credits must NOT be applied, however, if a student is prevented by illness or other sufficient cause from preventing themselves for, completing, or fulfilling the requirements of, examinations which form part of a Programme of Study leading to an award, the Award Board may consider applying discretionary credits, assuring itself that the overall award criteria have been met.

- a. to courses which are designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D for progression on the programme (and which might be defined as 'pre-requisite', 'core', 'qualifying', or equivalent terminology).
- b. to a dissertation, project, or any other supervised research work.
- c. to a course for which the course grade has been made invalid due to proven academic misconduct.
- d. as an alternative to mitigating circumstances. The mitigating circumstances process should be applied and, afterwards, the Progression or Award Board should determine an appropriate grade (either in the range of A-F or DC).
- e. in the case of a Graduate/Postgraduate Taught student, to facilitate progression through a programme of study.
- f. to a First Degree student for progression purposes where a student has been absent from the entire course assessment unless the Progression Board has agreed the application of DC on the recommendation of the Mitigating Circumstances Board.
- g. if a decision of absent (ABS) has been returned. This decision of ABS is often used when a student has completed some, but not all, of the assessment; in such cases, technically, a Grade F rather than ABS should have been returned.

NB: Eligibility for regrading of ABS to Grade F should be considered to ensure that students do not fall short of their requisite credits for award or progression simply because an incorrect decision of ABS had excluded them from being eligible for the discretionary award of credits. To be eligible for re-grading of ABS to Grade F and for the award of DC, a student must have attempted some of the assessment; DC cannot be awarded to a student who has been absent from the entire course assessment unless the Progression Board has agreed the application of DC on the recommendation of the Mitigating Circumstances Board.

3.4. Maximum Discretionary Award of Credits

- a. Boards have the discretion to award credits, up to a maximum over the course of the entire programme, for the relevant awards as per Regulation A7 Awards.
 - i. In the case of Foundation Programmes, normally up to 15 credits at the point of award;
 - ii. In the case of First Degrees, normally up to 30 credits over the course of the entire programme of study;
 - iii. In the case of Combined Studies up to 45 credits at the point of award;
 - iv. In the case of the Higher Degree of Master, and taught component of Postgraduate Research, normally up to 20 credits.

4. Applying Discretionary Award of Credits for Award Purposes

4.1. If a Board is applying the discretionary award of credits at the award stage it shall assure itself that:

- a. the Key Principles of this Policy have been applied (Section 3).
- b. all alternative options have been considered.
- c. any discretionary award of credit previously applied for the purposes of First Degree progression, as set out under paragraph 2.5 of Regulation A6 Progression, have been taken into account.
- d. the student has satisfied the overall criteria for award despite having not satisfied the requisite credit points.
- e. the student shall have taken all the assessment opportunities in the course in question and have obtained a Grade F (and Grade E in the case of Foundation Programmes only) in the assessment(s);
 - i. in the case of *final-stage* courses where no re-assessment is permitted, DC is applicable to Grade Fs gained after the first attempt.

- ii. in exceptional circumstances if a student is prevented by illness or other sufficient cause from presenting themselves for, completing, or fulfilling the requirements of, the examinations which form part of a Programme of Study leading to an award, the Award Board may consider applying discretionary award of credits, assuring itself that the above criteria has been met.
- iii. the above still applies in the case of a Grade F (and Grade E in the case of Foundation Programmes only) for a nullified assessment due to late submission.
- f. the use of DC is transparent, fair, consistent, and open to independent scrutiny.
- g. the justification for allocating discretionary award of credits shall be recorded in the minutes or formal record of the relevant Board.

5. Discretionary Award of Credits and Calculating an Award

5.1. When averaging courses for the purposes of calculating an award:

- a. where DC is being used for a course for which there are no accepted mitigating or exceptional circumstances, then that course shall be included. The mark from the re-assessment attempt (which may be 0 from an ABS or mark leading to a F grade) should be included in the calculation.
- b. where DC is being used for a course with accepted mitigating/exceptional circumstances, then that course shall not be included in the overall award calculation.

6. Progression (First Degrees only)

6.1. If a Progression Board is applying discretionary award of credits to facilitate progression it shall assure itself that:

- a. the Key Principles of this Policy have been applied (section 3).
- b. all alternative options have been considered. For example, where appropriate, and where programme regulations allow, the student might be given the opportunity to take alternative courses in order to minimise the possibility of having insufficient credits for the award of a degree.
- c. the student shall have taken all re-assessment opportunities in the course(s) in question and shall have gained a Grade F in the re- assessment;
 - i. The DC can be applied only to a Grade F after unsuccessful re-assessment in those courses neither specified as a pre-requisite nor designated as requiring a minimum of Grade D for progression on the programme.
 - ii. Re-assessment should always be recommended where a Grade F was gained at the first attempt; this includes a Grade F for a nullified assessment due to late submission.
NB: It must not be suggested to students that they could opt not to take a re-assessment on the basis that their Grade F might be changed to DC at the end of their programme.
- d. where consideration is being given to the transfer of students to a Combined Studies degree with one or more courses recorded as ABS, section 7 of this Policy shall be applied.
- e. the use of DC is transparent, fair, consistent, and open to independent scrutiny.
- f. the justification for allocating discretionary award of credits shall be recorded in the minutes or formal record of the relevant Board.

7. Transfer to Combined Studies

7.1. If a Progression Board is considering the transfer of students to a Combined Studies degree with one or more courses recorded as ABS it shall assure itself that:

- a. the Key Principles of this Policy have been applied (section 3).
- b. section 6 of this Policy has been applied: 'Progression (First Degree only)'. DC cannot be applied if a decision of absent has been returned.

NB: In cases where an ABS grade is an issue in a transfer to Combined Studies and where the student in question has actually attempted some of the assessment, the Associate Director of Studies (or their deputy) should discuss with the student's original School eligibility for re-grading such courses as 'F' and thereafter awarding discretionary award of credits for the Grade F.

8. Recording the use of the Discretionary Award of Credits

8.1. If a Board has chosen to apply DC it shall assure itself that:

- a. justification for its use has been recorded in the minutes or formal record of the relevant Board.
- b. with regard to the recording of DC on the Student Administration System, the original mark should be retained against the course and the Grade F (and Grade E for Foundation Programmes only) should be overwritten with DC in the grades column. **Note:** specific details on how to add DC records on the Student Administration System and on recording DC on spreadsheets returned to Academic Operations are provided in the [Undergraduate and Postgraduate Assessment Procedures](#) (issued each session).

NB: the transcript of assessment results will record the discretionary award of credits in the form of DC, with an explanation – *Discretionary Award of Credits* - against the appropriate course(s).

9. Exceptional Award of Credits

9.1. Exceptional Award of Credits: For Entire Cohorts or Part of a Cohort

- a. As a means of differentiating between individual and entire cohort mitigating circumstances, the use of Exceptional Award of Credits has been introduced to refer to the latter; Discretionary Award of Credits applies to individual student cases and should not be used where a number of students have been affected by the same circumstances.
- b. Exceptional Award of Credits can be used for mitigating or exceptional circumstances impacting an entire cohort or part of an entire cohort of students registered on taught programmes and taught components of a postgraduate research degree programme of study. The use of Exceptional Award of Credits complies with Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances and the Policy on Mitigating Circumstances.
- c. Circumstances affecting entire cohorts or part of an entire cohort can include, but are not limited to: adverse weather disrupting exams or other assessment, significant issues with the online learning, teaching and assessment services provided by the University, political unrest, industrial action (including a marking boycott), or where the teaching or assessment duties of a staff member, who is unexpectedly absent or has suddenly passed away, cannot be covered by other colleagues.
- d. The University's [Policy on Mitigating Circumstances](#) outlines the procedures to be followed whenever a School identifies circumstances requiring entire or partial cohort mitigation. This section here focuses on the use of Exceptional Award of Credits by Boards of Examiners, which takes place after it has been agreed that entire or partial cohort mitigation can be applied.

9.2. Exceptional Award of Credits: Procedures

- a. Following approval of the need to apply entire or partial cohort mitigation (as per 9.1d above), the decision to apply Exceptional Award of Credits should be agreed by the Course Assessment Board and approved in turn by the Progression or Award Board. Justification for the use of Exceptional Award of Credits should be recorded in the minutes or formal record of the relevant Board.
- b. Exceptional Award of Credits is recorded in the form of EC as a grade (and if there is no assessment information, a mark too) on the Student Administration System and on the transcript of assessment results. The specific explanation against EC is *Exceptional Credits: credit awarded at the discretion of the Exam Board due to exceptional circumstances normally impacting the entire cohort on the course*. **Note:** specific details on how to add EC records on the Student Administration System and on recording EC on spreadsheets returned to Academic Operations are provided in the [Undergraduate and Postgraduate Assessment Procedures](#) (issued each session).
- c. Where Exceptional Award of Credits for entire or partial cohort circumstances has been used at the award stage, then the relevant course(s) will not be included in the calculation of the award.