Learning and Teaching Board

Guidelines on Discretionary Award of Credits: Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes, Spring and Autumn 2017 (including RAY discretionary credits)

1. Introduction

This paper provides a series of guidelines to assist Chairs of Progression/Award Boards, Examinations Officers, Deans and Deans’ Representatives in the use of the Discretionary Award of Credits for students registered on undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes.

These guidelines comply with the proposals made by the Learning and Teaching Board for the compliance of the University’s programmes with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, which were approved by the Senate at its meetings in March and May 2003. See “Guidelines on Complying with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework” (document number 5):

The policy on Discretionary Award of Credits was originally implemented in June 2002. An amended version of the policy was introduced in September 2003. This paper incorporates further amendments (related to Combined Studies), approved by the Learning and Teaching Board at its meeting on 14 October 2004. Further revisions have been made to include the use of Discretionary Award of Credits for postgraduate taught programmes, which was approved by the Senate Council, on the recommendation of the Learning and Teaching Board, at its meeting on 17 May 2006.

On 1 April 2009, the Senate approved a Policy on the Award of RAY Discretionary Credits. The process of awarding ‘RAY discretionary credits’ was to take place at the end of academic session 2008/09 only and prior to registration for academic session 2009/2010. However, it has since become apparent that a number of distance learning students who had commenced programmes prior to RAY are currently short of credits and are unable to obtain an award. Therefore, on the recommendation of the Studies Committees, the Senate Business Committee (acting with the delegated authority of the Senate) has approved an extension to the Policy on RAY Discretionary Credits. The approved Policy is attached as an appendix to this document.

2. Overview: Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Programmes

HAPS permits Progression and Award Boards to use their discretion in the award of Grade E, particularly in the case of non-core courses. Grade E should continue to be used in this discretionary manner. However, Boards will have occasion to retain the award of a Grade F for a non-core course if, in the opinion of the Course and Progression/Award Boards, the student’s performance was not at the standard required for Grade E.

The discretionary award of credits has been introduced to enable Boards to deal with cases where students have not satisfied the requisite credit points due to achieving a Grade F in a course, but have otherwise satisfied the overall criteria for award (or progression – see restrictions below).

3. Undergraduate Programmes

The Progression Board has the discretion to award credit points to a student who has not achieved the requisite credits for award or for progression from one stage to another (since such students now require a full complement of credits for all awards). The discretionary credit scheme is governed by core criteria and can be applied only within a specific context. The Dean or representative should monitor the use of DC at Boards to ensure fairness and consistency.

(a) DC is an optional and discretionary device available to Boards to enable students who have satisfied the overall criteria for the programme, yet are “credit-light”.

(b) DCs can be awarded normally for up to two courses or 30 credits (normally up to three courses or 45 credits for Combined Studies degrees). DCs apply only to Grade Fs since all other Grades carry 15 credits.
(c) Only Grade Fs gained in courses which were not specified as core to the programme are eligible for consideration under the DC policy. Students must gain a minimum of Grade D in core courses.

(d) In the case of non-final stage courses:
   
   i. DC is only applicable to Grade Fs gained after unsuccessful re-assessment in those courses not designated as core.
   
   ii. re-assessment should be recommended in all non-core courses, including electives, where a Grade F was gained at the first attempt. NB Mentors and Directors of Studies should not suggest to students that they could opt not to take a re-assessment on the basis that their Grade F would probably be changed to DC at the end of their programme.

(e) In the case of final-stage courses, where no re-assessment is permitted unless there are extenuating circumstances, DC is applicable to Grade Fs gained after the first attempt.

(f) For progression purposes:
   
   i. DCs can be applied only to courses which are not pre-requisites and not designated as core.
   
   ii. DCs cannot be applied after the first assessment attempt.
   
   iii. Students must:
       
       - have taken a re-assessment and gained a Grade F in re-assessment (NB: Grade E is sufficient for students to progress in non-continuing courses);
       - have satisfied the specified criteria for progression;
       - be given the opportunity to take alternative courses to minimise the possibility of having insufficient credits for their award and of having used up their two DCs.
   
   iv. The Progression Board should be mindful of using DCs for progression in the case of students whose performance has been unsatisfactory, since such students may end up using their DC entitlement and, therefore, be ‘credit light’ at a subsequent progression stage or at the point of award.

(g) If a case for discretionary award of credits is proposed, the Board must satisfy itself of the following:
   
   i. The standards and outcomes of the programme and the award are not being compromised.
   
   ii. The student has satisfied the specified criteria for progression or the award as a whole, in spite of being "credit light".
   
   iii. The use of DC is transparent, fair, consistent and open to independent scrutiny.

4. Transfer to Combined Studies

Under the policy on the Discretionary Award of Credits, DC can be awarded to students only if they have achieved a Grade F in the re-assessment; DC cannot be applied if a decision of absent (ABS) has been returned. Students often transfer to a Combined Studies degree with one or more courses recorded as ABS. 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.

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 should discuss with the student’s original School the possibility of re-grading such courses as “F” and thereafter awarding discretionary credits for the Grade F. In this way, students transferring to Combined Studies would 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 discretionary credits.

Note: 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 accepted his or her case for extenuating circumstances.
5. Postgraduate/Graduate Taught Programmes

At its meeting on 17 May 2006, the Senate Council approved for implementation with immediate effect, the introduction of a policy on Discretionary Award of Credits for students registered on postgraduate taught programmes. The policy is applicable to all postgraduate/graduate taught programmes, with the exception of the MBA which will continue to operate under its own, separate Regulation 34, whereby a comparable compensation scheme can be applied.

The postgraduate version of the Discretionary Award of Credits policy is similar to the undergraduate scheme. The key criteria are as follows:

(a) DC is an optional and discretionary device available to Boards to enable students who have satisfied the overall criteria for the programme, yet are “credit-light” with respect to the award.

(b) Discretionary Award of Credits is applied to Grade Fs in courses (the only grade without any credits) and can be applied only in a maximum of one taught course (c.15-20 credits). Discretionary credits cannot be applied to dissertations (c.60 credits).

(c) DC can be applied for award only; DC should not be used as a means to facilitate progression through a PGT/Graduate programme.

(d) DC should normally be applied to a Grade F gained after unsuccessful re-assessment in the course in question. The Board should consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether it is appropriate to apply DC to Grade F gained after the first attempt.

(e) If a case for discretionary award of credits is proposed, the Board must satisfy itself of the following:

- The standards and outcomes of the programme and the award are not being compromised.
- The student has satisfied the specified criteria for the award as a whole, in spite of being “credit light”.
- The use of DC is transparent, fair, consistent and open to independent scrutiny.

(f) The Dean or representative should monitor the use of DC at Boards to ensure fairness and consistency.

(g) The Progression Board must clearly record its justification for awarding discretionary credits.

6. Recording the use of the Discretionary Award of Credits

If a Board has chosen to apply DC, justification for its use must be recorded in the minutes or formal record of the relevant Board.

With regard to recording DC on ISS, the original mark should be retained against the course on ISS and the Grade F should be overwritten with DC in the grades column. Note: specific details on how to add DC records on ISS and on recording DC on spreadsheets returned to the Academic Registry are provided in the Exam Procedures Guidelines (issued to Schools each session).

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).
Policy on the Award of RAY Discretionary Credits

1. Students should not be disadvantaged as a result of the University moving from a term to semesterised structure.

2. Only those students who enrolled for their programme of study prior to academic session 2008/09 may be considered for the award of RAY discretionary credits.

3. If students are credit light only as a result of the transition to RAY, they may be awarded RAY Discretionary Credits normally up to a maximum of 20 credits.

4. The award of RAY Discretionary Credits is the responsibility of the Studies Committees. This responsibility shall be delegated to the Chair of the relevant Studies Committee.

5. The award of RAY discretionary credits should be a separate process to the University’s policy on awarding discretionary credits and should not prevent students from being considered for discretionary credits in the usual way, either for progression or at the end of their course of study (in line with University Regulations).