Policy on Withholding Awards due to Outstanding Debts: Implementation Procedures

Background

The University’s policy on outstanding debts requires that students in such a position are not eligible to graduate or to receive their award certificate in absentia until such time as they have paid all debts. At its meeting on 11 October 2005, the Support Services Board approved in principle the proposal that award decisions could be withheld from graduating students who had outstanding debts to the University. Following a period of consultation with Schools, Finance and the Academic Registry (primarily via the Learning and Teaching Administrators Forum), an implementation process was introduced from 1 June 2006, whereby a separate ISS decision code (78) would be applied by the Finance Office to all graduating students with a debt of £100 or above.

With the introduction of SAS in September 2010, the process for identifying graduating students with a debt of £100 or above changed, whereby a Graduation/Award Hold (GC Hold) will be applied to the appropriate students’ records, but continues to provide a much more consistent and equitable approach to debt collection in the context of graduating students and, if debts are settled in advance of the deadline for receipt of results, will ensure that students can graduate. In addition, official notification of ineligibility to graduate via the release of online results should reduce the number of students being informed at the ceremony itself that they are not eligible to receive their award certificate.

GC Hold (Graduation/Award Hold): Wording on Online Results Page

In consultation with the University’s legal advisors, the Academic Registrar has ascertained that the University could be in a difficult position, from a legal perspective, if notification of results referred to debt. In consequence, the wording of the SAS GC Hold makes no reference to outstanding debt, but makes it clear that the award decision is being withheld and refers the students to the Student Service Centre to discuss their financial account. In this way, one of the main purposes of the hold – to ensure that notification of results cannot be used to indicate successful completion of course – can still be met.

GC Hold:

“Award Decision Withheld”

The Examiners’ decision on award has been withheld. You are not currently eligible to receive an award or attend a graduation ceremony. Please consult the Student Service Centre to discuss your financial account.

All graduating students to whom a GC Hold has been applied will receive their results online with the above decision. Once the debt has been resolved, a formal assessment results letter, with details of the award decision, will be issued.

Use of GC Hold in Practice

(Summary notes for Student Service Centre and Academic Registry - Appendix 1)

The procedures for implementing a GC Hold are outlined below:

1. The use of a GC Hold is not discretionary; it will be applied by the Student Service Centre on behalf of the Finance Office to all graduating students with Tuition Fee debt which totals £100 or above.

2. The Student Service Centre will add a GC Hold in SOAHOLD to the appropriate student records in SAS, using as a basis the centralised list of student debtors which will include cases of £100+ debts.

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1 Dubai Campus – reference should be made to the Registration & Finance Information Handbook given to students at the start of each academic year and advice from Dubai Campus staff should be sought.
3. Boards of Examiners (referred to as ‘Progression Boards’) should continue to make academic award decisions only and should not recommend a GC Hold during the Board meeting, but should recommend an award decision which should be input on SAS in the form of the appropriate code and returned in code form on the Assessment Results Report (ARR). The deadline for notification of Award Decisions and return of ARRs for graduating students is contained in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Assessment Procedures document (document 1). The ARR will identify students who have a GC Hold applied to their record, but Schools should enter the award code, as per guidelines provided and should not remove or inactivate the GC Hold.

4. Although Schools do not need to take any specific action regarding the use of GC Holds, School Financial Controllers will be able to provide debt listings to relevant school staff as required. Schools are requested not to publicise the fact that a GC Hold applies only to debts of £100 or above, since students will still be required to settle debts below that sum in order to receive an award certificate at graduation (see n.10 below).

5. All instances of debts cleared will be notified by the Student Service Centre to the Academic Registry no later than the deadline for recommendations for graduation. Case of debt resolution after the deadline (even if prior to a graduation ceremony) will result in deferral until the next conferment date or graduation ceremony.

6. Once debts are resolved, the Student Service Centre will remove the GC Hold and notify the Academic Registry who will produce a formal assessment results letter including the award decision. The ARR returned under No.3 above will be used to check the letter, since it contains a written record of the award decision made by the Progression Board. Letters with the award decision will then be sent out to students.

**Administration of Debts**

7. The Finance Office will be responsible for the administration and collection of all debts (including those above and below the GC Hold threshold of £100), with the exception of resit fees, graduation fees and Student Union debts. It is hoped that with the development of SAS in the future, all debts will be detailed against student records which will enable invoices to be raised via Oracle.

8. The Academic Registry will continue to be responsible for collecting resit and graduation fees, while the Students Union will undertake debt collection in relation to its own Hardship Fund.

9. The Finance Office will continue to issue letters on a routine basis with details of outstanding debts.

10. In the case of graduating students with debts below the threshold of £100, the Finance Office will continue to pursue such debts in advance of graduation, with the exception of resit and graduation fees (the responsibility of the Academic Registry) and the Hardship Fund (the responsibility of the Students Union). Although a GC Hold will not be applied to debts below £100, students will still be required to settle such debts to be eligible to graduate. The Student Service Centre will inform the Academic Registry of all graduating student debts below £100 – if such debts are not resolved prior to graduation, students will be referred to Student Service Centre staff (who will be present at graduation ceremonies) on the day of graduation to pay their outstanding debts before the ceremony.
Appendix 1

Academic Registry

Student Administration Service (SAS) – GC Hold: Graduation/Award Hold

The following notes summarise, for the benefit of colleagues in the Student Service Centre, Finance colleagues at the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses and the Academic Registry, procedures related to inputting Code GC: Graduation/Award Hold onto SAS.

NOTE:
1. These guidelines are intended to supplement, and should be read in conjunction with, the Policy on Withholding Awards due to Outstanding Debts: Implementation Procedures.
2. Dubai Campus – reference should be made to the Registration & Finance Information Handbook given to students at the start of each academic year and advice from Dubai Campus staff should be sought.
   Malaysia Campus – seek advice from Malaysia Campus

1. Student Service Centre and Finance Offices in Dubai and Malaysia: Adding a GC Hold

   The Academic Registry (AR) will provide the Student Service Centre (SSC) and colleagues in the Finance Offices at the Dubai and Malaysia Campuses with a list of all students (UG, PGT & PGR) who are eligible to graduate but who have a finance hold in SAS (FO, FM, DF, MF), so that they can identify which debtors should have a Code GC applied to them. Code GC should be applied to all debtors with an outstanding account of £100 (or equivalent) or more.

   SSC and Finance colleagues should follow sub-process P0067 – Add a Hold to a Person Record (SOAHOLD)

2. Student Service Centre and Finance Offices in Dubai and Malaysia: Removing a GC Hold

   2.1 Once a student has settled all outstanding debts, the SSC or Finance colleagues are responsible for removing the GC Hold and notifying the AR no later than the deadline for recommendations for graduation.

   2.2 Colleagues should follow sub-process P0067 – Remove a Hold from a Person Record (SOAHOLD)

   2.3 Once all GC Holds have been removed, a list of students concerned should be passed to the AR for processing of award letters.

3. GC Hold: Notes for Academic Registry

   This section provides information for the AR in relation to GC Holds: Graduation/Award Holds. Please note that these notes should be read in conjunction with the general procedures to be followed for releasing results online and generating assessment results letters from SAS (see separate paper).

   Release of Online Results and Assessment Results Letters for Students with GC Hold

   3.1 All students' results will be released online but for students who have a GC Hold on their record, the online page will automatically contain the ‘award decision withheld’ text in the examiners’ decision field.

   3.2 The award decision and the GC Hold will appear against the student’s record on the Assessment Results Report (ARR).

   3.3 Assessment results letters will not be sent out to students who have a current GC hold. The assessment results letter including the recommendation for award should be generated and sent out only when AR has been notified by SSC or Finance colleagues that debts have been resolved and the GC Hold has been inactivated.