

Imperial College London

Guidance for Taught Postgraduate Exam Boards on disruption to assessment and managing missing marks

Senate has considered the approach which should be adopted by the College to mitigate the impact of disruption to the assessment process and to ensure that the academic standards of the College's awards are maintained.

Senate agreed that in the event that a complete set of marks is not available to the Examiners' Progression and Award Board (EPAB, also hereafter 'the Board'), provision should be made for the Board to have the option to confirm the progression of students to the next year of study, and to confirm the graduation of final year students.

While the vast majority of taught postgraduate programmes at Imperial are one-year courses, there are a small number of exceptions to this, so this guidance covers the general multi-year case.

Guiding principles

As far as possible, departments should follow their normal procedures for marking, assessment and the running of the Board, including preparatory work by any Pre-Board. When this process is disrupted, the following overarching principles should guide departments in making any adjustments.

1. The integrity of the process must be maintained to ensure confidence that outcomes are rigorous and fair.
2. Any unavoidable delays to the provision of marks, feedback and decisions must be communicated to students as early as possible.
3. If prioritisation is necessary, then graduating students should come first, followed by progressing students who need to achieve a certain overall mark to remain on their programme.
4. Students should not be disadvantaged by adjustments required to ensure the integrity of the process.

Decisions for the Board to consider when marks are missing

In making any decisions about assessment outcomes or awards, either provisional or final, the Board must take care to clearly record the decision and the basis for it where the full set of marks have not been available to support their decision making.

The approaches set out below allow the Board to take a risk-based approach to managing disruption to assessment based on their knowledge of their modules and programmes and of the overall outcomes that they have previously produced. The Board will need to be satisfied that all programme learning outcomes have been met before confirming that a student has graduated, particularly for accredited programmes. In some cases, external requirements may mean that this guidance cannot be applied.

Departments should use their Pre-Boards to determine their approach in advance of the EPAB and discuss their approach with the external examiners ahead of the EPAB meeting. When marks become available after the EPAB, such that one or more students has a full set of marks, any final decision will normally be made by EPAB Chair's action. Once all of the marks for all students are

available, it is expected that the College examiners will reconvene (e.g. as part of a staff meeting) to confirm the final marks and review the outcomes.

When the EPAB is unable to make a decision about one or more students for any reason, the matter will be referred back to Senate. Senate may also decide to confirm provisional marks as final at any point after the EPAB meeting.

1. Quoracy of the Board

The [Conduct of Examination Boards](#) states that normally a minimum of 60% of the membership should be present for valid decisions to be taken. That document also sets out the expectation for which staff should be in attendance at the EPAB, as well as expected External Examiner attendance. Where a Chair of the EPAB has concerns that the meeting will not be quorate, they should contact the Academic Registrar or the Head of Academic Services for guidance on how to proceed. This should always be done where no external examiners are able to attend. Departments are encouraged to enable Board members to attend online to make attendance as easy as possible for them.

2. Decisions on Marks for an assessment or module with missing marks

Where an assessment has multiple parts that are marked independently, the Board could decide to use the available marks from some parts to determine a provisional mark for the whole assessment, if the students have been able to demonstrate that they have met the associated learning outcomes. This could be an acceptable approach where the available marks cover a representative majority of the assessment. Where there is more than one item of assessment for a module, the Board could decide to count the mark of one (or more) assessment(s) to determine a provisional module mark, if in completing the marked assessment(s), students have been able to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of the module. This could be an acceptable approach where the available marks count for a higher proportion of the overall assessment load for that module. For example, it is unlikely that students would have met all the learning outcomes in a piece of assessment weighted at 20% but may well have done in one weighted 70% or higher. The method for determining a provisional module mark must be recorded and made available to the students. Once the missing marks are available, the module mark should either be increased or the provisional mark should be confirmed. The module mark must not be decreased.

3. Missing marks not resulting from disruption

If a student has not completed all items of assessment for a module and does not have any mitigating circumstances for this, i.e. there are missing marks that are not due to disruption, then they should be deemed as incomplete and a provisional mark should not be submitted.

Where the student has submitted mitigating circumstances for an assessment (which leads to a missing mark), these should be considered as normal and a deferred assessment opportunity given. Otherwise the Board should not normally confirm progression or award until the student has completed all items of assessment.

4. Progression decisions

There are no academic regulations covering progression for one-year PGT programmes and where there are two year programmes, Boards should apply the arrangements as set out in the programme

specification. Where relevant, progression decisions should only apply where students have attempted the assessment.

Compensation should not be applied when marks are provisional. Students should instead be offered a resit opportunity. When returning progression decisions to the Registry Assessment Records team, departments will be asked to indicate which are based on provisional or unavailable module marks. Further guidance on the details of the process will be made available by the Assessment Records team.

5. Award decisions

For graduating students with an incomplete set of marks, the Board must first determine whether those students have met the learning outcomes for the programme and be confident that the students will have met the requirements to pass.

In making these decisions a range of options is available to the Board, and some suggestions follow. Boards may opt to confirm a compensated pass for a module(s) based on provisional marks for final year students if this enables them to graduate, the student does not wish to undertake a resit for the module(s) and the total compensated credits (derived from either provisional or final module marks) is within the limits for the programme.

Where pieces of major coursework such as research projects are independently marked by two examiners, two marks are required to allow moderation to take place. Where one of the markers is the project supervisor who is unavailable, this marker may be substituted by an appropriate second independent assessor as long as the Board undertakes a careful analysis to ensure that any systematic bias between supervisor and independent assessor marks is accounted for in the moderation process (e.g. using historic data). Alternatively, a viva could be used to verify that the student has passed the module so that a graduation decision can be made while the final mark is pending.

Registry will issue a partial transcript showing the available marks and this will be accompanied by a letter from the Academic Registrar explaining that the student has been deemed to have graduated.

Mitigating circumstances should all have been submitted by students prior to the EPAB and should therefore be considered as normal in advance of the EPAB. The Board should take accepted mitigating circumstances into account within their risk-based approach and keep clear records of all decisions. All mitigating circumstances must be formally considered when confirming final classifications. When returning module marks to the Registry Assessment Records team, departments will be asked to indicate which are provisional. When confirmed module marks are available, a subsequent return will be made to either confirm the provisional module mark or increase it. Further guidance on the details of the process will be made available by the Assessment Records team.

Students may request an arithmetic mark check on a marked assessment as normal (noting that this process can result in a mark being decreased).

Additional practical suggestions of how Boards might choose to operate, including:

- Students in danger of failing: an experienced examiner would be expected to review the scripts with missing marks to see whether there is prima facie evidence that a student has passed or failed the given assessment(s).

- In determining whether a student has passed, the Board might agree to substitute a range of representative values for missing marks to assess the risk that the decision might prove to be incorrect, including:
 - Identifying a reasonable lower bound and average for marks on a module based on experience from prior years
 - Using the average mark across a set of similar modules the student has completed
 - Using the range of marks already achieved by a student on the programme
- If both pessimistic and optimistic representative values yield the same outcome, this is clearly a low risk decision.
- If the outcome is sensitive to the choice of representative mark then more care needs to be taken.