

Heriot-Watt University

Engineering Council Condonement & Compensation Policy

This document provides a one-page summary and fuller guide of the approach¹ for HWU to meet the Engineering Council's Compensation and Condonement Policy and the Accreditation of Higher Education Programme (fourth edition).

This document starts with a summary page of the approved and agreed approach for HWU to EngC Compensation and Condonement Policy and AHEP 4. Please for more details refer to the fuller guide.

This document also summarises the key action statements that must be added to all programme handbooks and GCM (PSRB related section) for relevant courses and programmes

¹ The fuller guide was endorsed by the University's Studies Committee on 1 November 2022.

Summary of HWU agreed approach to Engineering Council Compensation and Condonement Policy & AHEP 4

Engineering Council 'Rules'

The following is a list of EngC rules and HWU proposals for complying with them which once endorsed by UCS can be shared with the PSRBs as the HWU response:

No.	EngC Rules	Summary of HWU Status and Required Actions
1	Evidence that all Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) learning outcomes are met by all variants of each programme must be provided before accreditation can be granted.	All disciplines are fully aligned with this, although individual programme and course descriptors may need updating by the 31 August 2024, AHEP4 deadline. Action: Disciplines to review and update programme and course descriptors as appropriate on GCM system prior to the deadline. This should added to the "PSRB Related Information" section in GCM.
2	No condonement of modules delivering AHEP learning outcomes is allowed.	HWU does not permit condonement ¹ . All degree awards require a full credit count as described in Regulation A7 paragraph 5.4.1 for First Degrees and Regulation A7 paragraph 8.5.1 for Higher Degree of Master. No Action required.
3	A maximum of 30 credits in a Bachelors or integrated Masters degree programme can be compensated, and a maximum of 20 credits in a Masters degree other than the integrated Masters degree.	HWU Regulations are consistent with this. (Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.2.1 for First Degrees, and Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.2.3 for Higher Degree of Master). No Action required.
4	Major individual and group-based project modules must not be compensated.	HWU Regulations do not allow the award of DCs for dissertations or projects. (Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.3). Regulations also give the Board discretion, in exceptional circumstances and with justification, to make a degree award where a student has an 'E' grade in a qualifying course (Regulation A7 paragraph 5.5.3.1). Exceptional circumstances would typically be those cases that would ideally require a MC application. This conflicts with PSRB guidance which states that a 'E' grade is considered <i>compensation</i> . HWU Regulations set the minimum requirements, so more strict requirements can be set within individual programmes. Action: It is very rare for a student to achieve an 'E' grade in a final year major project or dissertation. However, new wording should be included in programme and course descriptor documentation that should be made clear, especially for students, the implications of failing a major project in their final year(s).
5	The minimum module mark for which compensation is allowed is no more than 10% below the nominal module pass mark (or equivalent if a grade-based marking scheme is used).	This means that, in theory, DCs cannot be awarded for a course with AHEP4 learning outcomes where the course mark is below a 30% F (i.e., 10% below the nominal pass mark of 40% D) even if the learning outcomes have been met elsewhere in the programme. HWU Regulations allow Boards of Examiners to award discretionary credits if they believe the learning outcomes have been demonstrated elsewhere. However, Regulations also require the Boards of Examiners to ensure that standards and learning outcomes of the award are not compromised by the award of discretionary credits (Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.4.2). Action: DCs will not be awarded for any course with AHEP4 learning outcomes where the original mark was more than 10% below the nominal pass mark. This is compliant with Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.4.2. And per EngC Rule 1, course descriptors may also need to be updated to clearly identify which AHEP4 learning outcomes are assessed in each course. Disciplines to consider strengthening their progression criteria to ensure that students cannot progress if there are any poor outcomes in courses with AHEP4 learning outcomes.

1. The EngC defines **compensation** as: *The practice of allowing marginal failure (i.e., not more than 10% below the nominal pass mark) of one or more modules [courses] and awarding credit for them, often on the basis of good overall academic performance.* The 'E' grade awarded at HWU is considered *compensation* as the course has actually been failed, albeit narrowly. This interpretation has been confirmed by PSRBs.
2. The EngC defines **condonement** as: *The practice of allowing students to fail and not receive credit for one or more modules [courses] within a degree programme, yet still qualify for the award of the degree.* The HWU does not permit *condonement*.
3. Compensation rules do not apply to Scottish Stage 1 courses.
4. All notes should added to the "PSRB Related Information" section in GCM.

The grade boundaries used are F (0% to 34%), E (35% to 39%), and D (40% to 49%). A "D" grade is the lowest passing grade.

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This paper presents the guide that was endorsed² by the University Studies Committee (USC) from The School of Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society (EGIS), The School of Engineering and Physical Sciences (EPS), and Mathematical and Computer Sciences (MACS) to meet the [Engineering Council's Compensation and Condonement Policy](#) and related [Guidance Note](#).

University Regulations can be found [here](#) for reference.

Engineering Council 'Rules'

The new Engineering Council (EngC) Rules, plus the current HWU status and proposed actions are discussed below. The following definitions should be noted:

The EngC defines **compensation** as: *The practice of allowing marginal failure (i.e., not more than 10% below the nominal pass mark) of one or more modules [courses] and awarding credit for them, often on the basis of good overall academic performance.*

- Note 1: The 'E' grade awarded at HWU is considered *compensation* as the course has actually been failed, albeit narrowly. This interpretation has been confirmed by PSRBs.
- Note 2: In the following discussion, the grade boundaries used are F (0% to 34%), E (35% to 39%), and D (40% to 49%). It is recognised that some disciplines may use slightly different boundaries, so the text will need to be amended accordingly. But in all cases, a D grade is the lowest passing grade.

The EngC defines **condonement** as: *The practice of allowing students to fail and not receive credit for one or more modules [courses] within a degree programme, yet still qualify for the award of the degree.*

- Note: The HWU does not permit *condonement*.

To be clear, the EngC is only looking at Learning Outcomes (LOs) at course-level when considering *compensation*. Boards may historically have looked at programme-level LOs when deciding to award discretionary credits, but feedback from at least one Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB), i.e., Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE), is that this will no longer be acceptable.

It should also be noted that the *compensation* rules do not apply to the Scottish 'first year', i.e., HWU Stage 1 courses, so that students taking Scottish degrees are not disadvantaged compared to their rest-of-UK peers.

The following is a list of EngC rules and HWU proposals for complying with them which once endorsed by UCS can be shared with the PSRBs as the HWU response:

1. Evidence that all Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP) learning outcomes are met by all variants of each programme must be provided before accreditation can be granted.

- HWU Status: All disciplines are fully aligned with this, although individual programme and course descriptors may need updating by the 31 August 2024 [AHEP4](#) deadline.

² Endorsed by University Studies Committee, 1 November 2022

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- **ACTION:** Disciplines to review and update programme and course descriptors as appropriate on Global Curriculum Management (GCM) system prior to the deadline. In GCM, the course learning outcomes can be mapped against both the Engineering Council AHEP4 learning outcomes and the course assessments. If the descriptors are updated to reflect AHEP4, then the mapping should be clear to students, staff and PSRBs.
- Note: Some courses with AHEP4 learning outcomes are delivered by other disciplines within the same or other Schools, for example Mathematics for Engineers and Scientists 1 to 4 are delivered by Mathematics (F1 – MACS), Chemistry courses for some disciplines (e.g., Chemical and Process Engineering, CPE) are delivered by Chemistry (B1 – EPS), and Physics courses for some disciplines (e.g., Mechanical Engineering, ME) are delivered by Physics (B2 – Physics). As these courses have AHEP4 learning outcomes, their course descriptors will also need to be reviewed and updated in consultation with those other disciplines.

2. No condonement of modules delivering AHEP learning outcomes is allowed.

- HWU Status: HWU does not permit condonement. All degree awards require a full credit count as described in Regulation A7 paragraph 5.4.1 for First Degrees and Regulation A7 paragraph 8.5.1 for Higher Degree of Master.
- **ACTION:** None required.

3. A maximum of 30 credits in a Bachelors or integrated Masters degree programme can be compensated, and a maximum of 20 credits in a Masters degree other than the integrated Masters degree.

- HWU Status: Current HWU Regulations are consistent with this. (Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.2.1 for First Degrees, and Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.2.3 for Higher Degree of Master).
- **ACTION:** None required.

4. Major individual and group-based project modules must not be compensated.

- HWU Status: HWU Regulations do not allow the award of discretionary credits for dissertations or projects. (Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.3).

However, Regulations also give the Board discretion, in exceptional circumstances and with justification, to make a degree award where a student has an 'E' grade in a qualifying course (Regulation A7 paragraph 5.5.3.1). Exceptional circumstances would typically be those cases that would ideally require a mitigating circumstances application.

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This conflicts with PSRB guidance which states that a 'E' grade is considered *compensation*. HWU Regulations set the minimum requirements, so more strict requirements can be set within individual programmes.

- **ACTION:** It is very rare for a student to achieve an 'E' grade in a final year major project or dissertation. However, new wording should be included in programme and course descriptor documentation that should be made clear, especially for students, the implications of failing a major project in their final year(s).

It should be noted that the definition of a major project may vary between PSRBs, and that this should be clarified on a discipline-by-discipline basis and clearly stated in GCM programme and course descriptors.

The suggested text for Integrated Masters degrees is:

1. *Students must pass major project course(s) x###xx and x###xx to be eligible for the award of an Integrated Masters degree. The Course Team must ensure that the learning outcomes of the major project course(s) have been met in order for the student to pass the major project course(s). If the learning outcomes have not been met, the student cannot pass the major project course(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a pass is a minimum D grade.*
2. *Under University Regulations, discretionary credits cannot be awarded to dissertations or major projects. If a student fails these courses, they will not be eligible for the award of an Integrated Masters degree. The student will therefore be awarded a Bachelors degree based on the results from their (Stage 3 and) Stage 4 qualifying courses.*

The suggested text for Bachelors degrees:

1. *Students must pass major project course(s) x###xx and x###xx to be eligible for the award of a Bachelors degree. The Course Team must ensure that the learning outcomes of the major project course(s) have been met in order for the student to pass the major project course(s). If the learning outcomes have not been met, the student cannot pass the major project course(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a pass is a minimum D grade.*
2. *Under University Regulations, discretionary credits cannot be awarded to dissertations or major projects. If a student fails these courses, they will not be eligible for the award of a Bachelors degree. The student will therefore be awarded an Ordinary degree based on the results from their Stage 3 qualifying courses.*

The suggested text for Higher Degrees of Master (example given for MSc degrees):

1. *Students must pass major project course(s) x###xx and x###xx to be eligible for the award of a Master of Science degree. The Course Team must ensure that the learning outcomes of the dissertation/major project course(s) have been met in order for the student to pass the dissertation/major project course(s). If the learning outcomes have not been met, the student cannot pass the major project course(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a pass is a minimum C grade.*

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2. *Under University Regulations, discretionary credits cannot be awarded to dissertations or major projects. If a student fails these courses, they will not be eligible for the award of a Master of Science degree. The student will therefore be awarded a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma based on the results from their non-major project qualifying courses.*

5. The minimum module mark for which compensation is allowed is no more than 10% below the nominal module pass mark (or equivalent if a grade-based marking scheme is used).

- HWU Status: This means that, in theory, discretionary credits cannot be awarded for a course with AHEP4 learning outcomes where the course mark is below a 30% F (i.e., 10% below the nominal pass mark of 40% D) **even if** the learning outcomes have been met elsewhere in the programme.

HWU Regulations allow Boards of Examiners to award discretionary credits if they believe the learning outcomes have been demonstrated elsewhere. However, Regulations also require Boards of Examiners to ensure that standards and learning outcomes of the award are not compromised by the award of discretionary credits (Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.4.2).

In the past, Boards of Examiners have awarded discretionary credits below 30% F even though it is very unlikely that anyone achieving a mark less than 30% F will have met the learning outcomes for the course, but it may have been possible if the same learning outcomes were covered in another course that was passed.

Appendix 1 illustrates the impact on previous award decisions if this rule had been implemented at the time. Appendix 2 shows how some PSRBs have extended this rule to assignments, although the proposal in Appendix 2 is not to be taken as a proposal for all disciplines.

- **ACTION:** It is proposed that new wording is included in programme and course descriptor documentation to clearly state that discretionary credits will not be awarded for any course with AHEP4 learning outcomes where the original mark was more than 10% below the nominal pass mark. This is compliant with Regulation A7 paragraph 2.5.4.2. And per EngC Rule 1, course descriptors may also need to be updated to clearly identify which AHEP4 learning outcomes are assessed in each course.

Disciplines should also consider strengthening their progression criteria to ensure that students cannot progress if there are any poor outcomes in courses with AHEP4 learning outcomes.

Boards of Examiners (Course Assessment Board, Progression Board and Award Board) have discretion in mapping marks to grades. The mapping is undertaken by the Course Assessment Board and is confirmed by the Progression or Award Board. Progression or Award Boards may give further consideration to results where student performance is at the classification boundary or has not met the specified award requirements in terms of number or level of credits. Only in exceptional circumstances, can marks or grades be adjusted by Progression or Award Boards,

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and the Board should record its reasons for any such adjustment in the Minutes of the meeting.

The suggested text for programme descriptors, which also considers Rule 3, is:

1. *For new entrants from 1 September 2022, to comply with Engineering Council policy for accredited degrees, no course with Engineering Council Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes can be considered for compensation by the award of discretionary credits if the original mark and grade is less than 30% F.*
2. *As Engineering Council policy considers an E grade as compensation and therefore equivalent to discretionary credits, no more than two E or F grades (totalling 30 credits for First Degrees or 20 credits for Higher Degrees of Master) in non-major individual or group projects can be considered for compensation. This applies across the whole programme, so any discretionary credits awarded in lower Stages for progression purposes must be counted in the aforementioned limits.*
3. *For programmes in [discipline name], all courses have Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes unless otherwise stated in the specific course descriptor.*
4. *First Degree Stage 1 courses are exempt from this rule.*

The suggested text for course descriptors is:

1. *The assessment for this course assesses Engineering Council Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes, so the award of discretionary credits cannot be considered if the original mark and grade is less than 30% F. The rules for the award of discretionary credits are described in the University Regulations and the programme descriptor.*

As with the expectations for Rule 1, these updates should be made to programme and course descriptors by 31 August 2024. Before that date, the updates should be included in programme handbooks and communicated with all students.

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Appendix 1: Implication for Awards

Whilst the recommendations above have been endorsed by the EPS School Studies Committee (SSC), there remain concerns, and differences of opinion, amongst colleagues regarding not being able to award Discretionary Credits (DCs) below 30% F. This is particularly true for cases where a final year student has a 'bad day' in say a single final year examination and fails with a mark below 30% F for which a DC cannot be awarded.

If DCs cannot be awarded, then students may be awarded what may be considered a 'lower' degree, for example a BEng (Hons) rather than MEng (Hons), or BEng (Ordinary) rather than BEng (Hons). This may lead to disgruntled students.

The following table illustrates the impact on awards from CPE Award Boards if the new rules had been rigidly applied in recent years. It is clear that the impact falls mainly on the BEng (Hons) cohort and not the MEng (Hons) cohort:

Academic Year	MEng (Hons) to BEng (Hons)	BEng (Hons) to BEng (Ord)
2021/22	4 (all DCs below 30 F)	7 (all DCs below 30 F)
2020/21	-	6 (all DCs below 30 F)
2019/20	2 (both 'E' grades in major research project)	2 (both DCs below 30 F)
2018/19	-	11 (all DCs below 30 F)
2017/18	1 (DC below 30 F)	3 (all DCs below 30 F, one also E in design)
2016/17	-	4 (all DCs below 30 F)

In percentage terms, over the 6-year period c. 20% of the BEng cohort would have received a lower degree, whereas less than 1% of the MEng cohort over the same period would have received a lower degree.

The following is summary of the statements that should be added to the qualifying courses and accredited programmes.

Required actions for Courses

The assessment for this course assesses Engineering Council Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes, so the award of discretionary credits cannot be considered if the original mark and grade is less than 30% F. The rules for the award of discretionary credits are described in the University Regulations and the programme descriptor.

Required actions for Programmes

Integrated Master degrees

1. Students must pass major project course(s) x##xx and x##xx to be eligible for the award of an Integrated Masters degree. The Course Team must ensure that the learning outcomes of the major project course(s) have been met in order for the student to pass the major project course(s). If the learning outcomes have not been met, the student cannot pass the major project course(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a pass is a minimum D grade.
2. Under University Regulations, discretionary credits cannot be awarded to dissertations or major projects. If a student fails these courses, they will not be eligible for the award of an Integrated Masters degree. The student will therefore be awarded a Bachelors degree based on the results from their (Stage 3 and) Stage 4 qualifying courses.
3. For new entrants from 1 September 2022, to comply with Engineering Council policy for accredited degrees, no course with Engineering Council Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes can be considered for compensation by the award of discretionary credits if the original mark and grade is less than 30% F.
4. As Engineering Council policy considers an E grade as compensation and therefore equivalent to discretionary credits, no more than two E or F grades (totalling 30 credits for First Degrees) in non-major individual or group projects can be considered for compensation. This applies across the whole programme, so any discretionary credits awarded in lower Stages for progression purposes must be counted in the aforementioned limits.
5. For programmes in [discipline name], all courses have Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes unless otherwise stated in the specific course descriptor.
6. First Degree Stage 1 courses are exempt from this rule.

Bachelors degrees

1. Students must pass major project course(s) x##xx and x##xx to be eligible for the award of a Bachelors degree. The Course Team must ensure that the learning outcomes of the major project course(s) have been met in order for the student to pass the major project course(s). If the learning outcomes have not been met, the student cannot pass the major project course(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a pass is a minimum D grade.
2. Under University Regulations, discretionary credits cannot be awarded to dissertations or major projects. If a student fails these courses, they will not be eligible for the award of a Bachelors degree. The student will therefore be awarded an Ordinary degree based on the results from their Stage 3 qualifying courses.

3. For new entrants from 1 September 2022, to comply with Engineering Council policy for accredited degrees, no course with Engineering Council Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes can be considered for compensation by the award of discretionary credits if the original mark and grade is less than 30% F.
4. As Engineering Council policy considers an E grade as compensation and therefore equivalent to discretionary credits, no more than two E or F grades (totalling 30 credits for First Degrees) in non-major individual or group projects can be considered for compensation. This applies across the whole programme, so any discretionary credits awarded in lower Stages for progression purposes must be counted in the aforementioned limits.
5. For programmes in [discipline name], all courses have Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes unless otherwise stated in the specific course descriptor.
6. First Degree Stage 1 courses are exempt from this rule.

Higher Degrees of Master (example given for MSc) degrees

1. Students must pass major project course(s) x##xx and x##xx to be eligible for the award of a Master of Science degree. The Course Team must ensure that the learning outcomes of the dissertation/major project course(s) have been met in order for the student to pass the dissertation/major project course(s). If the learning outcomes have not been met, the student cannot pass the major project course(s). For the avoidance of doubt, a pass is a minimum C grade.
2. Under University Regulations, discretionary credits cannot be awarded to dissertations or major projects. If a student fails these courses, they will not be eligible for the award of a Master of Science degree. The student will therefore be awarded a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma based on the results from their non-major project qualifying courses.
3. For new entrants from 1 September 2022, to comply with Engineering Council policy for accredited degrees, no course with Engineering Council Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes can be considered for compensation by the award of discretionary credits if the original mark and grade is less than 30% F.
4. As Engineering Council policy considers an E grade as compensation and therefore equivalent to discretionary credits, no more than two E or F grades (totalling 20 credits for Higher Degrees of Master) in non-major individual or group projects can be considered for compensation. This applies across the whole programme, so any discretionary credits awarded in lower Stages for progression purposes must be counted in the aforementioned limits.
5. For programmes in [discipline name], all courses have Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes 4th Edition (AHEP4) learning outcomes unless otherwise stated in the specific course descriptor.
6. First Degree Stage 1 courses are exempt from this rule.