

# Student Guide to the University's Rules for Progression and Award in Taught Postgraduate Programmes 2021/2

This guide sets out the University rules relating to assessment, progression and award for students starting taught postgraduate programmes from 2011/12 onwards including students impacted by. We highlight the key rules and requirements concerning progression through your programme and your award<sup>1</sup> at the end of your programme. Full details of the assessment rules can be found in the official [Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback](#), which is available online at:

[University of York Guide to Assessment webpage](#)

Details of how your work will be assessed and marked and how you will receive feedback will be included in your student handbook and departmental web pages. If you are ever in any doubt, please speak to your academic supervisor or your postgraduate administrator.

## SUMMARY

To be eligible for an award from the University of York, you must:

- undertake an approved programme of study,
- obtain a specified number of credits at specified levels, and
- meet any other requirements of the award as specified in the Award and programme specifications and other University regulations (e.g. payment of fees, completion of the Academic Integrity online tutorial, requirements of professional bodies).

This summary is explained further through the following questions and answers. These should be read thoroughly and in the order they are presented to fully understand the progression and award system.

## PROGRESSING THROUGH YOUR PROGRAMME

### 1. What is the basic structure of Masters, Postgraduate (PG) Diploma and PG Certificate programmes?

Your programme of study is made up of modules of different durations and credit value. Modules count for credits which are awarded on successful completion of assessments.

**To be awarded a Masters degree you must successfully complete modules worth at least 180 credits.**

The programme will include a number of taught modules (general and specific) and likely to have an Independent Study Module (ISM) which will require you to undertake your own project or

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<sup>1</sup> By award, we mean Masters, pre-Masters, Bachelors or Foundation degrees, Diplomas and Certificates of Higher Education.

piece of research (Dissertation). There is normally a formal checkpoint partway through a Masters programme; this is between the taught part of the programme and the ISM. At this point, a decision is made about whether you can continue with the ISM and complete the Masters, or whether it is more appropriate to aim for a smaller-volume award (i.e. a PG Diploma or PG Certificate).

**To be awarded a PG Diploma you must successfully complete modules worth 120 credits.**

A PG Diploma programme will include a number of taught modules (general and specific) but may not include an Independent Study Module (ISM).

**To be awarded a PG Certificate you must successfully complete modules worth 60 credits.**

A PG Certificate programme will include a number of modules but not an Independent Study Module (ISM).

**2. How are credit value, credit level and module marks related?**

Each degree programme is made up of modules. Each of the modules you undertake will have a credit value<sup>2</sup> (e.g. 10 credits – 20 credits – etc.) and a credit level.<sup>3</sup> Most modules on a postgraduate programme will be at ‘M’ (Masters) level, but a few may be at ‘H’ (Honours) level.

Award	Min Credit Volume	Credit Levels
Masters	180	At least 150 Masters-level credits
Postgraduate Diploma	120	At least 90 Masters-level credits
Postgraduate Certificate	60	At least 40 Masters-level credits

A degree is awarded on the basis of credit acquired during your programme of study. In some circumstances, you may be eligible for an early exit award if you do not achieve the full requirements for the degree for which you registered. The type of award you receive will be dependent on the number of credits you have achieved and at what level.

In some programmes you may be required to achieve more than the number of credits listed above (for example, the MA in Social Work, Erasmus Mundus Programmes and the MA in Stained Glass Restoration).

The most straightforward way to achieve the credit for a module is by passing the module assessments. Modules are assessed by a range of methods which will usually result in a numerical module mark out of 100. However, some modules are marked on a Pass/Fail basis, in which case they do not contribute to the award mark, although you must pass them to get the credit.

Note that any ‘H’ level modules taken as part of a postgraduate programme will be marked on a pass-fail basis.

<sup>2</sup> One credit involves a notional workload of 10 hours. So a 10 credit module involves a notional workload of 100 hours, a 20 credit module a total of 200 hours etc. By workload we mean all work associated with the module taken, including teaching (i.e. lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops, labs, practicals etc), private study, work required during vacations and the preparation for assessment and assessment task(s).

<sup>3</sup> The credit level indicates the module’s relative intellectual demand, complexity and the depth of learning and of learner autonomy. See the relevant Framework for Programme Design:  
<https://www.york.ac.uk/staff/teaching/quality-assurance/design/>



### 3. What do module marks mean?

The University applies the following mark scale to **postgraduate** work:

Description	Marks	
Distinguished performance at postgraduate level:	70-100	Distinction
Good performance at postgraduate level:	60-69	Merit
Satisfactory performance at postgraduate level:	50-59	Pass
Marginal fail (potential to compensate)	40-49	Fail/Compensated pass (where eligible, see COMPENSATION section p7)
Fail:	0-39	Fail

### 4. What does weighting mean?

**Credit-weighting** means that when calculating your award mark, each module mark will be given more or less weighting according to the number of credits associated with it. There are two different ways to calculate this, both providing the same result.

**Note:** Pass/Fail modules do not count towards the credit weighted mean, so should be discounted entirely for this process. They must be passed to progress on your course.

The first method of calculating the credit-weighted award mark is to multiply each of your module marks by the credits associated with the module, sum the result and divide by the total number of credits for the degree (180 for a Masters), as seen in Column 1 below.

The second method is to take 20 credits as the base number for weighting and multiply higher or lower credit modules in relation to that base. The total is then divided by the number of 20 credit modules in the total number of credits, which is 9 for a Masters (180/20). This calculation can be seen in Column 2 below.

Module Mark	Credit Value	Column 1 – first method of calculation	Column 2 – second method of calculation
55	20	$55 \times 20 = 1100$	$55 \times 1 = 55$
62	20	$62 \times 20 = 1240$	$62 \times 1 = 62$
60	30	$60 \times 30 = 1800$	$60 \times 1.5 = 90$
52	30	$52 \times 30 = 1560$	$52 \times 1.5 = 78$
70	10	$70 \times 10 = 700$	$70 \times 0.5 = 35$
75	10	$75 \times 10 = 750$	$75 \times 0.5 = 38$
53	60 (ISM)	$53 \times 60 = 3180$	$53 \times 3 = 159$
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b><math>10330 \div 180 = 57</math></b>	<b><math>517 \div 9 = 57</math></b>
	<b>Outcome:</b>	<b>57 is the credit-weighted award mark</b>	<b>57 is the credit-weighted award mark</b>

For Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate awards, similar calculations are carried out, but with a smaller total credit value (120 for PG Diploma, 60 for PG Certificate). In the case of a lower exit award, the modules with the best marks will be used to determine any mark and grade.

Module Mark	Credit Value	Column 1 – first method of calculation	Column 2 – second method of calculation
55	20	$55 \times 20 = 1100$	$55 \times 1 = 55$
62	20	$62 \times 20 = 1240$	$62 \times 1 = 62$
70	10	$70 \times 10 = 700$	$70 \times 0.5 = 35$
75	10	$75 \times 10 = 750$	$75 \times 0.5 = 38$
	<b>Totals:</b>	<b><math>3790 \div 60 = 63</math></b>	<b><math>190 \div 3 = 63</math></b>
	<b>Outcome:</b>	<b>63 is the credit-weighted award mark</b>	<b>63 is the credit-weighted award mark</b>

## 5. Is there a minimum standard I have to reach after the taught part of my Masters programme?

Once you have completed the taught part of your Masters programme, a decision is reached on whether you have achieved the necessary number of credits, as specified in the [Programme Specification](#) and Student Handbook. This number may differ between programmes, to balance the varying size of the ISM.

If you have not managed to pass each module, it may be possible to apply compensation or reassessment to obtain the credits (see COMPENSATION section p7). However, if you still haven't achieved enough credits after compensation and reassessment have been applied, there are no other opportunities for continuing your studies on this programme. You may be eligible for a lower-volume award based on the credits you have gained (eg Postgraduate Diploma, Postgraduate Certificate)

## 6. What kind of Masters or PG Diploma can I get?

Unlike undergraduate degrees, postgraduate awards are not classified i.e. you do not receive a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2:1, 2:2 or 3<sup>rd</sup> classification.

Some postgraduate degrees may be awarded with Distinction, or with Merit. The exact criteria are given below. They involve the credit-weighted mean over all modules, the mark for an ISM (for Masters programmes) and a requirement that all modules should be passed at the first attempt (see below for details of reassessment).

For the award of a **Masters degree with Distinction**, you need to achieve the following, at the first attempt (i.e. without compensation or reassessment):

- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 70 over all modules (taught and ISM);
- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 70 in your ISM; and
- no failed modules.

For the award of a **Masters degree with Merit**, you need to achieve the following, at the first attempt (i.e. without reassessment):

- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 60 over all modules (taught and ISM);
- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 60 in your ISM; and
- no more than 20 credits of failed modules, with no module marks below 40.

For the award of a **Postgraduate Diploma with Distinction**, you need to achieve the following, at the first attempt (i.e. without compensation or reassessment):

- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 70 over all modules; and
- no failed modules.

For the award of a **Postgraduate Diploma with Merit**, you need to achieve the following, at the first attempt (i.e. without reassessment):

- a rounded credit-weighted mean of at least 60 over all modules; and
- no more than 20 credits of failed modules, with no module marks below 40.

**Postgraduate Certificates are not eligible for Distinction or Merit awards.**

Some worked examples for Masters and PG Certificate awards are given below:

<b>Masters student W</b>	<b>Masters student X</b>
Module A (20 credits) Mark 55 x 20 = 1100	Module A (20 credits) Mark 55 x 20 = 1100
Module B (20 credits ) Mark 62 x 20 = 1240	Module B (20 credits ) Mark 62 x 20 = 1240
Module C (30 credits) Mark 60 x 30 = 1800	Module C (30 credits) Mark 60 x 30 = 1800
Module D (30 credits) Mark 52 x 30 = 1560	Module D (30 credits) Mark 65 x 30 = 1950
Module E (10 credits) Mark 70 x 10 = 700	Module E (10 credits) Mark 70 x 10 = 700
Module F (10 credits) Mark 75 x 10 = 750	Module F (10 credits) Mark 75 x 10 = 750
<i>ISM (60 credits) Mark 68 x 60 = 4080</i>	<i>ISM (60 credits) Mark 58 x 60 = 3480</i>
Total 11230 ÷ 180 = <b>62</b>	Total 11020 ÷ 180 = <b>61</b>
<b>62 is the credit-weighted award mark. Awarded Masters with Merit (ISM mark above 60).</b>	<b>61 is the credit-weighted award mark. Awarded Masters. (ISM mark below 60, so no Merit)</b>

<b>Masters student Y</b>	<b>PG Certificate student Z</b>
Module A (20 credits) Mark 48 x 20 = 960	Module A (20 credits) Mark 55 x 20 = 1100
Module B (20 credits) Mark 62 x 20 = 1240	Module B (20 credits ) Mark 62 x 20 = 1240
Module C (30 credits) Mark 60 x 30 = 1800	Module C (10 credits) Mark 70 x 10 = 700
Module D (30 credits) Mark 52 x 30 = 1560	Module D (10 credits) Mark 75 x 10 = 750
Module E (10 credits) Mark 70 x 10 = 700	
Module F (10 credits) Mark 75 x 10 = 750	
ISM (60 credits) Mark 68 x 60 = 4080	
	Total 3790 ÷ 60 = <b>63</b>
Total = 11090 ÷ 180 = <b>62</b>	
<b>62 is the credit-weighted award mark. Awarded Masters with Merit (Failed module is compensated, no module mark below 40 and no more than 20 credits (Module A) of compensatable fail)</b>	<b>63 is the credit-weighted award mark. Awarded PG Certificate</b>

### Covid 19 - Flexible award rules

**Any post graduate student who has completed any teaching or assessment in the 2020/21 academic year will be eligible for the flexible rules introduced over that period. These are as follows:**

For the award of a **Masters degree with Distinction 2020/21:**

- Either i. a rounded credit weighted mean of at least 70 over all modules other than the ISM(s)
- Or ii. a rounded credit weighted mean of at least 70 in the ISM(s).

In either case the student must also have no more than 20 credits of failed modules, with no outright fails.

For the award of a **Masters degree with Merit 2020/21:**

- Either i. a rounded credit weighted mean of at least 60 over all modules other than the ISM(s)
- Or ii. a rounded credit weighted mean of at least 60 in the ISM(s).

In either case the student must also have no more than 40 credits of failed modules, with no more than 20 credits of outright fails.

## 7. What happens if my marks are only just below the mark needed?

In general, the marks awarded for modules are the only data that are used in the determination of whether a Postgraduate degree is awarded (unless additional requirements are imposed by a Professional Body). No other conditions will be applied or assessments undertaken to determine the final calculation.

## 8. What happens if I fail one or more taught modules?

If you fail a taught module, don't panic! In most cases there will still be an opportunity to achieve the credit required for progression or an award either through compensation or reassessment.

*It should be noted that in some cases, due to the nature of the programme or module (e.g. where professional / vocational requirements have to be met) the following compensation and reassessment opportunities may not be available. This should be clear in the regulations for your programme but if you are not sure, speak to your academic supervisor or postgraduate administrator.*

## COMPENSATION

For Masters level modules, the pass mark for module assessments is 50. However, if your mark for a module is in the 40 – 49 range, you may still be able to get the credits for the module if your performance in other modules is good enough to compensate. In other words, 'marginal' failure in one module may be compensated by achievement in others. There is, however, a limit to the amount of credit for which you can be compensated. Some modules in your programme may be designated as Pass / Fail, and failure in these modules cannot be compensated for. Some modules may also be designated as non-compensatable. Marks below 40 cannot be compensated.

To be eligible for compensation, you must meet the University's compensation criteria, which are based on the module marks achieved and your credit-weighted mean over all of the non-ISM modules in your programme. This means that a decision about whether a failed module can be compensated can only be reached when marks for all of the non-ISM modules in your programme are available. The University's compensation criteria vary depending on your intended award (Masters, PG Diploma or Certificate). For full details, please see the [Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback](#). The following are provided purely as examples; please consult the full Guide and your programme's regulations for the exact rules that will apply to you.

In a **Masters programme**, assuming no modules have been designated as non-compensatable, a maximum of 40 credits-worth of modules can be compensated as long as there are:

- No modules with marks below 40 and
- The credit-weighted mean over all non-ISM modules taken in the programme is at least 50.

For example, a student has the following profile of module marks:



Module A (20 credits): 53 (Pass)	In this example, none of the modules has been designated as non-compensatable, none of the module marks is below 40 and the credit-weighted mean over all modules in the stage is above 50 (actually, it is 51). Therefore, the marginal failures in Modules B and F (30 credits) can be compensated by the achievement in Modules A, C, D and E.
Module B (20 credits): 48 (Fail)	
Module C (30 credits): 52 (Pass)	
Module D (20 credits): 51 (Pass)	
Module E (20 credits): 50 (Pass)	
Module F (10 credits): 48 (Fail)	
ISM (60 credits): not eligible for compensation	

In a **Postgraduate Certificate programme**, assuming no modules have been designated as non-compensatable, 20 credits-worth of modules can be compensated as long as there are

- No module marks are below 40 and
- The credit-weighted mean over all the modules taken in the programme is at least 50.

For example, a student has the following profile of module marks:

Module A (20 credits): 45 (Fail)	In this example, none of the modules has been designated as non-compensatable, none of the module marks is below 40 and the credit-weighted mean over all modules is above 50 (again, it is 51). Therefore, the marginal failure in Module A can be compensated by the achievement in Modules B and C.
Module B (20 credits): 55 (Pass)	
Module C (20 credits): 53 (Pass)	

## REASSESSMENT

If you get a module mark below 40, this cannot be compensated and you will need to be reassessed in that module in order to progress on your course. However, there is a limit to the number of credits failed below 40 in which you can be reassessed:

- Masters and Postgraduate Diploma students are entitled to reassessment on up to 40 credits worth of non-ISM modules provided that they have failed no more than 60 credits with no more than 40 credits-worth of outright fail.
- Postgraduate Certificate students are entitled to reassessment in a maximum of 20 credits-worth of failed modules provided that they have failed no more than 30 credits with no more than 20 credits-worth of outright fail

If you get a mark between 40 and 49 and you are not eligible for compensation (either because you have failed too many modules, or because there is another module mark below the threshold for compensation, or because your credit-weighted mean is below the requirement), you may also need to be reassessed in that module. For details see full rules in the [Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback](#).

The majority of modules can be reassessed – however, your department will inform you of any that cannot be reassessed. If you fail a module that has been defined as non-reassessable and the failure cannot be compensated, you will not be able to progress and will fail the programme. Modules can only be reassessed once. If you fail a module at reassessment and the failure cannot be compensated, then you will also be unable to progress and will fail the programme. In both instances you may, however, be eligible to receive a lower-volume award.

If you fail and are reassessed in a module, you are not allowed to gain an advantage over those who passed the module first time. Your first-attempt mark, not the mark obtained on the second attempt, is used when calculating the overall credit-weighted award mark. (The award mark will be increased to the minimum pass mark, if the calculation based on first-attempt marks gives a result below the pass mark.)

The marks for all modules, both first-attempt and any reassessments, are included on your final transcript.

### 9. What is the relationship between compensation and reassessment?

If application of the compensation rules is not enough to give you the necessary credits, then you are allowed to be reassessed (within limits for each programme). The compensation rules may then be applied a second time, if needed, for you to achieve the credits. This means that some first attempt marks could be **potentially compensatable**: this happens when the compensation criteria are not met on the first attempt, but there are marks in the compensation range. Reassessment in other modules might allow the compensation criteria to be met (perhaps by raising the credit-weighted mean or by reducing the credits failed), and so the potentially compensatable marks can actually be compensated without any need for reassessment in those modules. After the progression board meeting, you will be asked to indicate in which failed modules you wish to be reassessed: this is a matter you should discuss with your supervisor.

Example 1: a Masters student has the following profile of non-ISM module marks:

Module A (20 credits): 53 (P)	This student must be reassessed on Modules B and F (30 credits total). Compensation is not possible because these marks are below 40 and the credit-weighted mean is below 50. Reassessment is allowed because there are fewer than 60 credits with a mark below 50, and fewer than 40 credits with marks below 40.
Module B (20 credits): 38 (F)	
Module C (30 credits): 52 (P)	
Module D (20 credits): 51 (P)	
Module E (20 credits): 50 (P)	
Module F (10 credits): 32 (F)	

Example 2: a Masters student has the following profile of non-ISM module marks:

Module A (20 credits): 53 (P)	No compensation is possible because the credit-weighted mean is less than 50 and there is a mark below 40. This student must be reassessed on Module F (mark below 40) and has the option to be reassessed in module B. If Module F is passed on reassessment, then Module B could be compensated for: for instance, a mark of 60 on reassessment for Module F would give a
Module B (20 credits): 45 (F)	
Module C (30 credits): 52 (P)	
Module D (20 credits): 51 (P)	

Module E (20 credits): 50 (P)	<p>credit-weighted mean of 51, so Module B would be compensated.</p> <p>Not taking reassessment in Module B would be a risk, if Module F was not passed with a high enough mark to allow Module B to be compensated, then there would be no further opportunity to to take reassessment for module B, therefore progression would not be possible.</p> <p>As cases such as these are complex, students should discuss their reassessment choices with their academic supervisor.</p>
Module F (10 credits): 32 (F)	

Example 3: a Masters student has the following profile of non-ISM module marks:

Module A (20 credits): 49 (F)	<p>No compensation is possible because the credit-weighted mean is less than 50 and there is a mark below 40. There are 60 credits of failed modules, but only 20 credits of outright fail (below 40). So the student is entitled to 40 credits of reassessment. They must be reassessed on Module E (mark below 40) and must choose whether to be reassessed on Module A or Module B.</p> <p>In such cases, students should discuss their reassessment choices with their academic supervisor.</p>
Module B (20 credits): 45 (F)	
Module C (30 credits): 52 (P)	
Module D (20 credits): 51 (P)	
Module E (20 credits): 32 (F)	
Module F (10 credits): 53 (P)	

## 10. Can I apply the same compensation and reassessment rules to my Independent Study Module?

The rules given above apply only to taught (non-ISM) modules. Different rules about compensation and reassessment apply to the Independent Study Module (ISM) of a Masters programme:

- An ISM cannot be compensated.
- If you fail a Masters ISM with a mark below 40, then no reassessment is permitted.
- If you are given a 'marginal fail' mark of between 40 and 49 on your ISM, then you will have the chance to make amendments (minor corrections) which will enable a minimum

threshold to be reached, with the mark after resubmission capped at 50. Details of the sort of revisions that would be expected are given in the [Guide to Assessment, Standards Marking and Feedback](#), but you would not expect to need access to the University's physical facilities, to collect further data or to need any further supervision, and it should be possible to complete the work with no more than the equivalent of two weeks' full-time effort.

## **EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES AFFECTING ASSESSMENT**

### **11. What if something happens that disrupts my studies and affects my ability to complete my modules?**

You may encounter circumstances which hinder your academic progress. For example, you have a serious illness, a family member dies, you are the victim of a crime, etc. It is vital that, should such circumstances arise, you consult your academic supervisor as soon as possible. As far as possible, claims regarding exceptional circumstances should be submitted to the department before any assessment takes place or assessment deadlines occur.

Such circumstances are considered by the appropriate departmental committee. Further general guidance can be found on the webpage for [Exceptional Circumstances webpages](#).

## **FAILURE AND EARLY EXIT**

### **12. What if I don't meet the progression or award requirements?**

If you do not meet the progression requirements, you will not be able to progress to the ISM part of your Masters programme. If at the end of your programme you do not achieve the required credits, you will not be able to graduate with your intended award (Masters, PG Diploma etc). However, you may be eligible for an alternative award based on the credits that you have achieved. Similarly, if, for whatever reason, you choose to leave the University part way through your programme, you may be eligible for an early exit award based on credits achieved.

For example, if you are on a Masters programme and you do not meet the progression requirements to move on to the ISM, you may be eligible for a PG Certificate (60 credits). In some programmes, you may be eligible for a PG Diploma (120 credits). Compensation and reassessment parameters are applied to the lower award as per those outlined above. Therefore you may be required to take reassessment in one or more modules in order to gain enough credits for a lower award. You will be informed of this at the time of progression. If you have any concerns you should speak to your supervisor.