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POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA IN RESEARCH METHODS

AWARD SCHEME

ACADEMIC YEAR 2012-2013

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Award Scheme sets out rules for making awards for the Postgraduate Diploma in Research Methods which is part of the 'PhD with PGDip in Research Methods' and only available for holders of Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 4-year studentships at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM, or 'the School').
- 1.2 Each student registered for this programme will be associated with a particular ESRC cluster/pathway, as set out in the separate [programme specification](#). Award of this PGDip will come under the authority of the Exam Board for the MSc associated with the same pathway, which is also responsible for course-level assessment matters such as determining re-sit requirements.
- 1.3 Special or non-standard assessment arrangements may sometimes need to be made for students on this programme, as set out below. Students and their supervisors are jointly responsible for agreeing with the relevant ESRC cluster/pathway co-ordinator and the relevant Exam Board Chair, as soon as possible after module choices have been made, about which modules each student intends to take for the PGDip, and when they plan to study and be assessed. Individual assessment arrangements can then be planned where necessary.

2. GENERAL ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 Assessment for the PGDip element of the course should operate in compliance with the LSHTM *Assessment Code of Practice*, a number of key points from which have been reiterated below. Assessment for the PhD element of the course is not addressed in this document but should operate in compliance with LSHTM research degree regulations, policies and codes of practice.

Grading scales and criteria

- 2.2 LSHTM uses a standard assessment system, marking against six integer grade points (GPs) on a scale from 0 to 5. Grades 2 and above are pass grades, whilst grades below 2 are fail grades. Standard descriptors for the level of work required to attain each grade are as follows:

Grade point	Descriptor	Typical work should include evidence of...
5	Excellent	Excellent engagement with the topic, excellent depth of understanding and insight, excellent argument and analysis. Generally, this work will be 'distinction standard'. ➤ NB that excellent work does not have to be 'outstanding' or exceptional by comparison with other students; these grades should not be capped to a limited number of students per class or cohort. Nor should such work be expected to be 100% perfect – some minor inaccuracies or omissions may be permissible.

Grade point	Descriptor	Typical work should include evidence of...
4	Very good	Very good engagement with the topic, very good depth of understanding and insight, very good argument and analysis. This work may be 'borderline distinction standard'. ➤ Note that very good work may have some inaccuracies or omissions but not enough to question the understanding of the subject matter.
3	Good	Good (but not necessarily comprehensive) engagement with the topic, clear understanding and insight, reasonable argument and analysis, but may have inaccuracies or omissions.
2	Satisfactory	Adequate evidence of engagement with the topic but some gaps in understanding or insight, routine argument and analysis, and may have inaccuracies or omissions.
1	Unsatisfactory / poor (fail)	Inadequate engagement with the topic, gaps in understanding, poor argument and analysis.
0	Very poor (fail)	Poor engagement with the topic, limited understanding, very poor argument and analysis.
0	Not submitted (null)	Null mark may be given where work has not been submitted, or is in serious breach of assessment criteria/regulations.

Marking schemes

2.3 Staff setting individual assessments should prepare more detailed criteria ('marking schemes') for placing students in each grade category, which must be adhered to by marking staff. The descriptors above are intended as a general reference point to ensure consistency, but more specific requirements will differ from assessment to assessment.

Double-marking

2.4 All summative assessed work will be double-marked and any discrepancies between markers resolved before a grade is agreed. Pairs of markers must agree any grades which are formally reported to students.

Principles for combining grades

2.5 Where an assessment has a number of components which are individually double-marked to agree an integer grade, these component grades may be averaged together (according to a weighting set out in the marking scheme) to generate an overall grade point average (GPA). Calculations and record-keeping systems should mathematically combine and bring forward data without rounding where possible; results should be reported to students (and if necessary, rounded) to two decimal places.

3. CREDIT SYSTEM AND STRUCTURE OF AWARDS

Credit system

3.1 LSHTM operates a credit system (also known as a credit framework). The final award will be determined on the basis of accumulating the required number of credits.

3.2 The credit-bearing elements of the PGDip are modules, normally drawn from the School's MSc teaching programme. Each module may in turn be split into further components. Examples of components include the different exam papers for the 'super-module' used to assess Term 1 learning; separate groupwork and individual coursework tasks used to assess a specific module; etc. Components do not have a credit value in themselves, although gaining credits will depend on assessment results for different components.

Course structure

3.3 The course structure and requirements are set out in the programme specification. Key points for award purposes are:

- (i) Modules taken as part of the PGDip should normally be drawn from those available for the MSc associated with each student's ESRC cluster/pathway, with any exceptions being agreed by the student's supervisor and ESRC cluster coordinator.

- (ii) A maximum of 30 credits may be taken from distance learning (DL) modules. These may not substantively overlap in content with other modules being taken face-to-face.
- (iii) A maximum of 60 credits may be taken from Term 1 modules or their DL equivalents.

Required modules

3.4 Modules which are compulsory for the MSc associated with each student's ESRC cluster/pathway shall be required for completion of the PGDip, unless it is agreed as an exception during the module choice process that a particular module need not be taken. Once a student has registered for such modules, they must gain credits from them in order to pass the PGDip. Other modules, which are not compulsory for the MSc associated with the ESRC cluster/pathway, are known as elective modules.

Progression requirements

3.5 Progression requirements are set out in the programme specification. Key points are:

- (i) Full-time students are expected to complete 60 credits of study by the end of year 1 (or year 2 for part-timers), and the full 120 credits by the end of year 2 (or year 4 for part-timers). Appropriate exceptions to this may be agreed with staff, for example to defer an assessment, or agreement to study Term 1 modules over two years and sit related exams in the second year. However the full 120 credits for the PGDip should normally be achieved by the end of year 3 for full-timers (year 5 for part-timers). The Withdrawal Procedure may be invoked for failure to progress in this way.
- (ii) Students may study an absolute maximum of 75 credits per term.
- (iii) For students who fail to upgrade from MPhil to PhD, eligibility to progress with the PGDip shall be determined according to circumstances by the relevant Exam Board Chair in consultation with the student's Upgrading Committee. The Withdrawal Procedure may be invoked.

4. AWARD SCHEME

Gaining credits

4.1 Credits will be awarded for the successful completion of individual credit-bearing elements (modules) of the award. Where a student fails to gain credits, they will be required to re-sit as described in Section 5 below.

Modules in Term 1 (with assessment through summer exams)

4.2 Modules taken in Term 1, or equivalent DL core modules, are normally assessed through summer exams. The relevant Exam Board Chair is authorised to determine, on behalf of their Board:

- (i) The exact format of the assessment(s). These should be directly related to the set of individual (sub-)modules taken in Term 1, and may require special or adapted tasks/questions/papers being set in the case where a PGDip student has not taken the full set of modules which would normally be taken by students on the associated MSc.
- (ii) The credit value of the assessment(s), to a maximum total of 60 credits. The exact value will depend on the sizes of (sub-)modules taken in Term 1. The set of Term 1 modules taken will normally be considered as a single credit-bearing 'super-module' for assessment purposes, but may be split into smaller discrete credit-bearing modules where viable and appropriate.
- (iii) The timing of when assessments may be taken – e.g. where there are two main exam papers, permitting students to take them in different years provided they have completed study for the associated modules.

4.3 Assessment of students on the PGDip Research Methods does not have to be identical to that of MSc students being considered for credit in relation to the same modules. Rather, assessments should allow each PGDip student to demonstrate (to the satisfaction of the Exam Board) that they have adequately achieved the learning outcomes for those specific modules. Assessments for MSc students, especially with respect to credits associated with Term 1, may evaluate further MSc-level learning outcomes. For example, Term 1 credits for MSc students may be assessed through one exam paper testing specific learning from different Term 1 modules, and another paper that evaluates how well Term 1 learning has been consolidated with further learning from Terms 2 and 3. In this case, PGDip students might be assessed for the full 60 credits of Term 1 based on a modified version of the MSc exam papers.

Modules in Terms 2 and 3

4.4 Modules taken in Terms 2 and 3 are all worth 15 credits each, and are assessed individually.

4.5 Modules may be assessed through a variety of methods including essays, other written coursework, short written exams, multiple-choice tests, practical exams, groupwork, presentations or other methods. Oversight of assessment for individual modules is delegated by responsible Exam Boards to individual Module Organisers, who should set and agree specific marking schemes for their modules in advance. Principles for grading, and for combining grades from different assessment components into an overall GPA for each module (according to agreed and published weightings), are set out in the LSHTM *Assessment Code of Practice*.

Credit awards

4.6 To gain credits for an individual module, students must normally achieve a GPA of 2.00 or above.

4.7 Credits may be granted for one individual module worth up to 15 credits with a GPA between 1.0 and 1.99, provided an average GPA of 2.00 or above has been achieved across all modules (including the module graded between 1.0 and 1.99). This is known as compensation. If it is not possible to compensate a grade between 1.0 and 1.99, that module will be failed with no credits being awarded; any components graded below 2.00 must then be re-sat (as described in Section 5 below).

4.8 If Term 1 modules have been grouped into a single credit-bearing 'super-module' for assessment purposes (i.e. with a credit value greater than 15 credits), this cannot be compensated and a GPA of at least 2.00 must be achieved for the 'super-module' as a whole. Within this, the Exam Board responsible for setting the super-module assessment may set (or waive) requirements for minimum grades to be achieved on particular components; for example, requiring that a grade of at least 1.0 be achieved on each exam paper that forms part of the assessment.

4.9 A GPA of at least 1.0 must be achieved for each individual module. Grades below 1.0 (or below 2.0 for modules which cannot be compensated) will result in failure of the module, with no credits being awarded, and a requirement to re-sit (as described in Section 5 below) any components graded below 2.00.

4.10 The GPAs for individual modules are reported separately to Boards of Examiners. Student transcripts will show GPAs for individual modules.

5. RE-SITS

5.1 If a student fails to gain credits for a particular award element on the first attempt, they will be permitted one further attempt, as a 're-sit'. Only failed components of failed award elements, i.e. those with GPA below 2.00, may be re-sat – as determined by the Exam Board. Where a module is re-sat, its overall GPA will be capped to 3.00 (even though higher specific GPAs may have been achieved, and reported back to the student, for the particular components which have been re-sat).

5.2 If a student fails to gain credits for a required award element on the second attempt, they will be ineligible for the award and will be withdrawn from the course. However, the student will retain credits for elements which have otherwise been passed or appropriately compensated.

5.3 In lieu of re-sitting, a student who fails to gain credits for a particular elective module on the first attempt may apply to the Exam Board to take a different elective module instead as part of their award registration (with the full fee for the replacement module being payable).

(i) Only modules which are available as standard elective options for the award may be taken as replacements, save by special decision of the Exam Board.

(ii) Up to two elective modules only, to a total of 30 credits, may be changed in this way.

(iii) If a replacement module taken in this way is itself failed, then a standard second attempt will be permitted. However, substitution of a replacement module with another different elective module is not permitted.

(iv) A student who fails to gain credits for any elective module on the second attempt will not be eligible to change to another option; nor is such a change possible in respect of compulsory elements of a particular award; nor is such a change possible for elective modules which have been passed.

6. DETERMINATION OF THE FINAL AWARD

6.1 To be awarded the PGDip in Research Methods, a student must obtain 120 credits from the set of modules selected – including all those identified as compulsory for the award.

7. FINAL AWARD CLASSIFICATION RULES

7.1 Where sufficient credit for the PGDip has been gained, an 'award GPA' should be calculated to indicate the student's standard of performance on the course and assess eligibility for an award with distinction. The Award GPA shall be **the average GPA (weighted by credit value) across modules contributing to the award, with the exclusion of the lowest-graded module of modules worth 15 credits or fewer.**

7.2 The final award classification should then be determined as follows:

Award GPA	Classification
2.00 to 4.14	Pass
4.15 to 4.29	Consider distinction
4.30 to 5.00	Distinction

In the case of 'Consider Distinction' candidates, Exam Boards will decide the final classification (either Pass or Distinction) using procedures laid out in the LSHTM *Exam Board handbook*.

7.3 Student transcripts will show the overall award GPA.

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