

Senate Paper

**Course Sharing between Undergraduates and Postgraduates
and Guidelines for Assignment of Level of Course Code**

1. The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) has drawn attention to the policy of allowing undergraduates (Ug) and postgraduates (Pg) to share the same course, and asked CUHK to review the situation. There are actually several different types of situations, for which the policy ought to be different.
2. The fundamental premise is that a course is a coherent collection of learning activities, with a clearly specified set of learning objectives against which students are assessed and grades are assigned. This definition then implies that the treatment of all students in the same course should be identical, irrespective of their status.

Policy for enrolment across levels

3. For the present purpose, a course is designated as Ug or Pg depending on whether its course code is below or above 5000 (see also Paragraph 6 below), and enrolment across levels include the following situations.

(a) Ug students taking a Pg course as an elective

So long as the course is taken as an elective and therefore on a voluntary basis (including the case of an elective course that contributes to the major requirement), there is no problem in principle with an Ug student subjecting himself/herself to more stringent standards and less favourable chances of obtaining good grades (even though the QAC Report seems to query this practice). Such practice is common in many United States universities, within the credit-unit system, especially among the better students intending to go on to graduate school.

Individual programmes may of course impose restrictions or conditions on enrolment, but these should be clearly spelt out in advance.

(b) Ug students taking a Pg course as a programme requirement

However, if an Ug programme specifies a Pg course as a programme requirement, without alternate choices of Ug courses, this can be unfair to the students concerned. This practice should be disallowed at programme approval stage.

(c) Pg students taking Ug courses to satisfy programme requirement for an advanced degree

Such practice for advanced degree programmes (masters and taught doctorates) should be discouraged; where approved on an exceptional basis, such Ug courses should not exceed 15% of the unit requirement for the Pg degree, and unless specifically approved

with good justification, should be limited to 4000 level courses. (The limit of 15% is suggested by QAC in its audit report, while the restriction to 4000 level courses would appear to be common sense.)

Moreover, in such cases, the programme may wish to set a higher grade requirement, e.g., “to complete BIO4123 with a grade of at least B”.

The case of Pg programmes *not* leading to an advanced *degree* is dealt with separately below.

(d) Pg students taking Ug courses as make-up requirements

A student with a first degree in subject A admitted to a Pg degree programme in subject B may have to make up some Ug courses in subject B. There should be no limit on such practice, provided such make-up is genuinely *additional* and does not count towards the normal Pg degree programme requirement.

(e) Pg students taking Ug courses that are not required

Pg students may take other Ug courses, typically in a different subject, purely for broadening and interest (e.g., calligraphy or music), or to develop other skills (e.g., language, including a third language). These *additional* courses, which are not required, should be allowed without limit. It is of course up to the student and the advisor to consider overall workload.

Postgraduate Diplomas

4. Postgraduate diplomas (PgDip) are offered in two modes.

(a) In many cases, a PgDip is offered to allow a first degree in one subject to be topped up or converted to another subject – with no claims that the latter is at a higher level than a first degree (i.e., a Bachelor’s degree). In fact, this is the recognized mode in the largest UGC-funded PgDip programme, namely the PGDE, since the official policy is that a subject degree (BA, BSc etc.) plus a PGDE is regarded as equivalent as BEd. The PgDip in Psychology is also intended to bring a student with a first degree in another subject up to a level comparable to that of a BSocSc in Psychology, in preparation for Pg or professional training. For these programmes, so long as the designated programme outcome is broadly as described above, and is so stated in the programme description, approval can be sought from the Graduate Council for exemption from the rules in Paragraph 3 above.

(b) In other cases, a PgDip is just the first part of a master-degree programme, and can count towards the requirements of the latter. In these cases, the rules in Paragraph 3 above will apply.

Grading policy

5. Students in the same course should be graded in exactly the same way, blind to their

status, i.e., the definition of A/B/C/D etc. should be the same for all students. (This policy should apply not only to Ug versus Pg, but also to RPg versus TPg, and also within the Ug sector between majors and non-majors.)

6. Nevertheless programmes should have the authority to apply the percentage guidelines on grade distribution to the appropriate subset of students. As an example, suppose the enrolment in a 4000-level course contains significant number of Pg students. Then the percentage guidelines on grade distribution can be applied to the Ug subset first of all to obtain grade boundaries (e.g., the B/C cut-off is 70 marks), and then the same boundaries are applied to all students. The result (assuming the Pg students perform better on average) could be that for the whole group, the cumulative percentage above a certain grade may exceed the guidelines significantly. Likewise, in a 5000-level course, the percentage guidelines can be first applied to Pg students only, and the resultant grade boundaries applied to the whole group.

7. It is recognized that the definition of “pass” as well as the use of D+ is currently different between the Ug and Pg sectors. This technical issue will be separately addressed, but in the meantime, it is best if the concept of “pass” is totally avoided in this context, and reference is only made to letter grades. If a higher standard is needed for the Pg programme, then that should be specified as a higher grade requirement (e.g., “at least B”), not by altering the meaning of any grade.

Sharing of learning activities

8. In special cases where there is a genuine need, two similar but not identical courses, respectively at Ug and Pg levels, can share the same learning activities but differ in other aspects such as assessment. The shared learning activities might be lectures, laboratory classes, formal workshops, excursions or field trips, etc. Indeed, a wide range of shared learning activities are possible. The conditions for such practice will be separately considered, but a central tenet is that the two groups of students are given genuinely different assignments or tasks as assessments, and because of this difference, the resulting credits are not transferable between the two courses. This practice should not be conceptualized as double coding the *same* course, because the courses must not be the same.

Student support

9. Course teachers should be alerted to the need for special attention in student support when there is a mix of Ug and Pg students in the same class.

Cross-charging

10. The Ug / TPg division happens to be closely related to the Block Grant / self-funded division (though the two are not identical). But the issue of enrolment across levels discussed here, a matter of quality assurance, should not be confused with the issue of possible cross-subsidy. The latter can always be handled by imposing a level of cross-charging approved by the Bursar.

Guidelines on level assignment of course code

11. The above policy recommendations presuppose a clear understanding of what a particular level of course code means (in particular the difference between 4000 level and 5000 level). In the language of OBA, there should be an articulated set of outcomes for different levels. The present discussion presents a good opportunity to formalize a set of guidelines, which are proposed as below.

Level	Specification
1000	An introductory course appropriate to 1st year students in a 4-year normative Ug programme, but could also be open to more senior students, especially non-majors seeking an introduction to the subject. There should be no prerequisite requirements, not even at A-level. The learning outcome would typically be to gain an introduction to a subject at university level, and to enable students to then access 2000 level courses and higher.
2000	An introductory course appropriate to 2nd year students in a 4-year normative Ug programme (or 1st year students in a 3-year normative Ug programme), but could also be open to more senior students, especially non-majors seeking an introduction to the subject. The prerequisites, if any, should be limited to 1000 level courses or A-levels. The learning outcome would typically be to gain an introduction to a subject at university level (over and above A-level), and to enable students to then access 3000 level courses and higher.
3000	An intermediate course appropriate to 3rd and/or 4th year students in a 4-year normative Ug curriculum (or 2nd and/or 3rd year students in a 3-year normative Ug curriculum), building on introductory courses at 1000 and 2000 level. The level of sophistication should be appropriate to upper years of university study, and typical learning outcomes would include the ability to integrate knowledge, make use of high-level skills, master advanced and specialist content. Such courses would typically not be appropriate as a required part of Pg studies, with possible exceptions such as a third language.
4000	An advanced course appropriate to 4th (and possibly 3rd) year students in a 4-year normative curriculum (or 3rd (and possibly 2nd) year students in a 3-year normative curriculum), building on introductory and intermediate courses at 2000 and 3000 level. The level of sophistication should be appropriate to the culmination of undergraduate studies, and typical learning outcomes would include the ability to integrate knowledge, make use of high-level skills, master advanced and specialist content, begin to undertake research and provide preparation for immediate entry to graduate school. Some such courses could form a (small) part of programme requirements in postgraduate studies.
5000	An advanced course designed with standards and learning outcomes appropriate to Pg studies, with an associated teaching and learning strategy that emphasizes independent learning, some research, engagement with open questions and possibly contact with the frontiers of knowledge in the subject. Some such courses could be made available as electives in Ug programmes; however, courses at this level should not be made part of the requirement of Ug programmes.
6000+	A highly advanced or specialized course designed with standards and learning outcomes appropriate to Pg studies, especially upper-year Pg students, with an

	associated teaching and learning strategy that emphasizes independent learning, research, engagement with open questions and contact with the frontiers of knowledge in the subject. Such courses would not normally be appropriate for Ug students even as electives, and any Ug students seeking to enrol would require justification and exceptional approval.
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Notes:

- (a) The descriptors cannot be absolutely sharp, and each Faculty/ Department/ Programme Board is expected to exercise its discretion taking into account the particular circumstances of the course.
- (b) The level is defined by course design, including: desired outcomes, standard, teaching and learning strategies and assessment. It is *not* defined by the enrolment pattern. For example, if a course is designed with outcomes and standard etc. appropriate to Pg level, but for some reason the enrolment is predominantly Ug (e.g., the department has a small Pg enrolment, but many Ug with good standards), that course should still be classified as 5000 level rather than 4000 level.
- (c) The Visiting Examiner/ External Examiner/ Visiting Committee/ Programme Review Panel in reviewing the course should apply a benchmark appropriate to the level assigned.

12. It is noted that at present some units use the first digit of the course code to denote attributes other than the level (e.g. “9” for a course in a non-local programme). Such practice should be phased out, and the first digit should be reserved exclusively for denoting the level as above. The CUSIS steering group will be asked to consider the need for allowing one more digit for labeling other attributes.

Decision requested

13. The Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning (SCTL) has endorsed these proposals at its meeting on 21 January 2009. The Senate is requested to approve the policies contained in this paper. Subject to such approval, course sharing arrangements and course code assignments should be brought into conformity with this policy not later than the academic year 2010-11.

[Approved by the Senate at its Third meeting (2008-09) held on 18 March 2009.]