Biology Teaching Organisation

Handbook for Demonstrators

Dr. Nadia Tuzi
Dr. Ann Haley
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Introduction

This guide contains useful information for new demonstrators in the School of Biological Sciences and will act as a reminder to some aspects covered in greater detail in the Biology Teaching Organisation’s (BTO) Training Course for Demonstrators. However, it will also be of interest to postgraduates who are considering becoming a demonstrator for the first time as well as of value to those who are experienced demonstrators.

Postgraduate demonstrators make a very important contribution primarily to the teaching of undergraduates in practical classes but also to a lesser extent to postgraduates on taught programmes. Not only do the students benefit from being taught by you, but you will gain very valuable experiences in many areas that will enhance your CV.

If you are a postgraduate student, you will be expected and encouraged to take part in the teaching programme, although you should discuss your desire to demonstrate in practical classes with your research supervisor.

This guide will provide background and general practical instructions to allow you to deliver your best in this most important role.

Important Administrative Matters

Initial enquiries and applications

If you would like to be a demonstrator on the courses in the School of Biological Sciences, please look at the course summaries: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/SBSUndergraduateIntranet/Undergraduate+courses

and fill out the Registration Form at: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/intranetpublic/Demonstrating+and+Tutoring

You will also need to:
• attend the BTO Demonstrator Training Course
• take your passport into the BTO main office to demonstrate you are eligible to work in the UK.
• If you have a visa, then please take this into the BTO. For eligibility to work, visas may be in a current passport, but NOT in an expired passport or may be in the form of a Biometric card.
• fill out a P46 tax form if you do not wish to be taxed. This will be issued with your contract, but can also be found on https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/intranetpublic/Demonstrating+and+Tutoring
Training course

All individuals wanting to demonstrate on courses run by the BTO **MUST** have attended the Training Course for Demonstrators held within the School of Biological Sciences. This is arranged bi-annually through the BTO (August and November/December). You will be paid for 5 hours for the induction training. If you undertake additional training, please agree this with your supervisor. It is not mandatory to undertake extra training, and you will not be paid for any additional courses you may do.

Eligibility to Work

Any graduate wanting to demonstrate has to provide proof that they are eligible to work in the UK. UK Visas and Immigration requires that the University has evidence to this effect. Therefore, you will need to bring your passport to the BTO **BEFORE** you start work. The BTO staff will copy:
- the front cover (the page which declares your nationality)
- the page with your name and photo on it
- and if applicable, your student visa/work permit

British students who do not have a passport will be required to present their full birth certificate (an abbreviated version is not sufficient) and your National Insurance card.

Depending on your visa, or source of funding, you may be limited, or sometimes required, to work a certain number of hours. Please check your own status, and do not work more than your limit.

Registration

If you would like to demonstrate, whether recruited by a course organiser, by the BTO, or would like to express an interest, then please fill out the Demonstrator Registration Form at this wiki (requires EASE login):

https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/intranetpublic/Demonstrating+and+Tutoring

This form allows you to tell the BTO which courses you would like / have agreed to assist with.

Notification of number of hours contracted to work

Each demonstrator will receive a contract with a set number of guaranteed hours. Your official line manager will be Dr Ann Haley.

Payment

Demonstrators are expected to have read any notes (such as the relevant part of the course book and any demonstrator notes provided) regarding a session beforehand and be familiar with what is expected during a particular session. You will be paid for 45 minutes preparation time for each **new**
practical. You will also get reimbursed for a specific course meeting if you are required to attend.

Some demonstrators are recruited to mark in-course assignments. Marking is paid at Grade 6 and you will be told the rate, for example, 30 minutes per script. This will vary between courses and assignments.

Many third year course organisers recruit their own demonstrators, but for courses in earlier years, the BTO will do the recruiting.

Payment is by completing timesheets on eTime. You will need to use your staff UUN to log in. More guidance on the use of eTime is available on the Demonstrating and Tutoring wiki: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/intranetpublic/Demonstrating+and+Tutoring.

eTime timesheets should be submitted near the start of the month for work carried out in the previous month. eTime still has to be verified by the relevant Floor Leader and authorised before payment can be arranged, so don’t leave it to the eTime deadline before you submit! You will receive payment around the 28th of the month directly to your bank account.

The hourly rate can be found on the University website: https://www.ed.ac.uk/human-resources/pay-reward/pay/pay-scales. You will start on the lowest spinal point, and progress up one spinal point every year. Your contract allows an additional payment of 16% (UE05) and 18.1% (UE06) in lieu of annual leave.

_Tax Form P46_

This can be downloaded from the wiki page: https://www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/intranetpublic/Demonstrating+and+Tutoring

You will get taxed if you have not filled out one of these forms.

General advice:
- If you do not have a National Insurance number, you should apply for one, and let us know when you have received the NI number
- Submit your timesheets on a monthly basis.

For any questions on administrative matters, please contact bto.demonstrators@ed.ac.uk.
Organisation of Undergraduate Teaching in the School of Biological Sciences

The School of Biological Sciences is one of seven academic ‘Schools’ within the College of Science and Engineering. It has about 125 academic staff in six research institutes. The Head of School is Professor David Gray. The Director of Teaching is Dr Patrick Walsh.

The University has its responsibilities towards you in your teaching role. These include the provision of a clear line of authority, contractual arrangements, laboratory guides, demonstrators’ notes and clear assessment criteria. These will be provided by the administrator who appoints you, the course organiser, course secretary or laboratory leader of the course on which you are contracted to teach. It is also the University’s responsibility to ensure safe working practices and to ensure that you are aware of all safety issues. General safety issues are addressed at the BTO demonstrator training course and the lab leader will inform you, and the students, of any lab-specific safety issues.

Most of the undergraduate courses in the School of Biological Sciences are administered by the Biology Teaching Organisation (BTO). Its offices are on the second floor of the James Clerk Maxwell Building (JCMB), Room 2105, and in Ashworth Building, Room 52. Additionally, the Ecological Science degree programme is administered by the GeoScience Teaching Organisation (GTO), the Chemistry degree programme by the Chemistry Teaching Organisation (CTO), and the Medical Science degree programme by the Biomedical Teaching Organisation (BMTO). These teaching organisations co-operate closely with the BTO, since our students routinely take courses run by four separate Schools. If you wish to teach on GTO, CTO or BMTO courses the contacts are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Organisation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
<th>Telephone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GTO</td>
<td>Ms Christine Lee or Ms Judy Adlington</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Christine.Lee@ed.ac.uk">Christine.Lee@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>650 5430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:jadlingt@staffmail.ed.ac.uk">jadlingt@staffmail.ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>650 2624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTO</td>
<td>Ms. Linda Burns</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Linda.Burns@ed.ac.uk">Linda.Burns@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>650 6451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMTO</td>
<td>Ms. Karen Harris</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Karen.Harris@ed.ac.uk">Karen.Harris@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td>651 5998</td>
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In each university year, full-time undergraduate students must take courses adding up to 120 credit points. Most of the courses are worth 20 points, so students generally take 6 courses per year. Undergraduate teaching is carried out through lectures, practicals, workshops and tutorials. While lectures may be attended by 375 students, practicals are usually split into replicate classes of up to 110 students and tutorials are attended by 8-25 students. Each undergraduate is assigned a Personal Tutor who advises them on their course choices and provides them with pastoral care.
Time Matters

The first thing to do before you arrange to teach any courses is to discuss your teaching plans with your supervisor. While taking part in undergraduate teaching is a normal expectation of most PhD students, your main aim is to carry out research. Any teaching duties must therefore be timetabled carefully and sensibly.

You must be aware that you will be required to spend time outside your contact hours. Preparation time will include talking to the people who are leading the class, reading the material provided for students in the course books and any additional demonstrator notes provided as well as researching the topic. You also need to arrive early to check out the equipment and biological material.

If you know that you cannot attend in advance, please let the BTO know by emailing bto.demonstrators@ed.ac.uk in plenty of time. If you need to cancel at short notice, please phone Ann Haley (650 5538) or Louise Hann (650 7481) early that day so that emergency cover can be arranged; please do not rely on e-mail for short notice cancellation.

The Team

It is important to recognise that you will be part of a team which includes other demonstrators, the floor leader (if there is one), the lecturer(s), the Course Organiser, the technicians and, of course, the students. It really is best to consider the students as part of that team, someone with whom to share that “wow” when viewing some exciting biological material, seeing the results of a successful experiment or helping a student understand the practical.

Being aware of what the students have already learned on the course will enable you to teach new or related topics more effectively. Thus you should make an effort to find out where that practical fits in the context of the whole course, by looking in the course guide. This also applies if you are being drafted in to demonstrate on only one or two practicals within a semester-long course.

What to Bring?

You will not need to bring a lab coat as these are provided in the lab. In most of the early years the demonstrators are provided with blue coats, which stand out against the sea of students’ white coats.

You should bring with you a name badge if you have one (or they may be provided in the lab). Paper is available in the lab but you may want to bring your own pen and pencil. You must bring your copy of the course book and demonstrator notes to every session. Please take care not to leave your
demonstrator notes lying around as they may have answers to questions asked in the course book that may form part of the in-course assessment.

You may also like to bring some supporting information e.g. textbooks or copies of material from the internet. Difficult concepts are often best explained with props. Bring those along with you too if you have any, although some props may be available in the lab for you to use. It is a good idea to have your own permanent ink marker pen with you as these are often missing from the labs as the semester progresses!

**Being a Good Demonstrator**

You should familiarise yourself with the equipment and provided material *before* you are called on to demonstrate its use in class. If necessary, ask the floor leader or technician to go over it / them with you before the next practical. Most staff will welcome such an approach and will see it as a sign of diligence rather than ignorance.

Demonstrators who feel insecure about their knowledge tend to feel safer hiding amongst other demonstrators and only approach a student when a hand shoots up. However, if you adopt this approach, you will not enjoy the experience of demonstrating and the students will not be satisfied and they will report this in the course feedback questionnaire.

It is much more productive for both you and the students if you patrol your benches proactively, encouraging them to think critically, observe, discuss and ask questions.

Another example of bad practice is to whisper together with the other demonstrators when the floor leader is addressing the class. This is a distraction to the floor leader, other demonstrators and the students. It is essential that you listen attentively when the floor leader speaks, even if you have heard it all before.

Students will often ask you questions to which you do not know the answers. It is OK not to know something, but it is not OK to bluff! On the other hand, if you say that you don’t know but will endeavour to find out, then you do need to deliver on your promise. If the question they ask is something they really ought to know, then the best strategy is to channel their thoughts in such a way that they arrive at the answer themselves. Avoid making the student feel silly or ignorant, you do not want to put them off ever asking for help again.

One of your most important roles as a demonstrator is to encourage a questioning attitude. Our examination systems tend to reward excellence of answer, but the ability to ask questions is too rarely encouraged. Practicals offer a very favourable environment in which to hone their questioning skills.

If you find that there is a general feeling of misunderstanding, then the best ploy is to gather students together in groups and explain things to several students at the same time. Indeed encourage group work throughout. It
promotes discussion and exchange of ideas and students enjoy the social interaction it offers. General lack of understanding of the issues or practical aspects of the session should be reported to the floor leader or course organiser. It may be that the students lack sufficient background and extra explanation is required from the front of the class.

Feedback
A demonstrators’ feedback session will be held in April every year to allow a chance to review your experience over the previous two semesters.

Practical Books
In many courses practical books are formally assessed, so it is important that all demonstrators offer consistent advice. It would do no harm to remind students that their record keeping at undergraduate level prepares them for research or other lab-based work in later years.

Lab book assessment differs from course to course. In many first year courses, students write up as they go along and you will be offering comments while they do so. In some courses, lab books are collected for formative or summative marking from time to time, or at the end of the course. In other courses, students take notes during the practical itself and individual practicals are written up or a proforma is completed and submitted separately. You will be told what the exact arrangements are for the course in which you are teaching, and the ‘turn-around time’ for marking. Since this is often short, you must be able to deliver the marked books or scripts on time and in person, if you have undertaken to be involved with the assessments (in addition to your role as demonstrator).

Generally students ought to be advised that a good lab book should be used like a diary with a clear title and date. Diagrams should be drawn using a sharp pencil and be accompanied by a scale and labels. Graphs must have an informative title, their axes labelled and units indicated. It is often difficult to write up experiments according to the usual format of introduction, materials and methods, results and discussion because the experiment may be spread over several days or weeks and the stages of the experiment interspersed with other practical exercises. However, students should not leave blank pages but rather write in the diary mode and to refer to previous pages (numbered or dated) of their lab book. It is important that you are aware of what is required within each course you are demonstrating on before commenting on any lab book.

Commenting on a student’s lab book requires skill and often tact. Never deface a student’s lab book. Comments should be constructive, e.g. “This is much better than last week’s” or “good, but would be even better if….” (see later comments on providing feedback on students’ work). Some students find drawing difficult and some are even quite phobic about it. Don’t be too hard on people who don’t draw well. Encourage them to supplement their work with text. Use the opposite tactic to anyone with a dyslexic problem.
They can make annotated diagrams, rather than illustrated notes. Play to the students’ strengths, not their weaknesses. With digital cameras incorporated into mobile phones, students often want to illustrate their lab books with digital images. That is fine as an extra, but point out to them that looking and drawing is a better way of recording observations, and it may actually be a requirement of the course. Also be aware of whether the use of mobile phones are permitted in the lab.

Pastoral Care

Often you will be demonstrating on 1st and 2nd year courses and our ‘freshers’ and / or direct entry students are often overwhelmed by the size of the first / second year classes and some may become home-sick. If a student speaks to you confidentially, you should listen, as a friend would, but encourage them to communicate with / seek advice from their Personal Tutor. You could also direct them towards the services that are available within the university (listed on the Edinburgh University Students’ Association website: http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/advice ). Some key support services are listed below:

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<th>Phone number (KB)</th>
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<th>Web site</th>
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<tr>
<td>University Health Centre</td>
<td>-</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Health.Service@ed.ac.uk">Health.Service@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/health-wellbeing/services">http://www.ed.ac.uk/staff-students/students/health-wellbeing/services</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers Service</td>
<td>650 5773</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Careers@ed.ac.uk">Careers@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers">http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/careers</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Disability Service</td>
<td>650 6828</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Disability.Service@ed.ac.uk">Disability.Service@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service/">http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling Service</td>
<td>650 4170 or 651 6200</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk">Student.Counselling@ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-counselling">http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-counselling</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Advice Place</td>
<td>650 5772</td>
<td><a href="mailto:Advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk">Advice@eusa.ed.ac.uk</a></td>
<td><a href="http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace/">http://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/adviceplace/</a></td>
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For reasons of confidentiality, you should not report the problem to the Personal Tutor (PT), unless the student specifically asks you to do so. You can remind them that late submission of course work will incur a penalty. If there are any special circumstances, then they must make their PT aware. The PT, or a member of the BTO Student Support Team can submit a Special Circumstance Form on their behalf. These will then be considered by a Special Circumstances committee.
Enquiries regarding special considerations in examinations should be addressed through the Student Disability Service (http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service).

If you think a student is having academic difficulties, you could refer them to the Senior Academic Tutor. She offers some subject specific help in first and second year courses and generic study skills support such as managing course requirements, preparing for revision and exams etc. The Senior Academic Tutor in the BTO is:

Dr Nadia Tuzi  650 8652  Nadia.Tuzi@ed.ac.uk

Her office is within the BTO, JCMB 2105. You can also speak to Nadia (Nadia.Tuzi@ed.ac.uk) if you feel you need advice relating to demonstrating.

Occasional Problems

Remember that if a problem does arise in a practical class, you are not alone. The floor leader is there to offer you guidance and it is a good idea to keep them informed about any issues that arise in the laboratory (do not wait until the lab has finished before mentioning things).

Here are a number of problems that demonstrators may come across that require tactful handling, e.g.:

*Ethical scruples about dissections or use of animals in teaching*

The views of students who are not willing to participate in dissection or in the killing of animals (usually invertebrates) should be respected and you should never pressurise or coerce a student to do anything with which they do not feel comfortable. Ask them whether they mind watching other students do the dissecting. If they do, then alternatives can be found. You should inform the floor leader if there is a student with concerns and they can refer them to textbooks and websites as appropriate.

*Phobias/allergies*

Students may have phobias or allergies, e.g. fear of spiders, centipedes or worms. Others faint when they smell certain chemicals. Never mock the students for their problems. If the offending material is an essential part of the practical, then the students must be told to prepare in other ways. Ask the floor leader to suggest alternatives.

*Problems with ideas about evolution*

Some students may not ‘believe’ in Darwinian evolution. Be respectful of their views and tactful in the way you talk to them. If the discussion arises in a
practical, in which evolutionary ideas are explored, then it might be easier to turn to the easier issue of natural selection in action, and ask the student to provide examples e.g. bacterial resistance.

**Approaches to Students with Disabilities**

Your course organiser or floor leader should alert you to any disabled students in your care, and inform you of any special provisions that are being made. However, they will most probably not provide you with a list of all the dyslexic students. Dyslexia and/or dysgraphia are probably the most common disabilities that students present, so you have to be careful not to be too hard on the poor spellers and bad writers. They might disclose the information about their disability. If they do not, you could ask, but be tactful. If they have not been tested, a slight nudge might encourage them to seek help. You could advise them that the Student Disability Service (http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service/) sees students on a drop-in basis, without appointment, or they can make an appointment (http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/student-disability-service/new-students/making-an-appointment).

It is quite common for students to become temporarily disabled though injury. If this happens, remind them to alert their Personal Tutor and the BTO. For example in the case of an injury that affects a student’s mobility, temporary provisions may need to be made. If one of your students has an injury e.g. a broken limb, please inform your floor leader.

Students with diabetes, epilepsy or particular allergies may have informed the floor leader of their condition. If they have not already done so, and they speak to you, please pass this information on to the person in charge.
Providing Feedback and Marking Students’ Work

Feedback

Providing feedback for lab-books has already been addressed in an earlier section. On some courses, some demonstrators will be asked to provide lab-book feedback either formative or summative at some stage. You might want to ask the Academic Administrator or Course Organiser whether this is part of your contracted duties or whether additional payments are due. Other assessments are usually additional to contracted hours, and the Academic Administrator or lab floor-leader will ask you whether you are prepared to do them. Do ask about the expected ‘turn-around time’, if there is a markers’ meeting that you must attend and the payment per script before you agree to take on the work.

Feedback from markers is an extremely important teaching aid, which allows students to progress and improve, yet poor feedback is most often commented on by students in staff-student liaison committees. Large classes often deal out scripts to twenty or so different markers, so lack of consistency of feedback between markers is a big issue. The first thing to do is to check exactly what advice the students were given for carrying out and completing their assignment. If you are not quite sure of the advice they got, then you cannot provide effective feedback. Secondly, familiarise yourself with any guidance notes, marking schemes etc. that have been provided and ensure you adhere to such guidance. Markers’ meetings may be held prior to marking commencing, it is very important that you attend these (indeed they may be compulsory).

In some courses, assignments are uploaded onto tablets and you will be given a tablet with a number of ‘scripts’ to mark electronically. Special instructions will be given. Check with the course organiser or course secretary whether comments on paper scripts can be written in pencil (so you can erase them if you change your mind) but note that the final mark awarded must be in pen. Key points to look for when marking an essay are:

- is the essay on topic with thought processes following logically?
- are appropriate facts used in the context of the topic?
- are facts adequately supported by evidence and examples?
- are the references appropriate, cited in the text and correctly listed?

Try to comment on the students’ thought processes and logic, rather than just picking on the much easier issues of grammar and style. Encourage them to support their facts with evidence and examples, by pointing out where in the script these are lacking. For very good scripts, it is tempting to write “Very Good” and leave it at that. That is disappointing feedback to somebody who has obviously put in a lot thought and would wish to enter into a dialogue with their marker on some of their ideas. They too want to know what they did well and where there is room for improvement. If a student has obviously put in a lot of effort, but has failed to answer the question adequately, then you need to show them where they veered off.
If the student makes a good point – praise it; saying ‘you make a good point here’. But if the student makes an error, say ‘this essay does not explain (whatever) clearly’. Thus your feedback can be personal in praise but keep it impersonal to suggest a failing.

If you suspect that a student may be dyslexic (see section above), don’t correct all their spelling mistakes, this will be a waste of your time and will serve to further diminish their self-esteem. Rather make a general comment on the spelling with a reminder to spell check future assignments and alert the course secretary of your concerns so they can pass this on as it is ‘recommended that an appropriate person in the School sensitively discusses this with the student and suggests that the student contacts the Student Disability Service’.

**Marking**

While comments on the script itself may be written in pencil (see above), those on the mark sheet and the marks themselves need to be in ink, so that the students cannot alter the numbers.

You will remember from your own studies how it felt when marked work was returned to you. Now, the responsibility is yours to mark fairly and consistently. Assessed problems usually come with a well-defined marking scheme but this is much harder to achieve for lab books and essays. Find out from the course secretary who else is marking and do not hesitate to confer with your colleagues to ensure consistency. Essays and projects are the hardest to mark objectively. If no guidance is given, go to see the course organiser and ask. Find out from them how strictly students are expected to stick to the word-count, what proportion of marks to allot to examples, which referencing convention the students are expected to follow, and what sort of penalties are prescribed and who will apply them. Find out how much written feedback is required and ask about the marking range. The common marking scheme is given overleaf, but since only a few students fail their course-work, you might expect to give marks between 30% and 90%.
Edinburgh University's “Common Marking Scheme”:

**CMS 1: Undergraduate Degree Assessment (except BVM&S and MBChB)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Honours Class</th>
<th>Mark (%)</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Non-Honours Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>90-100</td>
<td>A1</td>
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<td>2.1</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Performance at a level showing the potential to achieve at least a lower second class honours degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Pass, may not be sufficient for progression to an honours programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Marginal Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Clear Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Bad Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Bad Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>