

POSTGRADUATE &
UNDERGRADUATE
(MAJOR AWARD
DEGREE & AND SPECIAL
PURPOSE)
EXAMINATION
STATISTICS REPORT
2010-2015

Postgraduate Programmes

This section comments on examination results for Postgraduate master's qualifications from the academic years 2010/11 to 2014/15. Readers should note that the grade bands for postgraduate master's awards are as follows: First class honours (1H): 70+; Second class honours (2H): 60-69%; and Pass: 40-59%. There is no 2H1/2H2 distinction in the second class category.

1. In line with expectations for level 9 postgraduate programmes, the analysis shows very low Fail/Exempt figures across the programmes. The MEcon Science has performed the best in terms of exam success rates and throughput figures, with 100% in both categories. This reflects to some extent the fact that students on this programme are granted significant release from work to attend class. The MEcon Science success rate compares with a 94% exam success rate in the MA and an 86% throughput figure. The MSc has an exam success rate of 81% with a throughput figure of 76%.
2. Further analysis of the MA exam success rate reveals that the MA has had a failure rate of 0.6% and a deferral rate of 5% over the 5 years of the study. The MSc in Business & Management, though lagging the MA rates, has also fared well, with a Fail/Exempt average of 3% across the 4 years. The deferral rate of 15% reflects to some extent the Springboard programme with some students interrupting their studies to pursue work opportunities.
3. In the MA, second class honours results have been on a consistent upward trend since 2011 with a highpoint of 76% of students achieving a 2H in 2015. Given the high 2H threshold (60%), these findings are very positive. There has been a consequent falling off in 'Pass' grades and deferrals. 1Hs have been relatively static. The increase in 2H figures across the MA reflects efforts over the period to enhance the guidance and supervision of the dissertation phase of the programme.
4. The trend in the MSc sees a marginal decline in the 1H and 2H categories since 2012 with a consequent slight rise in Pass grades. The overall exam success rate is good – an average of 82% over the 4 years under review.
5. Broadly, the results across the streams for the MA have an overall positive rating. Inevitably, however, there are slight, nuanced differences across the streams.
 - While the Leadership & Strategy stream has the best exam success rate (100%), the Public Management stream performed best in terms of actual grades achieved across the 5 years, with 23% of students on average achieving a 1H, and only 18% achieving the lower category 'Pass' Grade. There have also been no failures or deferrals in the stream.

- The Local Government Management stream has performed less well than other streams in the upper grade categories. We note, however, the number of students taking this stream has also been very low (with an average of 6 over the five years), thus making statistical interpretation difficult. While the majority of students are in the 2H and Pass grade bands, with a relatively even split across them – 44% achieving a 2H compared to 43% on average across the 5 years achieving a Pass – the stream has the lowest average rate of 1Hs (only 4%), and a proportionately larger number of lower category ‘Pass’ Grades than for the other streams.
6. Grades in the available streams of the MSc – Financial Management and HRM – have been broadly similar, with the HRM stream on average performing marginally better than the Financial Management stream. An average of 54% of students received a 2H in HRM compared to 43% in Financial Management. In the deferral category, there was an average of 8% in HRM, compared to 19% in Financial Management. The most significant difference is the 0% Fail rate in the HRM stream compared to 5% in Financial Management. The difference in results could, in part, be attributed to the fact that in the Financial Management stream there are quantitative type subjects that place technical demands on students that they may not have encountered in previous third-level studies.
 7. The MEcon Science has had the highest rate of 1Hs, at 40% on average over the 5 years. The average for the MA is 12%, and the MSc is 7%. The average rate in the 2H category in the MEcon Science is 58%.

Issues Arising

- The structure of the postgraduate programme comprises a dissertation and taught subjects. The taught subjects are assessed by means of examination and assignments. A contributory factor in the higher results for the MEcon Science is the assessment weighting division of 70:30. The IPA is reviewing the possibility of extending this weighting to the other postgrad programmes, which are currently at 80:20.
- The IPA is planning to further increase the contact hours and supervisory direction for students at the dissertation phase of their studies. This should continue the positive impact on the deferral rate and facilitate an enhanced opportunity for first and second class honours.
- The IPA is also planning extra tuition for the more difficult accounting subjects on the Financial Management stream of the MSc.
- The IPA has embarked on developing on-line components for its programmes. The introduction of webinars and on-line instruction will particularly help learners on the MA and MSc programmes, in which the primary delivery mechanism is blended learning. The

additional support will have a positive bearing on grades achieved by weaker students and those facing significant work and family pressures.

Undergraduate Programmes (Major Award Degree Programmes)

This section comments on examination results for undergraduate major qualifications (BA Hons and BBS Hons) from the academic years 2010/11 to 2014/15. Readers should note that the grade bands for undergraduate awards are as follows: First class honours (1H): 70%+; Second class honours Grade 1 (2H1): 60-69%; Second Class Honours Grade 2 (2H2): 50-59% and Pass: 40-49%.

1. The average exam success rates (pass rates) across BA stages 1-4 have remained broadly consistent in the five years of study (91%, 90%, 88%, 85% and 84%). This is also true of the BBS stages 1-4 (84%, 89%, 83%, 83% and 79%), though the average exam success rates for the BBS are marginally lower than for the BA.
2. The exam success rates for stage 1 students of the BA are 10%-20% higher than the exam success rates for BBS stage 1 students. BBS stage 1 students also have the lowest exam success rates across the four stages of the degree programme (with one exception of 2014/2015). The exam success rates of stage 1 students of the BA were relatively consistent with the exam success rates for the other stages of the BA.
3. The course throughput figures (exam success rate divided by intake at the beginning of the year as opposed to exam candidates registered) reveal lower completion rates for stage 1 students in comparison to other stages.
4. The best results (award classification) are being achieved by students at the later stages. Stages 3 and 4 have produced the highest number of 1H and 2H1 grades, though recently there has been a marginal decline in 1H and 2H1 grades in the BBS (with a corresponding rise in 2H2s) and a marginal decline in 2H1s in the BA (with a corresponding slight rise across the other grade bands, including the 1H category).
5. Across all stages, the BBS has consistently had more 1H grades than the BA; however, the difference between the two fell in 2015. The BBS also had a higher Fail/Exempt rate than the BA. Consequently, the BBS had a greater proportion of high and low grades than the BA. The BA has had consistently higher second class honours (both 2H1 and 2H2) over the 5 years than the BBS.
6. The Accounting and Information Systems Management (ISM) streams of the BBS returned the vast majority of 1Hs in the BBS. The decline in 1Hs in these streams in 2015 – mainly due to a decline in 1H grades from both IPA lecture and distance education

students taking these streams – contributed to an overall decline in the number of 1Hs in the BBS in general.

7. In stage 4 of the BBS, the HRM stream has by far the highest rate of 2H1s. Marketing has the highest percentage of 2H2 and Pass grades (and lowest rate of 1H/2H1 grades).
8. The number of 1H grades has been traditionally low in the BA, particularly at stage 4. However, there has been a reversal of this trend in 2014/2015, with a significant increase in 1H in Stages 3 and 4 of the BA. This rise is seen across all streams.
9. 2H1 in general is the most frequent grade achieved by final year students across all the different streams of the BA programme. In the local government stream, however, the number of 2H1s awarded has dropped over the 5 years, with a consequent rise in the number of 2H2s. There are high percentages in the 1H and 2H1 grade bands in the IT and Healthcare Management streams, but the number of students taking these streams is very small.
10. In the BA programme, there is little difference in the exam success rate between IPA-based and distance education students across the 5 years under review. If anything, distance education students have marginally better exam success rates. However, distance education students in the BA (and the BBS) have higher absent rates at the examination than lecture students. Also, in terms of grades, IPA-based students have marginally higher combined 1H and 2H1s than distance students. 1Hs in general are particularly low across both tuition methods; however there are signs of a change in 2015.
11. In the BBS, the majority of students across the three tuition methods – IPA lectures, distance education, and distance education with regional study centre – achieved second class honours (this is roughly split between 2H1 and 2H2). Distance education students taking additional classes at a regional centre, on average, perform better than regular distance education students and their counterparts based in the IPA. Students who take their BBS studies at IPA evening lectures, however, have the highest number of 1Hs (and the highest percentage of lowest grades), relative to their distance education and study centre counterparts.
12. The IPA's active system of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), whereby new students with previous qualifications access advanced stages of a course, means that the number of students registering for a particular academic year tends to exceed the number of successful students progressing from the previous lower stage. This is true for both the BA and BBS, and the pattern is consistent across each of the academic years under review. The RPL advanced entry levels, historically, are most pronounced at stage 3, which has been the most significant year for student intake after stage 1.

Issues Arising:

- 1.** The number of 1H grades has been traditionally low in the BA, particularly at stage 4, with 1%-2% of a class awarded 1st class honours out of 100-130. External examiners have encouraged the IPA to make more use of the 60%-69% and 70%-100% grade bands, where warranted. This issue has been discussed at faculty, and co-ordinators have been systematically reviewing marks in the high 2H1 and low 1H bands at stage 4 level to ensure that lecturers are making comprehensive use of marking schemes that cover the full range of marks. Consequently, the statistics reveal that the 1Hs at stage 4 have improved. This is a positive trend that should be further promoted.
- 2.** The top 1H grades are more frequent in the BBS than the BA. Obviously, the BBS is a more numerically based discipline and leads to answers that are right or wrong. At stage 4, in particular, the IPA has been working to introduce more varied types of examination question into accounting & tax subjects. Consequently, there may, in the future, be a slight decrease in the number of 1H awards at stage 4 of the BBS.
- 3.** Some of the stream subjects at stage 4 of the BA & BBS, such as the HR elective subjects, have historically returned results in the 2H2 category. Extern examiners have indicated that there is scope to distribute marks more evenly across the full second class category (2H1 and 2H2) to keep the elective results in line with the other subjects taken by these students. Recent results reveal that the HR stream is returning more 2H1s than any other grade.
- 4.** While it is expected that students improve their results in later stages due to academic maturity and ambition, there is still scope to improve results in stages 1 and 2. Furthermore, a lower number of students reach the point of examination in stage 1 of the BA and BBS. Distance students, in particular, in both the BBS and the BA have the highest absent rates. We must reflect on the learning infrastructure in place and the adequacy of support for remote learners and students at these crucial early stages of their programme.

Undergraduate Certificate and Diploma (Special-Purpose) Programmes

This section comments on examination results for undergraduate certificate and diploma special-purpose programmes (levels 6-7) from the academic years 2010/11 to 2014/15. The focus of the review is on the rate of exam success and overall grade classification (1H, 2H1, etc.) achieved by students at the end of the programme. Readers should note that the grade bands for undergraduate awards are as follows: First class honours (1H): 70%+; Second class honours Grade 1 (2H1): 60-69%; Second Class Honours Grade 2 (2H2): 50-59% and Pass: 40-49%.

1. The majority of the undergraduate programmes under review are level 6-8 special purpose awards with credit volumes of between 15-20 credits. These short and focussed programmes are concerned with developing the knowledge and competence of participants working at specific grades or roles in the public service e.g. local government officials, health managers, project management and procurement specialists, etc.

The pass rates for the Certificate & Diploma programmes are very high, as can be expected for programmes that (i) are specialist, focussed level 6, 7 & 8 qualifications, (ii) have a strong practical application, and are undertaken by practitioners often on block release from their employers, and (iii) have intimate learning environments. The average success rates are generally in the 90-100% range.

Consequently, as can be expected from specialist programmes undertaken partly during work time, there is a very low and often non-existent absent rate across all courses and all years. Naturally, there are students who apply for a leave of absence or withdraw for family/work reasons, but these numbers are also very small.

2. In a number of fields of study, the structure requires the student to undertake a foundational certificate stage before progressing to the diploma, which broadens in to policy and strategic-related areas. This is the case for health services, local government, civil service and state agency studies, public procurement. With respect to this suite of programmes, the results for the diplomas are better (more 1Hs and 2H1s combined) than the certificates that have preceded them: the number of students in the diploma is smaller, and it is evident that the more able and motivated students are progressing beyond the foundational certificate stage.

For instance, 1Hs have been consistently higher in the Diploma in Local Government Studies than in the equivalent Certificate across the 5 years, with an average of 43% compared to 27%. The higher achieving Cert students usually progress, thus accounting for the higher number of 1Hs in the Diploma.

3. The public procurement area (certificate and diploma) returned the highest set of results among the certificate and diploma programmes. The majority of students at both stages achieved a 1H: an average of 74% in the certificate and 67% in the diploma. Again, these are expected results from an applied course that caters for practitioners who have professional experience in the area of public procurement. The high results are closely replicated in the project management programmes and the computer studies programme, which has had a relatively high and consistent percentage of 1Hs – 37% across the 5 years, as well as relatively low absent rates (0%) and fail/exempt (4%).
4. Included in this report are three stand-alone, one-year diplomas – Diploma in Human Resource Management, Diploma in Law and Diploma in Management – that have a different structure and profile to the other programmes. They involve a larger workload, and they comprise level 7 & 8 modules that have a broader social science base. Consequently, the results are more varied than the other special purpose one-year programmes – there is a wider distribution of marks across the grade bands, more absent/fails, lower number of firsts. In general, the exam success rates of these one-year Diplomas are comparable to stages 3 and 4 of the degree programmes.
5. The intake for many of the programmes declined in the years under review due to the recession. Understandably, the public service cut back on block release and on training funding. The intake figures for 2014/15 demonstrate a reversal of this retrenchment, and recent 2015/2016 figures confirm that the demand for these programmes is increasing.

Issues Arising

1. The IPA has been reviewing the suite of special purpose certificates and diplomas, particularly the NFQ level assigned to them. This has resulted in the upgrading of qualifications from level 6 certificates/diplomas to level 8 professional diplomas e.g. Professional Diploma in Housing Studies and Project Management. Participants and public sector employers are happy that the title of Professional Diploma and the upgraded content are more fitting for them as practitioners.

The high results for the original certificates and diplomas confirm that a raise in level is justified for the participant profile involved. For instance, the Certificate in Housing Studies has had an average of 23% of students achieving a 1H and 57% a 2H1. The Certificate in Housing Studies (NFQ level 6) was upgraded to a Professional Diploma in Housing Studies (level 8) in 2014. The average for the Professional Diploma is 8% and 47% respectively. The general decline in the number of 1Hs and, to a lesser extent, 2H1s in the Professional Diploma is matched by a corresponding increase in the number of students achieving a 2H2. This is an expected outcome with the upgrading from a level 6 to a level 8 course with more complex subject matter. The absent and fail/exempt categories have had a 0% rating across the years and across both the Cert and Professional Diploma

The IPA will continue to seek approval for other upgrades in line with the memorandum of agreement with UCD. The IPA also intends to review whether level 7 (as opposed to level 6) may be a more fitting designation for programmes that attract entry level public servants, such as the certificate & diploma in civil service and state agency studies, local government, health services.

2. The recent demand for IPA special-purpose programmes provides the IPA with an opportunity to progress more successful diploma students onto the BA degree. Such structures already exist and bridging opportunities are outlined to students, but there is scope for more active recruitment.
3. The exam success rates for the stand-alone, level 7 diploma programmes, which have a broader social science orientation, reveal that students (particularly the weaker students) find the programmes challenging. For example, the exam success rate for the Diploma in Law is noticeably lower than the rate for the Diploma in Management and Diploma in HR.

The IPA is addressing such concerns. For example, we have increased tuition contact significantly for Diploma in Law students (effective from September 2016) and we are presently creating on-line videos for the present Diploma in HRM, Management and Law cohorts. Further roll-out of on-line material for other IPA programmes is also in train.