

LTC15D135

Title: **Thresholds for the progression of students on undergraduate Bachelors¹ courses with a year or semester abroad or in industry**
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Date: 27-4-16
Circulation: LTC – 11 May 2016
Agenda: LTC15A005
Version: Final
Status: Open

Issue

The final report of the QAA's Higher Education Review issued in January 2016 contained the recommendation that the University 'review assessment board regulations and their application to ensure greater consistency and equity of treatment of students'. This paper specifically considers those regulations governing thresholds for progression on study abroad and year in industry courses.

Recommendation

To approve the recommendation set out below.

Resource Implications

There are no resource implications for the University associated with the proposal. In restricting progression to attainment of the threshold at first sit, financial commitments associated with study abroad for any student failing a module should be reduced.

Risk Implications

There are no risk implications associated with the proposal.

Equality and Diversity

The proposal seeks to address inequality and inconsistencies in the regulations.

Timing of decisions

Approval at this meeting would permit changes to be made to the Award Regulations for 2016/7. Care would be taken to ensure that any student already on courses were not disadvantaged.

Further Information

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¹ Integrated Masters courses will be reported in a separate document.

Background

With the introduction of the Bachelors and Integrated Masters (BIM) award regulations in 2013 the University standardised the regulations in respect of progression thresholds as far as it was able at the time. However there are some inconsistencies and concessions against these regulations, and it is timely to review the current situation to improve consistency and equity of treatment.

The regulations governing periods of study abroad cover both progression on the course, and how the study abroad is accounted for in terms of contribution to the overall award. It is the former progression issues considered here, as the assessment issue was considered by LTC in June 2015. At that meeting, LTC resolved to assess semester abroad study as 'pass/fail' and therefore not contributing to the final classification of the degree for Bachelors' degree courses: [LTC14M006 24.06.2015](#) Min 166 bringing semester-abroad study in line with the assessment of year abroad study for four year Bachelors courses. The Committee also resolved that issues around progression for Integrated Masters courses with a year abroad, plus the three year Computing Studies with a Year Abroad be consulted on further, with the outcome being considered at a future meeting of LTC. The Integrated Masters courses are reported on separately, and the three-year CMP course situation is reported below. The thresholds required to progress on a course with a study abroad element were not discussed at the time, and are the substantive subject of this proposal. Year in Industry Bachelors courses are also included in this paper, with a recommendation to standardise the progression requirements for these courses, too.

Although the paper considered by LTC in June 2015 recommended that thresholds were reviewed in 2016/7 this has been brought forward as a result of the HER recommendation.

Bachelors with a Year Abroad

There is one three-year course in which the second year is spent abroad which meant that the marks obtained abroad would contribute to the degree classification. The course, BSc Computing Science with a year abroad U1G404302, has been closed with effect from September 2016, with the last students, one student in Year 2 and one in Year 3 being seen out by June 2017. It has been replaced with an Integrated Masters with a year abroad.

For all other Bachelors courses with a Year Abroad, the year abroad is an 'extra' year, sandwiched between Stage 2 and Stage 3; students have to pass the year abroad, but they receive no marks for their study abroad on their UEA record; it is accommodated as pass/fail credit.

The progression requirement on these four-year courses was standardised with the introduction of BIM, with the requirement of a stage aggregate of at least 55% to progress at the both the end of Stage 1 onto Stage 2 and the end of Stage 2 onto the Year Abroad (see [the regulations](#) (section 12.5.1)). This additional threshold does not apply to four year language and translation studies courses with an integral year abroad; for these courses there is no additional threshold in Stages 1 or 2 [See regulations](#) (section 12.5.4)).

However, LAW and AMA have been operating under a concession granted by the Academic Director of Taught Programmes (ADTP) that students not making the 55% aggregate in Stage 1 be allowed to progress onto the Stage 2; in granting the concession, the ADTP recommended that the BIM requirement be reviewed.

Bachelors with a Year in Industry

For most Bachelors courses with a year in industry, there is no academic threshold above the normal progression requirements, but students must satisfy the placement provider's requirements (normally an interview); for Actuarial Sciences with a Year in Industry, there is a threshold of 55% at the end of Stage 1 and 2, the same as the current Year Abroad thresholds.

Bachelors with a Semester Abroad

The regulations do not stipulate any additional threshold for students wishing to study for only a semester abroad, over and above the normal progression requirements. However, with the Arts and Humanities Faculty's expansion of semester abroad study, where it now offers most 3-year courses the option of a semester abroad, there is increasing concern about the inequality of treatment between Year Abroad and Semester Abroad students regarding the academic requirements to progress to Study Abroad.

Discussion

Study Abroad

There are differences of opinion about the necessity to have a higher threshold for students going abroad; many feel that UEA students studying abroad are advocates for the University and as such should be the very best, academically, and one way of predicting this would be a higher threshold in the preceding years. In addition, the students with high academic ability are more likely to cope with the teaching, especially if it is in a foreign language and be able to adjust to living abroad whilst being able to manage the academic work. However, there are others who believe that as long as students meet our progression requirements, no further threshold is necessary, and in fact students who may have been attaining low marks before going abroad benefit so much from the experience that they get much better marks on their return (anecdotal evidence from LAW). Also, it is not just about academic performance, but also cultural and social experiences, potentially adding to the CV, and learning new language skills.

The Associate Dean (L&T) for HUM has looked at other comparable universities, and has found that our 55% progression rule is not out of line. Bristol, Exeter, Imperial, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Nottingham, UCL and Warwick all require a year average of at least 60%. There is very little mention of a semester abroad; Bath Spa is one of the few and it requires a 60% minimum as well. Many also require a letter of recommendation from the department.

Before the introduction of BIM, many Bachelors degree courses with a year abroad had the year abroad 'counting' towards classification, the stage aggregate contributing 10 or 20% towards the classification mark. Now that we have changed [the regulations](#) (section 16.3.1) so that the year out is 'pass/fail' and does not contribute towards classification, perhaps the requirement for the students to be amongst the best academically is no longer so relevant. Arguably it is the less academically gifted who may benefit the greatest from the experience, and restricting the experience to only the most academically able may restrict our ambitions regarding mobility. This was robustly discussed at the April meeting of the Taught Programmes Policy Group, and the majority of the group felt that there was a need to retain the higher threshold.

The current regulations are silent on whether the threshold stage aggregate is attained only by first sit marks, or whether students who fail at first attempt, but could still meet the threshold even with a capped reassessment mark, should still be eligible. This was raised recently by the Teaching Director in LAW who wishes to restrict progression to only those

students who achieve the threshold at first sit. As a result of this request, School Teaching Directors were asked for their opinions on whether this should be the case, for both Stage 1 and Stage 2 progression. Of the 8 responders who offered an opinion only one was in favour of restricting progression only to those who pass first time at the end of the first year, but this rose to four at the end of the second year (see Appendix One). There are practical advantages to restricting progression to first sit only at the end of year two, due to the timing of reassessment.

If we were to keep the 55% threshold at the end of Stage 2 (with or without the 'pass first time' requirement), and we wanted to impose a similar threshold to semester abroad study, this would be based on their year one attainment. Another practical issue to consider is that the number of students on Year Abroad programmes can be managed, through admissions, but the number of students wishing to study for a semester abroad may far exceed the number of places available. The Schools offering these opportunities must publish clear guidelines to prospective students on how they allocate places.

It does not seem possible to resolve this to every School's satisfaction, but if we are to address the HER recommendation we need to reach a compromise that is at least acceptable to all Schools. Taking into account the feedback from the Taught Programmes Policy Group and the consultation on the 'pass first time/reassessment' issue, the consensus view appears to be:

- Keep the threshold of 55% for progression for Bachelors courses with a year abroad. This average could be obtained after reassessment at Stage 1 (using the capped mark), but only at First Sit at Stage 2.
- Introduce a threshold of 55% for progression to a semester abroad as a minimum (but where places are limited, they would be allocated on academic performance ranking; this would need to be made clear to students). This average would be obtained at first sit; any student referred to reassessment would not be eligible to go on a semester abroad.
- Keep the exception for language and translation courses
- Where a student narrowly misses the threshold, the ADTP to give favourable consideration to a concession request to permit the student to progress, with the support of the School.

Year in Industry

In the past there have been academic thresholds for Year in Industry students but with the introduction of BIM these were removed from all but one course, with only Actuarial Sciences having a threshold. It is recommended that this anomaly is changed so that students only need to meet the standard academic progression requirements, along with any interview or other requirement of their placement provider, as long as there are no professional accreditation repercussions.

Recommendation

Bachelors Course	End of Stage 1	End of Stage 2
Year Abroad	55% (at first or second attempt)	55% (first attempt only)
Semester Abroad	55% (first attempt only)	n/a
Year Abroad for language and translation studies courses	No additional threshold	No additional threshold
Year in Industry	No additional threshold	No additional threshold other than meeting the requirements of the placement provider (normally an interview)

Appendix One

Summary of responses to whether students should be required to pass first time to progress

School	Responder	Should students who fail a module in Year 2 be prevented from going abroad?	Should students who fail a module in Year 1 be prevented from continuing on the course?	Other comments
CHE	S Lancaster			IMs – not affected; no response given
BIO	M Coleman	No	No	The requirement for 55% seems to me to be a perfectly reasonable way of dealing with this. If we implement a system whereby any student who fails any module at first sit is excluded from the year abroad we risk excluding students that have better overall marks than students allowed to progress. That seems unfair to me. I think that the mark capping is sufficient penalty and sufficient to prevent an unscrupulous student gaming the system.
SCI AD	D Stevens	Yes	Yes	Year Abroad students are ambassadors for the university. This is a privileged position. We should only be sending high-performing and engaged students abroad
ENV	P Dolman	Yes	No	
AMA	C Bigsby	?	No	
HUM AD	C Matthews			Need to address the issue of a threshold for Semester Abroad students
PSY	N Cooper	Yes	No	Students with ECs may have difficulty coping with the Year Abroad, depending on their circumstances, and these cannot always be legislated for.
EDU	L Beaumont	No	No	
DEV	R Grant	No	No	We think that requests from Schools for concessions in order to vary these regulations to suit the specific needs of their courses should be accommodated wherever possible
LAW	C Richards	Yes	No	