

LTC14D227

Title **Should Semester 2 of Year 1 Count Towards Classification?**
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Issue

A paper on whether semester 2 of Year 1 should count towards degree classifications within the New Academic Model. This issue was flagged by Senate in Nov 2013 as being worthy of further consideration as part of a strategy to enhance student engagement.

Recommendation

LTC members are asked to consider and approve the recommendations contained in the paper.

Resource Implications

If the recommendations are approved, they are unlikely to result in any significant resource implications.

Risk Implications

Minimal risks to the business of the University.

Equality and Diversity

It is not envisaged that any of the recommendations contained in the report will impact on groups with protected characteristics.

Timing of decisions

The recommendation is that there should be no change in current weighting of Year 1 (0%). Current practice would simply continue from 2015/16 onwards.

Further Information

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Background

This paper considers whether part of Year 1 should count towards classification.

In November 2013 Senate endorsed a direction of travel which:

- a) markedly reduces the number of courses offered;
- b) moves the University to a position where the majority of pieces of assessed work are formative and feed forward to a smaller number of summative assessments and reduces the number of exams;
- c) introduces a more structured system of student induction;
- d) reconsiders whether academic engagement in Year 1 would be strengthened if Semester 2 were to count towards degree classification;**
- e) improves the effective use of learning technology to enhance the delivery of learning & teaching.)

See: <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7745168/LTC14D008.pdf/b460d501-07ff-458b-b1ca-6bafef75062a>

This paper addresses Section (d) of the 'Direction of Travel' noted above.

Background

The issue of whether the 1st year, or part of the 1st year, should 'count' towards classification is one which has previously been subjected to a great deal of detailed and lengthy discussion at UEA. For example, the issues were explored by the CCS Review Group during 2009/10 and set-out in a paper drafted by the ADTP in December 2009 at a time when the University was in the throws of debating the key elements of what would eventually evolve into the New Academic Model. See extracts from LTC Review of the CCS Regs from 2009/10 (**Appendices A & B**). Executive Team decided in March 2010 that no element of the 1st year should count. As a result the weighting of degree programmes within the BIM Regulation is 0/40/60, with Year 1 weighted at 0%. In December 2006 work commenced on a 3-year HEFCE-funded project to explore all areas of assessment at UEA. The project was extended to 31 July 2009, as was the work on the parallel project on transitions to/within HE. A one-year post was created to extend the project work for a further year from 1 August 2010 to 31 July 2011 (Phase 2) using TESS money. By 2011 the project was completed and in June 2011, LTC considered a report on the review of assessment. As part of this some modelling was undertaken on mark profiles to see whether making Year 1 'count' would have a significant impact on classification outcomes. The summary is provided below:

*The problem of poor student engagement in the first year of study has been noted. A possible solution of making the first-year count towards degree classification was explored. Using student progression data sets from previous finishing cohorts various weightings were modelled and it was noted that very **little difference would have resulted** by changing the weightings by around 10% per year. It was also noted that the results for each academic year may have been different had students been working under a different system.*

See: <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7721179/ltc10d108.pdf/07e6afd1-211d-4e03-9988-8c920fe2c600>

Whilst it was recognised that making Year 1 count might assist in ensuring high levels of student engagement (effort and commitment to study), and that it would send out a positive message about how the University valued the first year of study, there were also a number of very serious concerns about making even part of the first year count. These concerns are still pertinent and should cause LTC to exercise extreme caution before approving such a measure.

Reasons for maintaining existing weightings within the BIM Regulations

- The requirement within the BIM Regulations to pass all modules applies to all stages of study, though the regulations do allow for Exam Boards and Heads of School to exercise some discretion regarding opportunities for reassessment for Year 1 students. The 'pass all modules' BIM requirement already sets high expectations regarding student engagement in Year 1, arguably negating the need to make Year 1 'count towards classification'.
- The expectations and requirements relating to student attendance have been clarified and enhanced in the new attendance policy that was approved by LTC in 2013/14. This requires students to attend all sessions and Module Organisers to ensure that a register is taken at least once per week on each module, thereby enabling the more effective application of Gen Reg 13 on Attendance, Engagement and Progression.
- From 2011/12 onwards school redesigned their programme to take into account the shift to the creation of larger, year-long modules (30/40 credits) which allowed for the more effective integration of formative and summative assessment, and which provide a more coherent educational experience. Schools like EDU and ECO re-designed their programmes accordingly and Year 1 now comprises 3 x 40 credit, year-long modules. Making Semester 2 'count' would require these schools to totally re-design their 1st year programmes (again). Given that the Schools followed University guidance and redesigned their Year 1 programmes following encouragement from senior managers, to now require them to back-track would be extremely unwelcome and (arguably) rightly so.
- The data suggests that at UEA the 2nd year 'slump' simply does not exist in the majority of Schools, and even where it does occur, the slump is relatively small (2-4%). At institutional level in 2013/14 the Year 2 slump became a 'hump', with performance actually increasing between Stage 1 and Stage 2. This indicates that in most schools students are negotiating the transition between Years 1 and 2 very successfully (they experience an increase in marks) or see only a very small decline in their Stage

average marks. In the vast majority of Schools the upward trend in Stage marks is continued in Stage 3, which (again) is a very positive picture. The successful progression in performance now seen across most schools does little to support arguments for making part of Year 1 count.

- Making Year 1 count for 10% weighting (which was the favoured weighting in 2010) is unlikely to make any difference – the weighting is so small that a strong performance in Year 1 would arguably make little difference to the overall classification, thus minimising any positive impact on engagement.
- Making Semester 2 count would require a significant change in the responsibilities of external examiners and an accompanying step-change in the use of external examiners to review coursework and exam scripts for Sem 2 Year 1 modules – additional work which would require a significant increase in costs of payments to external examiners.
- When discussed at TPPG, the majority of the group felt that Year 1 should not count, but there were some members who felt that it would help with engagement. However, for reasons of equity and fair/consistent treatment of students it would be unsustainable to have a mixed economy within the University – i.e. if we make Semester 2 of Year 1 count, this rule would need to extend to all UG programmes. This level of ‘prescription’ is unlikely to be welcomed by some Schools.
- Making part of the first year count towards degree classifications would have implications for international student recruitment and might require an increase in the IELTS English language entry requirement for undergraduates, which could lead to a decrease in numbers of international students at UEA. This concern was expressed by Admissions managers in 2010 and is still pertinent. Because the first year of undergraduate programmes are treated as a ‘transition’ year, international students with lower IELTS scores have time for their language abilities to improve before progressing to Year 2, when marks ‘count’.
- Making the first year count towards classification would have major implications for direct entry into the second year of study or any student who wishes to transfer degree programmes.
- The University would arguably need a longer induction period which included information on study skills, assessment methods and probably introducing more ‘practice’ in assessed bits of work; if the second semester only was to count then exams would need to take place at the end of first semester to prepare those students who do not come from a background where formal examination is the norm.
- Very few competitor HEIs give any weighting to Year 1.
- According to the UG Academic Officer of the UUEAS, any change to making Year 1 (or even part of Year 1) ‘count’ would be extremely unpopular with the student body, most of who welcome the use of Year 1 as a ‘transitional period’.

Recommendation

That the University should not ‘count’ Semester 2, and should (instead) maintain the existing weightings for Bachelors and Integrated Masters programmes.

Appendix A

**Extract from: ‘Making part of the first year count towards classification’,
Director of Taught Programmes - Report from Chair of CCS Review Group LTC
December 2009, LTC09A003**

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7704450/dividerj+lrc09d047.pdf/a65aca13-c7cb-4168-91bf-937f299c1d57>

There has been some discussion in HUM about making part of the first year count towards degree classification, something favoured by some members of HERIG. Discussions at ET in the past 18 months have touched on whether this can be implemented in the current CCS regulations.

As far as I am aware the reason for wanting to make part of the first year count in this way is to provide an incentive to students to engage with their studies, particularly in semester 2. If this is the sole reason then the move to require students to pass all modules coupled with rules about reassessment may provide sufficient incentive that making part of the first year count is unnecessary.

Some of the issues that will have to be worked out if the new regulations make some of the first year count are:

- How much will count? Possibilities are the best 20 Cr module mark from semester 2 and the aggregate semester 2 mark contributing a fixed % of the final degree aggregate. [Note that if it is a relatively small % it may not provide much incentive]
- Whatever counts will need to go through the normal quality assurance processes for work counting to degree classification (scrutiny by externals, double marking/internal verification), which might have consequences for management of exam boards.
- Will what counts be at level 1 or level 2 (i.e. will Honours level teaching start in year 1?). Note whatever arrangements are made will need to be consistent with the QAA Framework on HE Qualifications.
- Can a School or Faculty have part of the first year counting without the rest of UEA following? There is such a diversity of UG courses across UEA already that the answer may be yes, but there are issues that need to be explored. For example. if a 3-year HUM course has S2 year 1 counting and it is at Honours level this suggests that this Honours HUM course will comprise 60 Cr level 1 and 300 Cr level 2/3. A comparable SSF or SCI course where the first year does not count will have 120 Cr level 1 and 240 Cr level 2/3 (in this example I have ignored the situation where a student may take a level 1 module from their profile in years 2/3). Does it matter that there will be such a difference in the courses?
The majority of members of the CCS Review Group who have responded to this point are against making the first year count.

Appendix B

Extract from:

LTC Reviews - Progress on the CCS Review, LTC Feb 2010, LTC09A004. See:

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/7702932/dividerl+ltc09d079.pdf/a9d2a6c1-d6a6-4998-9ceb-6724db237738>

The Chair mentioned the current debate concerning whether the first year at UEA should count towards the degree classification, which some Faculties favour in order to improve student engagement and recognise achievement. The decision regarding this issue does lie with UEA's Executive Team which is going to make a decision shortly. Some members seem to be convinced that changes to the CCS regulations as proposed would already lead to an improvement in student engagement and thought that making the first year count to achieve the same goal may not be necessary.

The Chair had also met with the Admissions Faculty Managers and members of central admissions office to brief them on the approved principles of CCS and the debate about the first year counting towards the degree classification. Admissions Faculty Managers were concerned about whether the undergraduate prospectus for 2012 entry would contain the correct information regarding the revised CCS regulations. The prospectus for 2012 would be finalised in October/November 2010 and by then the revised CCS regulations would be nearly finalised and therefore it should be possible to ensure that the information in the prospectus reflects the spirit of the new CCS regulations. However, it is recognised that it would be preferable to have a final Senate decision on the new regulations before the prospectus is finalised. Admissions Faculty Managers expressed some concerns about the first year counting towards the degree classification as they thought that this would have implications for international student recruitment and might require an increase in the IELTS English language entry requirement for undergraduates, which could lead to a decrease in numbers of international students at UEA. [Note the IELTS score for admission of taught postgraduate students is higher than that for undergraduate students because taught postgraduate students start with counting soon after they arrive at UEA. It has been felt that because the first year of the undergraduate programmes are treated as transition years international students with lower IELTS scores would have time for their language abilities to improve]. They also thought in case the first year at UEA should count towards the degree classification, that further thought needs to be given to any students who were accepted as a direct entry into a second year of study or any student who wishes to transfer degree programmes. Further points raised by some of the Faculty Managers were: we would need a longer induction period which included information on study skills, assessment methods and probably introducing more 'practice' in assessed bits of work; if the second semester only was to count then exams would need to take place at the end of first semester to prepare those students who do not come from a formal examination.