

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 19 February 2010

Report from Academic Regulations Sub-Committee Meeting of 11
February 2010

Professor Tom Guthrie, Convener

Harmonisation of Supplementary Regulations

1. *Issues raised by ASC*

The Sub-Committee considered concerns raised by ASC at its meeting on 20 November. In particular, ASC had noted the possibility of a student entering honours not being able to proceed to final year and wishing to graduate with an Ordinary degree. The concern was that if the requirements for entry to honours did not include sufficient credits at grade D students in this position would not be able to meet the requirement of 280 credits at grade D set out in the Undergraduate Generic Regulations for graduation with an ordinary degree. Variance in the requirements for entry to Honours relating to the number of credits at grade D was noted. The current situation was that Arts required 220 credits at D, MA (SocSci) required 240 (though in practice there was considerable discretion) and Sciences 180. Most faculties had indicated a willingness to move towards a consistent position but the Sciences were still looking to retain the 180 credit requirement. A query had been raised through MIS to identify how many recent graduates had in fact had fewer than 200 credits at grade D when qualifying for entry to Honours, and the figures indicated that numbers were small.

The Sub-Committee agreed to propose to ASC that the requirement should be ‘200 credits at grade D or above’, but with the clear understanding that in appropriate cases the discretion enjoyed by Heads of Departments might be exercised to permit entry below this threshold (this would offer the Sciences some discretion). Given the desirability of students ultimately being eligible to graduate with an ordinary degree even if they did not achieve Honours, it was important that this requirement should be expressed as a number of credits rather than a grade point average. It was agreed that the continuing concerns of the Sciences should be noted when reporting to ASC.

The ASC discussion had also raised the issue of whether there was an assumption that all the requirements for an ordinary degree would be applied to entry to Honours. The view of the Sub-Committee was that the example quoted, of the need to have taken Philosophy, in fact only applied to the designated degree, not the ordinary degree, and there was no suggestion that that requirement should be applied to students who sought to graduate with a non honours degree at the end of third year.

2. *Faculty responses to consultation*

The Sub-Committee considered the responses received in relation to the various issues raised in the latest consultation document.

2.1 Progress RulesProgrammes admitting to Honours at entry.

The BAcc were still considering their response on this issue. It was noted that MEng should be added under this heading.

Programmes which select for Honours

Of those programmes which had external requirements (BTechEd, MARPE, BN) they all essentially required everything to be passed at D3 or better to progress. The BN had the additional requirement that at least 40 credits from level 2 should be at grade C or better. The Sub-Committee considered that there was no need to introduce this additional requirement for the other programmes as it was not clear what the benefit of this would be.

Of those programmes selecting for Honours that did not have professional recognition considerations, there appeared to be consensus on the requirements for entry to Honours:

(a) Students entering Honours must have 240 credits at levels 1 and 2.

There was agreement with this.

(b) At least 140 of those credits were to come from the course list appropriate to the programme, defined as subjects which could be taken to Honours level within that programme.

While there was agreement with this, there needed to be clear understanding about what was meant by the 'course list', to ensure that the subject of the degree was reflected appropriately in the curriculum. Any ambiguity would be eliminated once Campus Solutions had set up course lists associated with particular programmes. Until this was in place, a form of words would need to be used that clarified the meaning of this requirement.

Credits at grade D required for entry to Honours.

Further to the discussion above there was also the issue of specifying the number of credits at D or above that should be at level 2. The Sub-Committee agreed that the requirement for 80 of these credits to be at level 2 presented a particular problem where a student took two different subjects in year 2 and did not do well in one of those subjects. It was agreed that this requirement was unnecessary. There were, in any event, pre-requisites for entry to honours in a particular subject that still needed to be satisfied and it was agreed that a specific requirement relating generally to credits at level 2 should not be included.

Pre-requisites

The proposal consulted on was that the minimum requirement for entry to a particular subject would be a grade C or better in 40 credits of that subject at level 2. The Sub-Committee agreed that this should be expressed as an average across the credits, i.e. a grade point average of 12, though with a departmental discretion to admit to Honours below that level (as currently exists). Science had pointed out that there were programmes where the level would have to be set at 30 credits, e.g. in Astronomy where only 30 credits were available at level 2. In order to accommodate such programmes, **the requirement for entry to a particular subject would be stated as a minimum of 30, but normally 40, credits at level 2 at a GPA of 12.** It was also recognised that a discretion, currently exercised in exceptional circumstances by some departments, to admit to Honours on the basis of grade A in level 1 should still be permitted.

First attempt

The consensus was that the standards required for entry to Honours should 'normally be achieved at the first attempt'.

Progress within Honours

One concern raised by LBSS had been the requirements for progress in relation to students returning from an overseas Junior Honours year. In most cases results would

not be known by the start of the final year, with marks often not being converted until December. It was agreed that this should be dealt with by means of a footnote exempting such students from the need to satisfy the requirements before progressing to Senior Honours. This was not considered to represent a significant problem given that the weaker students were unlikely to spend the third year abroad.

The different structures of Honours programmes made it difficult to prescribe a single rule for progress. For example, some programmes involved study at level 3 while others were at level H. **A number of different possibilities had been proposed, but the one that had received most support was:**

To progress from third year to fourth year within Honours, students must achieve an average of D3 in courses taken in third year as part of the Honours programme (with the possibility of adding variants to accommodate professional accreditation requirements).

FBLs had expressed concerns at the effect of the demand for a certain number of grade Ds where students following a joint programme performed substantially worse on one of the two strands. The Sub-Committee agreed that the requirement should simply be expressed in terms of an average of D3, but where there were accreditation requirements, variants would be required.

For progress between years three and four and between years four and five on an integrated Masters, it was agreed that a simple average of C3 would be required, where there were accreditation requirements, variants would again be required. It was noted that there was no case for mirroring the progress requirements applying to the PGT, as the programme structures were significantly different.

2.2 Weighting in calculation of Honours classification

There was wide variation in practice across the University and many different arguments had been put forward in support of the different weightings used. **The Sub-Group agreed to propose to ASC that weighting should normally follow the credit rating of courses taken in the Honours programme (this would usually represent a 50 : 50 weighting). However, where an appropriate rationale was put forward, there could be some variance from this.** One compelling argument for weighting the final year more heavily, for example, would be where the third year was taught at level 3 and the fourth at level H. In such cases a weighting of 30 : 70 or 40 : 60 would be appropriate. In other cases professional accreditation demanded that the calculation be heavily weighted towards the final year.

For new programmes, the structure and the rationale for a weighting which departed from a reflection of the credit rating of the individual courses would need to be laid out in programme approval documentation (and clear guidance both for course teams and for programme approval groups as to what sorts of considerations were relevant would be needed in order to support this). For existing programmes, the arrangements should be scrutinised at DPTLA, with departments asked to highlight in the SER programmes where weighting did not follow the credit rating of courses. Again this would need to be covered in the appropriate briefing. It was noted that all programmes would be being asked to review the weighting rules for their programmes in readiness for implementation of the Campus Solutions system.

It was noted that FBLs had presented an extensive rationale for a model that departed significantly from the norm. It was currently being proposed that all programmes in the Faculty harmonise on a scheme for calculation of Honours classification based entirely on grades achieved in the final year. **It was agreed that this document should be circulated (appendix 1) and that ASC should be asked for its view on this issue.**

Weighting of honours assessment in FBLS

Degree programmes within the Faculty are in the process of harmonising on a scheme for calculation of final honours classification which derives this entirely from grades derived in final year. Not all of these grades are derived from final examinations - assessments and essays in the course of the year feed into them. There is a variety of linked reasons for adopting this method:

1. The two year honours programme operates as an integrated programme with third year feeding into final year.
2. The third year covers broad areas and students progress to more detailed, in depth study of specialised areas in the final year.
3. Employers of graduates are looking in particular at the graduate's command of these specialised areas of study and the mode of classifying honours gives them a means of assessing graduate ability in these areas.
4. The credibility of graduates (and of the degree) depends on the ability of graduates to articulate their understanding of particular aspects of biological and life sciences rather than on their understanding of more general material. This more detailed material is what is covered in final year.

A number of other points may be worth noting:

1. Student performance in third year is not irrelevant, they will still need to meet progress requirements and there appears to be no evidence that students do not take assessment in third year seriously simply because it does not count towards final honours classification.
2. There is some impressionistic evidence that students might be disadvantaged by counting of third year results because of the upward trajectory from second year through third year and into fourth year.
3. Incorporating third year results may, for some of the reasons set out above, have an adverse effect on external perception of the degree.
4. The Glasgow programme would not be unique in calculating honours classification on the basis of final year performance, the same method is adopted at the Universities of Dundee and Aberdeen. In at least the former of these other programmes, such as the MA, base honours classification on all honours courses taken in third and fourth year.