

Academic Policy and Regulations Committee

Title	Liberal Arts and Sciences Programme
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Executive summary	<p>The Liberal Arts and Sciences programmes commenced this session.</p> <p>A key feature of the programme is its greater flexibility, and this requires exemptions from Regulations, particularly in respect of programme structure, progression and degree award.</p> <p>APRC is invited to approve exemptions from Regulations.</p>
Impact on current legislation / codes	Exemptions are sought from sections of Regulations 6 and 7.
Timing of implementation	It is proposed that the exemptions be granted with immediate effect.

LAS Programme and Regulations

It is proposed that the exemptions listed below are listed in the programme specifications as permitted by regulations 6.1.2.(p) (ii)

1. Programme Structure

1.1 Current Regulation 6.1.2 (p) (vii)

Modules taken for an honours degree (480 credits) shall normally:

At Stage 1 be at level C

At Stage 2 be at level I, but may include up to 20 credits at level C

At Stage 3 be at level H but include up to 20 credits at level I

Current Regulation 6.1.2. (p) (viii)

Where an international year of study abroad/industry is included in the programme to which a registered student has been admitted, the year abroad shall be regarded, for purposes of credit and progression, as an additional stage between stages 2 and 3. This element of the programme will normally be assessed and contribute to the final degree classification.

At present, in practice, all BA/B.Sc. Year Abroad/Year in Industry modules are formally at Level I and contribute to the mark for Stage 2 assessment. The level of the modules actually studied, which students are typically required to pass, varies considerably depending on the partner institution.

1.2 Proposal for exemptions from Regulations 6.1.2 (p) (vii)

For the Bachelor of Liberal Arts & Sciences degree (480 credits) the modules taken (480 credits) shall normally:

At Stage 1 (year 1) be at level C;

At Stage 2 (years 2 and 3) be at level C or I or H but shall include at least 100 credits at level I or above;

At Stage 3 (year 4) be at level H, but may include up to 20 credits at level I.

1.3 Rationale

Given the nature of the LAS Programme, with the aim of allowing students to explore a range of subjects and to build up breadth, as well as depth, it is clearly a very different programme to others across the University. It has been structured in part in response to discussions with employers which have shown that they value breadth of study as well as depth – these proposals will facilitate that breadth. The proposed exemptions also enable us to mimic the structure and flexibility of a typical US Liberal Arts degree. The proposed structure will allow LAS students to explore a variety of majors and either to progress to the study of Level I modules in Year 2 or continue to expand their breadth (up to 100 credits at level C in year 2) or some mixture of both. Year 3 will typically involve Level I or level H credits but may, subject to meeting the usual progression requirements to enter the final year, also include further level C modules. This may

mean that over years 2 and 3 there will be fewer modules at level I (potentially the normal 100 required of a three-year degree rather than 200 or more in a traditional four-year degree).

Students will still be required to have achieved the usual requirements to enter the final year of at least 100 credits at Level I (to include at least 60 credits at level I (or above) in any proposed major). In the final year they must fulfil the same requirements as other candidates, that is they must take at least 100 credits at level H. The final year will contribute 75% of the marks for the degree in the usual way (see below).

2. Progression

See Options Briefing paper for context and rationale

It is proposed that any necessary exemptions requested below are listed in the programme specifications as permitted by regulations 7.3.1 (a) (i) and 7.3.1 (b) (iv)

2.1 Current Regulation 7.3.1. (a) (i)

Registered students are required to pass 100 credits at a given stage of a programme in order to progress to the subsequent stage.

Proposal for Exemption

Registered Students are required to pass 100 credits at stage 1 of the degree and 300 by the end of stage 2 (i.e. years 2 and 3).

Current Regulation 7.3.1. (a) (iii)

To be eligible for progression to any year abroad/in industry required by the programme, the preceding credit requirements (stated above) must have been satisfied. For eligibility to progress to the stage of the programme following the year abroad/in industry, that year must be passed satisfactorily (i.e. at least 100 credits attained).

Proposal for Exemption

To be eligible for progression to the year abroad/in industry required by the programme, registered students must have passed at least 100 credits in Year 2.

- 2.2 Rationale: Taken together 7.3.1.(i) & (iii) allows a modest relaxation of the usual requirements to respond to the challenge by employers to permit students to take more risks and experiment with modules which require alternative skills. The overall progression requirement to Stage 3 remains the same.

3. Award

3.1 Current Regulation 7.3.1 (b) (ii)

A registered student must achieve the credit requirements indicated below in order to be eligible for the Award of the specified degree:

Classified bachelors degrees with honours (480 credit programmes)

At least 440 credits, including:

- at least 100 credits at level C or above
- at least 300 credits at level I and H, including at least 100 at level H or above

3.2 Proposal for Exemption

For a classified bachelor's degree with honours:

At least 400 credits, including:

- at least 200 credits at level C or above
- at least 200 credits at level I and H or above, including
- at least 100 credits at level H or above.

4. Definition of a Major Field

The following definition of a major pathway (field) is proposed:

For the Liberal Arts & Sciences Degree a student shall qualify for a major field in their degree title, and the corresponding designation of B.Sc. or B.A. as appropriate, provided that they complete at least 160 credits in that subject with at least 60 credits at both levels I and H (or a double major field if they complete 160 credits in two subjects), and a minor field if they complete 120 credits with at least 40 credits at both levels I and H.

5. Degree-Classification Rules

5.1 Current Regulation 7.3.1 (d)

- (i) Marks from the stages of a programme shall contribute to the classification of the degree in the following proportions
- (ii) Programmes with modules at levels C to H.
Stage 1 - 0
Stage 2 - 25%
Stage 3 - 75%
- (iii) Classified Honours Degrees
Final awards will be calculated using a scheme or schemes based on weighted mean taking account of the credit value and level of the modules concerned as agreed by the Senate or under delegated authority (see above).

5.2 Proposal for Exemption

For the purposes of degree classification for the Liberal Arts & Sciences undergraduate degree, the calculation of the stage 2 mark (worth 25%) shall be based on 120 credits worth of module marks, including at least 100 Level I credits (or above), provided that these include at least 60 credits of Level I or above) marks from any proposed subject major.

Rationale: See Options Briefing Document.

Options briefing paper in relation to Regulation 7 as it applies to the Liberal Arts & Sciences

This paper provides a briefing in relation to the options for degree classification which arise from the decision to allow University of Birmingham Liberal Arts & Sciences greater flexibility in the structure of their degree in years 2 & 3 (the year abroad), mirroring the flexibility of a normal US Liberal Arts degree. Note the requirements for the Final year are identical to all other BA/BSc programmes.

Background:

There is no presumption that a Liberal Arts & Sciences student will definitively have settled on a major in Year 1 of their programme. It is actually one of the distinctive selling points of the programme that we, like US Liberal Arts programmes, allow students to study a variety of things in years 1 & 2 before (usually) settling on a major by the end of Year 2.¹ Thus, in Year 2, a student may progress beyond year 1, by pursuing greater depth (taking level I modules, building on modules from a potential major studied in year 1), or by completing Level C progression requirements (building on a module from year 1), or by continuing to expand their breadth (taking Level C modules in new subjects), or some mixture of the above.

This will in turn determine what they can, and may have to, study during their year abroad if they wish to graduate with a particular subject major. Thus, if necessary they will have to complete any pre-requisites for their proposed major at one of our select number of (predominantly U21) Liberal Arts & Sciences international partners during that year. As a result, Year 3 can involve a mixture of Level, C, I or H modules subject to meeting the normal final-year entry requirements of: *At least 100 credits of Level I (or above), and for consideration for a major, 100 credits of subject-based knowledge (i.e. excluding skills) with at least 60 credits at level I* (exactly the same as JH).

Implications:

This structure has implications for the portfolios of modules which students may hold when it comes to classifying their degree in the final year.

Thus at two extremes, we could find ourselves sitting in an exam board meeting in four years' time with students with the following portfolios:

	Range	Certificate Level (C)	Intermediate Level (I)	Honours Level (H)	Total
Lib Arts & Sc's	Upper End	120	120	240	480
Lib Arts & Sc's	Lower End	260	120	100	480
Normal 3 Year BA/BSc degree	Upper End	120	120	120	360
	Lower End	140	120	100	360
Normal degree with Year Abroad	Upper End	120	240	120	480
	Lower End	140	240	100	480

¹ Note a very small percentage of students in the US would not graduate with a major, but that is not to suggest that their portfolio is random. Thus, it would be possible for a LAS student to assemble a major which focussed on gender issues in English, African Studies, European Studies, Anthropology and Sociology. It might also be possible for a student to develop a portfolio which reflected alternative biological and psychological perspectives on decision making in economics without qualifying for a major in any one discipline.

As a result we need to review the current degree-class determination formula to consider the implications of the potential real or perceived impact on degree class of differences in module-level profile, due to any real or perceived differences in marking patterns across levels.

Encouraging risk-taking:

We have one additional challenge which we wish to embrace in the context of Liberal Arts & Sciences: In several meetings we had with employers during the development process they voiced concerns that in addition to becoming increasingly specialised from age 16 onwards, students are becoming more and more focussed on doing only what they are good at. They wanted us to find a way to challenge students to take things they were not good at, for example, languages, some STEM breadth subjects etc, where they could not only increase their range of skills, but learn to cope with the difficulties of doing things outside their comfort zone. We considered the option of making things compulsory but recognised that this ran the risk of severely limiting our market (for example, less than a third of students do a language beyond the age of 16). Instead we agreed to encourage students to undertake new challenges without the penalty of damaging their potential degree class. The proposals below reflect this decision.

Current situation

At present a degree class is calculated on the basis of 75% for the final year (minimum 100 credits at level H) and 25% for stage 2 consisting either of 120 credits (minimum 100 credits at level I) in Year 2 of a three-year degree or 12.5% each for Years 2 and the Year Abroad in Stage 2 of a four-year degree. That is, all 240 credits are equally weighted in Stage 2 of a four-year degree. There is some variability of assessment of the Year Abroad but the dominant model is an assessment at Level I of a piece of work set and marked by the University of Birmingham with an additional requirement that the student passes the modules taken at the partner University, regardless of whether those modules are at level C, I or H.

Liberal Arts & Sciences: Considerations and Options:

Given that the final year of the Liberal Arts & Sciences follows the same model as all other degrees there seems little reason to treat it any differently for classification purposes (save possibly to increase its weight).

Thus the problem discussed below amounts to the way we choose to treat the following two extreme portfolios:

	Range	2 nd Year		Year Abroad		End of Stage 2		Final Year	
Lib Arts & Sc's	Upper End	Level I	120	Level H	120	Level H	120	Level H	120
		Level C	0	Level I	0	Level I	120	Level I	0
Lib Arts & Sc's	Lower End	Level I	20	Level I	80	Level I	100	Level H	100
		Level C	100	Level C	40	Level C	140	Level C	20

In particular, we have to consider how to classify two students both of whom will have at least 100 credits at Level I, while one may have 120 credits at Level H (plus a further 20 credits at Level I) and the other 140 credits at level C.²

Five challenges for Liberal Arts & Sciences:

1. Do marking patterns vary between levels such that a student with the 'upper level' LAS credit profile is more or less likely to get a first-class honours or 2.1 than the student with the 'lower-level' LAS credit profile?
2. Regardless of whether marking patterns vary across levels, are student likely to perceive that a particular module-level profile is more or less likely to yield a first-class honours or 2.1. encouraging them to modify their choice of Level?
3. Do marking patterns vary between subjects such that two LAS students with different majors but an otherwise identical set of subject modules at each level may be more or less likely to get a first-class honours, 2.1 etc.? (The sciences [Code of Practice on Adjusted Regulations](#) problem).
4. Is it likely that, compared with single-honours students with a similar or lower University entry grades, LAS students who take a wide mix of subjects (wider than both JH and Natural Sciences) run the risk of a lower exit profile? Is this likely to affect a student's choice of modules and hence their overall breadth?
5. Is it likely that, having experimented with new subjects in Year 1, student will stop experimenting in Year 2 if they get lower grades outside their proposed major if they believe that such grades will count towards their degree class?

It is important to stress that there is no answer solution to these challenges and all the options considered below have their pros and cons.

A point to remember:

In the current four-year degree classification each 10 credit module at Stage 2 is worth 1.042% of the grade profile. A rise/ fall of 10 per cent in the module grade will increase/reduces the overall average by 0.1042%. So the effect of one good or one poor module under the existing rules is fairly marginal. It is the general performance which is more important than any specific module. Nevertheless, it is perceptions that matter for student choices and actions, and the perceived impact of a good/poor grade may be much larger than its reality in a student cohort that has come from a particularly exam and grade driven system.

Possible Options:

1. Shift the full weight of the degree classification to the final year.
2. Maintain the existing 25% weighting associated with Stage 2, but in order to avoid real or possible perceived upward bias due to students with a significant number of predominantly Level C modules in their portfolio at stage 2, or to avoid real or perceived

² A possible solution is to treat all Level C modules in Stage 2 a bit like graduate and post-graduate degrees: that is to define them as Stage 2 in time but at level C and come up with new module descriptions and assessments for each. It is questionable whether that is academically appropriate, but it would be certainly be administratively prohibitive.

downward bias due to taking more difficult level H modules on the year abroad, adopt a modified rule:

Some Potential Rules

- 2.1. The Gymnastics Solution: Delete the top 40 and lowest 40 credits and weight the remaining 160 credits equally, regardless of level.
- 2.2. Delete the lowest 40 credits and weight the remaining 200 credits equally, regardless of level.
- 2.3. Only include level I modules, up to a maximum of 200 credits.
- 2.4. Include all Level I and H modules up to a maximum of 200 credits (and ? if necessary to produce the normal 120 credits, 20 credits of level C).
- 2.5. Delete lowest 40 credits and include remaining 200 credits but give Level I credits a higher weight than level C or H modules.
- 2.6. Deploy usual three-year rule and ignore 'extra' C, I or level H modules. That is, include 120 credits including 100 at Level I (or above), to include 60 credits at Level I (or above) for any subject major.

Evaluation:

1. This would encourage significant risk taking at Stage 2 but students might object that it results in all the weighting being on the final year and there is a danger that students would not work as diligently as we would like during Stage 2.
2.
 - 2.1. Has the risk of being perceived as unfair to someone with good results at the upper end, particularly if these were at Level H. Doesn't address issues in relation to real or perceived differences in level and hence gaming of levels outside of the 100 Level I credits required for progression.
 - 2.2. Doesn't address issues in relation to real or perceived differences in level and hence gaming of levels outside of the 100 Level I credits required for progression.
 - 2.3. Could result in only 100 credits being counted. Ensures equal treatment of LAS students with respect to the 100 Level I credits required for progression. May ignore better level H results during Year Abroad on the one hand and doesn't address issues in relation to real or perceived differences in level on the other. This gives the possibility of gaming of levels outside of the 100 Level I credits required for progression. For example, if a student achieves good grades in 100 credits of Level I in Year 2, how does that affect his/her behaviour on the Year abroad?
 - 2.4. Ditto.
 - 2.5. Ditto, except that everyone would count 200 credits, including potentially 100 credits of level C.
 - 2.6. Avoids gaming issues associated with choice of Levels of study and ensures equal treatment of LAS students with respect to the 100 Level I (or above) credits required for progression. It has the merits of being the same as the current three-year degree, effectively ignoring the additional C, I and H modules. Has risk of lack of due diligence in relation to a subset of the latter. It has the merits of reducing risk of degree-class

deflation due to a wide mix of subjects. Has the merits of (hopefully) avoiding the need to make special provision for Adjusted Regulations associated with a major in some sciences.

Thus, Option 6:

For the purposes of degree classification for the Liberal Arts & Sciences undergraduate degree, the calculation of the stage 2 mark (worth 25%) shall be based on 120 credits worth of module marks, including at least 100 Level I credits (or above), provided that these include at least 60 credits of Level I or above) marks from any proposed subject major.

has to my mind the most to commend it on grounds that

- a) it offers equity of treatment ensures equal treatment of LAS students with respect to the 100 Level I (or above) credits required for progression,
- b) it is a compromise solution to the risk of upward as well as downward bias relative to students on other programmes,
- c) it offers equity of treatment of LAS students by comparison with the current three-year degree classification rules,
- d) its ability to encourage risk-taking in areas where skill are weak,
- e) its ability to mitigate risk of degree-class deflation due to lack of specialisation
- f) its potential capacity to cope with Alternative Science Rules scenario

There is a risk of a lack of due diligence by students on some subset of Stage 2 modules. However, all students admitted to the programme do so through a lengthy interview and selection process. Integrity, a record of determination to succeed, and a commitment to learning about a wide range of things are key elements in selection. All these elements, along with the more intensive tutoring process associated with the programme, serve to mitigate this risk.