

UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

For the meeting of the Senate to be held on 12 October 2015

Accreditation of Placement Year in Industry and Year Abroad**1. Introduction**

Currently undergraduate degree courses offer a range of opportunities for students to take a year working in industry or studying abroad in a range of forms: an additional, intercalated year or an integrated year, replacing a year of study at Warwick; compulsory or optional; carrying credit towards the degree or unaccredited. However it is now a condition of the University's Erasmus Charter that sending universities recognise all credit awarded by receiving universities and count this towards the student's degree. This paper therefore sets out options for amendments to courses to ensure that alignment to Erasmus Charter requirements. In order to ensure consistency and fairness of treatment it is also proposed that such approaches are applied to those periods of study abroad or to work in industry to which Erasmus funding does not apply. What is set out here is also designed to support the University's strategic objectives to enhance the mobility of students and their graduate employability.

2. Progress to Date

Initial discussions were held with those departments most likely to be impacted early in the summer. The Steering Committee considered a paper setting out the issues and proposed timescales at its meeting on 15 June 2015 (Paper SC.152/14-15 {restricted}) and agreed that no changes should be made until 2016/17 to allow further planning to be undertaken. It was also recognised that no changes could be made for current students which would disadvantage them and that proposals should take this into consideration.

Further discussions have since taken place with the following departments on options and implications:

- Chemistry
- English
- History
- Law
- Life Sciences
- Modern Foreign Languages and Cultures
- Politics and International Studies
- Psychology
- Theatre Studies
- Warwick Business School

In light of these discussions the following proposals are set out for the consideration of the Steering Committee.

3. Definitions

For the purpose of this paper the following terminology will be used:

- Integrated year abroad/period of work in industry: a period which is integrated into the standard period of study, replacing time normally spent studying at Warwick. This would already carry credit towards a degree.
- Additional year: a period of study abroad or working in industry which is in addition to the standard length of an undergraduate degree. This has typically been named

an 'intercalated' year at the University of Warwick. However as an intercalated year should normally involve suspension of studies for a period, this would not apply in this instance.

- Placement year: either of the above options. Placements will also include periods of professional practice but these are not included in the scope of this paper.

4. Principles

The value of a Warwick degree is enhanced if students are able to demonstrate that their degree recognises success in a different academic and cultural context. An essential component of a placement abroad is gained through the intercultural experience of being abroad which cannot always be captured through marks. At the same time, the academic value of the student's study must be recognised in appropriate ways, as part of a Warwick degree.

The following principles will underpin the recognition of the credits earned by students while on placement years:

- Equity of experience should be ensured for all students.
- Partner organisations are selected on the basis that they are able to offer students the opportunity to achieve what is required of them during placement periods.
- Systems for recognition of credit should not be unnecessarily burdensome in their implementation.
- Where possible, marks awarded by partner universities to students studying abroad should directly contribute to the mark awarded by the University of Warwick for this period.
- Accurate information is made available to students in advance to support them in their decision about placement years.

In order to secure implementation of these principles the following considerations will be applied:

- Credit earned through activities undertaken at partner organisations must meet the standards required for the award of the University's qualifications and contribute to the achievement of stated course learning outcomes.
- Students must pass the placement year in order to proceed to the next year of study. It follows that students must be given the earliest possible opportunity to remedy failure. If the student still does not pass the placement year the student will default to the degree without the placement year which may be awarded if the student meets the learning outcomes for that degree.
- Students should be provided with appropriate support in the preparation for and during their periods of placement, and this must have academic approval from the department.
- Credit earned while on placement periods will contribute towards students' degrees through recognition on the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). All marks earned abroad will be translated into Warwick equivalents for the purposes of the HEAR, to University-wide standards. This will enhance the transparency of marks for employers; it will also enable the University to better understand how our students perform overseas and to monitor student performance across institutions.
- The establishment of a university-wide framework for recognising credits will set a minimum standard, and should help departments that wish to recognise marks earned abroad on particular courses, through university-agreed marks conversion schemes.

The Steering Committee is recommended to comment on the principles above, such that the Steering Committee's view can inform the consideration of the Senate.

5. Models for the Award of Credit

In developing a framework for credit recognition the University needs to provide the flexibility to allow departments to adapt it to the needs of their students, while also providing a clear structure within which departments can recognize credits for study abroad, work abroad and work in the UK.

5.1 Study Abroad

There are two models for study abroad: additional period of study abroad (usually a year as it is, in addition to the standard length of degree) or an integrated period of study abroad.

In either case, it is essential that departments take responsibility for the academic support of the student studying abroad. This must be based on confidence in the academic rigour with which partner institutions teach the students; that students have to adapt to the norms and standards of the partner institution; and that:

- The University has assurance that the study taken abroad fits with the overall objectives of the Warwick course
- Departments know (and approve) which modules (or equivalent units of study) are taken by students overseas
- Students take an appropriate number of credits or their equivalent
- Students know where to turn to for help in the host institution and at Warwick concerning academic, administrative and welfare matters.
- Students are appropriately supported before, during and after their placement period.
- There is institutional oversight and consistency in the conversion of marks to their Warwick equivalent.

Students should be sent only to institutions which will provide an excellent student experience. Normally, this means sending students to leading institutions nationally and internationally. This should not prevent us from sending students to institutions in less developed educational systems, nor should it deflect from the intercultural value of studying abroad, which goes far beyond academic study (but which may be much more difficult to assess). However we must have confidence that the educational experience can be counted towards a Warwick degree and is commensurate with the standards and quality the University maintains for its students taught at Warwick. Students may also be asked to undertake reflective assessments to demonstrate the wider skills and personal development achieved through the period.

In order to ensure that, in future, partner organisations are able to offer an appropriate experience to our students, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee has agreed that the approval of proposed exchange partners lie with its International Sub-Group. Criteria and guidance for the selection of exchange partners is under development.

5.1.2 Integrated Placement

Options for integrated study are:

- Part-year study abroad - students will study abroad for the autumn or spring term in Year 2, for the equivalent of 60 credits – and their marks will be translated in full, with 50% of their second-year mark derived from converting the marks earned abroad into a Warwick degree.

- It is also possible to accommodate other periods of student placement, e.g. where students go abroad or work in industry in order to complete a project supervised by their home department.
- Full year abroad: It may also be possible for students to go abroad for a whole year (out of three), being awarded 120 credits. In this case the year abroad would carry the same weighting in the calculation of degree classification as the equivalent year at Warwick would have done.

In order for this approach to provide for an appropriate quality of experience, students must take courses at institutions which can offer an equivalent academic experience. The learning outcomes for the degree awarded by Warwick must be met within the three-year course and the content of modules and their learning outcomes must be reviewed to ensure that this is the case. Schemes for the conversion of marks from a number of countries and, where appropriate, individual institutions, are under development by the Office for Global Engagement, to support this approach. Approved mark conversion schemes must be used in this instance.

Where departments already offer this approach, no changes would be required, other than ensuring that the institution and mark conversion scheme had the necessary approvals.

5.1.3 Additional Year Abroad Placement

All credits and marks earned abroad will be included on the HEAR but will not initially contribute to the degree classification, unless such an arrangement is already in place (as is the case in the Warwick Business School, the Law School and Comparative American Studies). Students must however pass the year abroad to progress to the next year of study.

Under this approach students would take a third year abroad as part of a four-year bachelor's degree, or a fourth year abroad as part of a five year integrated master's degree. Previously such a bachelor's degree would usually have carried 360 credits, and an integrated master's 480 credits, unless the department already awards some credit for the year abroad. In this option, students taking the four year bachelor's degree would be awarded 480 credits and students taking a five year integrated master's would be awarded 600 credits.

5.2 Work Abroad and in the UK

The framework we adopt for students on placements abroad should be easily adaptable to students going on placements within the UK. As with study abroad the University must be assured that:

- Work placements offer students the opportunity to undertake work relevant to the discipline they are studying and which contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes for their course.
- Departments ensure that students will be appropriately supported and supervised before, during and after their placement.
- Placements are approved prior to a student commencing their study.
- Assessments set for students during the placement enable students to demonstrate the achievement of the stated learning outcomes.

A number of optional approaches to the award of credit have been discussed with departmental representatives and are now being proposed:

5.2.1 Integrated part year placement

Students may undertake a shorter term work placement (e.g. 3 months) which may replace a research project undertaken at Warwick. Students are assessed using the same methods as would be used for the research project at Warwick.

5.2.2 Additional part and full year placement

Where students work abroad for a term (combined work placement and university study) or for a year, students will be assessed for the work undertaken (which will count for 60 credits for each part-year period) through appropriate assessment, which may include a reflective logbook, oral examinations upon return, and so on. This will be marked at Warwick. Departments will need to have an appropriate module approved and a template module is being developed. Departments must also verify the quality of the work placement, noting that it may be the students' responsibility to find suitable work placements.

5.3 Remedying failure

As students are required to pass the year abroad, opportunities should also be provided to students to remedy failure. The following mechanisms are recommended:

- 5.3.1 Study Abroad: where possible, students should resit assessments or examinations while at their host institution. However it is recognised that this may not be feasible and in such circumstances, students should be set an assignment designed at Warwick which assesses the generic learning outcomes for the placement year (see Section 5.1.3). This may be based on existing reflective models of assessment.
- 5.3.2 Work Placement: where a student is undertaking a short term placement replacing a research project at Warwick, they should be reassessed using the approaches in place for the Warwick modules.
- 5.3.3 Where a student fails a full year placement the year abroad following a resit assessment, they will be required to transfer to a variant of the degree which does not include a placement year. This will ensure that students can proceed to complete a degree at the University.

6. **Timescales for Implementation**

While the University needs to ensure that its policies are aligned to those required by the Erasmus Charter, it is also necessary to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by changes. It is also necessary that both current and prospective students have correct and timely information prior to making decisions about courses of study and optional intercalated years.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) guidance for HE providers, published in March 2015, provides additional mechanisms for undergraduate students to raise concerns of a potential breach of consumer law such as significant changes to a course part way through. It also sets out requirements about the information which should be made available to prospective students.

It is necessary therefore that decisions are made and communicated to prospective students before they begin to accept offers in autumn 2015 and before students make decisions about placement years where this is optional. While the course structures of current students would still be changing part way through their degree, students would be notified well in

advance of opting to do an intercalated/year abroad, where this is the case. It would also enable them to make decisions on what they would do during this year, informed by the knowledge of the implications for their degree.

It is therefore proposed that the additional year placement will be credit-bearing for all undergraduate students from 2016/17. Credit and marks gained will therefore be shown on students' HEARs. Those departments which already award credit and marks for the year abroad will continue to do so.

The Steering Committee is recommended to comment on the above proposal for the introduction of credit for the year abroad and year in industry, such that the Steering Committee's view can inform the consideration of the Senate

7. Next Steps and Longer Term Developments

Should the Senate approve the proposals above, further work will be required to:

- Amend Regulation 8 for First Degrees to reflect the changes in progression requirements
- Course approval process: permission to develop new course specifications, where required.
- Develop template modules for placements on which course-specific outcomes could be added.
- Communicate to students and applicants the arrangements for recognition of credit.
- Develop guidance on transferral of marks awarded overseas and on equivalency of credit for those institutions not using the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation Scheme (ECTS).

In the longer term it is the intention to move towards a greater integration of study and work placements for students into their degrees, particularly seeking options for part-year mobility. This would contribute to the University's strategy to increase mobility of students as well as enhancing employability. It would mitigate against some of the concerns students may have about taking a full additional placement year.

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