

Consideration of changes required to support additional entry points in the Academic Year

1. Background

- 1.1 In June 2014, a meeting was held between Academic Registry and administrative colleagues in SML to discuss SML's requirements for a January intake from January 2015; it was envisaged by SML that this would result in a significant additional intake of students in January each year. This would involve additional work for the Student Systems Unit (SSU), Information Services (IS) and Academic Registry (AR) in adapting Student Administration Systems (SAS) and student processes to manage a January intake. SML's request highlighted a recurring issue relating to the requirement for a January intake which had been raised by a number of areas of the University eg SBE, Dubai, West London College.
- 1.2 Further discussion took place at the July SAS Management Group (with representation from School Heads of Administration, LTB and central services). The feeling of the Group was that, as such an initiative would result in opportunities for growth in student numbers, it was likely that other Schools will wish to follow suit with January intakes as a standard activity and therefore the requirement to accommodate this within SAS is likely to escalate. However, members felt that there should initially be a discussion of the proposal at LTB to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the detailed requirements from Schools for additional intakes (for example, whether more additional entry points – such as April - might also be required) and of the work entailed if the University does decide to adopt this approach, and the resultant impact on resources.
- 1.3 On the plus side, such a development would mean that there was no longer a need to manage (albeit smaller numbers of) January intakes through the time-consuming ad hoc workarounds that currently have to be employed. These can result in inconsistencies, difficulty in maintenance, delays in student transfer to subsequent programmes, poor student experience (eg with content of transcripts and graduation timing) and other unintended consequences. As such, the developments required would be beneficial in the long run. However, there would be a considerable amount of reconfiguration work and process change required, in particular for IS, SSU and Academic Registry, and resources would have to be available for multiple functions at multiple points of the academic year to support different student cohorts at various stages of their studies.
- 1.4 The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) (DP) was alerted to the increasing number of ad hoc requests coming forward for additional entry points in the academic year, particularly in light of the current strategy for alignment of the existing academic year structure which it was thought would result in less need for ad hoc arrangements. Confirmation is therefore being sought that the University does wish to proceed with the proposal which will require the adaptation of systems and processes to accommodate January intakes to various programmes as a matter of course. There would be additional central and School costs/ resource implications, depending on the extent of the changes identified by LTB as being required. If approved by LTB, the next stage would be for a full Project Proposal to be initiated.

2. Comments from the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching)

- 2.1 Delivery should, as a general rule, follow the single academic year as summarised in L&T Briefing Paper 3:
<http://www1.hw.ac.uk/committees/ltb/resources/briefing-structureacademicyear.pdf>
- 2.2 There may be circumstances in which there is a clear business case for offering alternative start dates and, in such circumstances, the possibility should not be ruled out – particularly where, for example, establishment of a new campus brings the need to scale up student numbers rapidly. The DP (L&T) recommends that, once such arrangements have matured, they should be reviewed (through AMR or Academic Review processes) and it is anticipated that they could be brought back into line with the single academic year.

- 2.3 Permanent exceptions to the single academic year would require both an academic and business justification and, while the former is dealt with on behalf of Senate by the Studies Committees at the approval stage, the latter would need to be undertaken via the Business Approval process. Exceptions, temporary or permanent, entail additional cost not only for the School involved, but also for the Academic Registry, Student Systems Unit and Information Services. In the interests of transparency, these additional costs need to be clearly identified, quantified and then fed into the business decision-making process. Furthermore, it would not be equitable if Schools requiring bespoke arrangements for a number of programmes were to pass on the cost of these to central services (in terms of additional staff time and resource) or to other Schools.
- 2.4 The first stage of consideration of this proposal would be to bring a paper to LTB for a discussion.

3 Operational Considerations

- 3.1 A note of the operational issues so far identified as needing to be considered is provided in Appendix A to this paper. Comments have been provided by a number of Schools, IS, SSU and AR.

4 Resources

- 4.1 The Director of IS notes that the Banner Student System (SAS Banner) is the key to all of this; other student-related systems (eg IDM, email, Vision, printing etc) are all driven by SAS. It is Banner which informs the other systems that a given student is registered and enrolled on a particular programme/ course, with specific start and end dates etc. In order to allow programmes to begin and end at arbitrary times of the year, these start and end dates, and all intermediate waypoints, need to be disconnected from any concept of academic year or semester. Sizing the amount of change required in SAS alone is a feasibility project that will occupy at least one analyst for many weeks.
- 4.2 The Head of the Student Systems Unit (SSU) has worked with IS to put together some ball park estimates (Appendix B) for each of the areas of HWU's student systems which would require to be changed. For each area a range estimate is indicated, and a figure added for contingency (following the Government 'Supplementary Green Book Guidance' on reducing the impact of optimism bias in early estimates for IT projects):

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/systems/uploads/attachment_data/file/191507/Optimism_bias.pdf

The overall range is broad eg 9 to 21 months' effort split between SSU and IS, with several months of data updates to be carried out by Schools to fit with the new frameworks. There would also be a management overhead of at least 10% (SSU can provide the table of estimates showing how these figures were calculated, but acknowledges that there are uncertainties within the figures). The duration of work would vary, depending on the number of staff involved and the percentage of their time they could dedicate to this project.

- 4.4 For the Academic Registry, if the proposal for January (and other additional) intake points goes ahead as a standard offering from HWU, most of the operational processes currently undertaken would need to be repeated at additional points in the year, regardless of the numbers being admitted; it is difficult to envisage how this could be achieved without additional members of staff to support the processes for multiple cohorts and their specific requirements.

The Head of Registry Operations has added information to Appendix B relating to Academic Registry resources, following consultation with relevant members of staff within the section. However, there are a number of unknowns and it has only been possible to provide ballpark figures until there is more clarity on the University's requirements.

4.5 This exercise has highlighted the magnitude of change required to allow multiple entry points to programmes at HWU. However, to achieve more certainty, this would need to be carefully reviewed as part of a strategic project in order to understand what the University requires and provide options, and then more accurately scope and identify resources. SSU and IS consider that the initial stage of such an investigation is likely to involve ~2 months' effort for a Business Analyst (BA), working in conjunction with a designated project team, and assuming that the BA has adequate access to stakeholders.

5 Request to Learning & Teaching Board

5.1 A considerable amount of work would be required for major reconfiguration of student systems and student processes to accommodate a second intake of students in January (and possibly at additional points) during each academic year as a standardised business process at HWU. In view of this and the growing number of requests from Schools for additional entry points for significant numbers of students, a decision needs to be made by LTB as to whether the University wishes to pursue this option further. LTB will need to consider whether it is serious about pursuing this additional flexibility in HWU's systems and what priority it would place upon such an exercise against all of the other competing developments in progress. If LTB supports such a proposal, it is recommended that the University Executive should also give consideration to this matter and that, if approved by UE, the next stage should be for the University to set up a Strategic Project and develop a full Business Case.

Kathy Patterson, Academic Registrar and Deputy Secretary

Mike Roch, Director, Information Services

Marcus Gilchrist, Head of Student Systems Unit

Karen McArthur, Head of Registry Operations

September 2014

APPENDIX A: OPERATIONAL ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

1. **Information Services (IS)** colleagues have noted that the University's support systems, in particular SAS and Vision are set up to efficiently support the standard operating process of the University. Any change to the normal working process of the University has cost associated with it. The changes required need to be balanced against the perceived benefit of deviating from normal operating procedures. In IS, manual workarounds are currently provided to support student enrolment, creating of IT accounts and email, registration on courses, and feeding data into downstream systems such as Vision. This typically involves manual processes for: extraction of information, manipulation of data, and import to another system. IS has confirmed that following a rebuild of systems to accommodate a flexible academic year (instead of the current single academic year), much less manual processing would be required; however, the work required for the rebuild would be significant and should not be underestimated.
2. **The Student Systems Unit (SSU)** team has noted that if arrangements for cohorts starting in January continue to be brought back into line with the main academic year subsequent to their enrolment (as currently happens), this is less problematic ie if students must then re-enrol each September, and have progression decisions and graduations at the same time as for the current main cohort of students. Nevertheless, the growth in student numbers envisaged through a second intake point would be likely to have an impact on resources required at multiple points of the academic year. However, if more flexibility across the whole academic year cycle is being considered, this would be a much greater task because the current set-up of the academic year is intrinsic to the way SAS is configured. This would mean completely re-developing and maintaining SAS (and eg PAMS and the VLE) to manage overlapping but distinct academic year cohorts and running of programmes.
3. **IS and SSU** have further noted that to implement this functionality as anything other than a series of work-arounds designed specifically to accommodate a January exception, the student systems would need to be developed to allow for intakes at any point and so involve an almost complete overhaul of the systems. However, the benefits that would ensue include that the systems could be designed to accommodate more flexibility for further changes, for example, if additional intake points might be required in the future (eg April or May or for exceptional intakes).
4. **The Academic Registry and School Heads of Administration** identified the following areas that would need to be considered if the proposal to accommodate a large intake of additional students in January (or at other times of the academic year) was accepted:
 - Summer period (raised by SBE) and whether this should be accepted as a teaching period. If so, then systems would need to recognise this. However, it could have a major impact on academic staff and time for research over the summer. If not, then the question arises of how the gap in the middle of the 'year' for January intakes is managed
 - Multiple rollover points for student records (as an example of a current issue, IDL students who enrol and pay for courses in August cannot view these until September when all annual enrolments are pulled through from Banner into Vision as part of rollover)
 - Redesign of programme structures to accommodate overlapping academic years (would need redesign of PAMS for example)
 - Support for admissions and enrolment for January (or other) in-takes
 - Identification and accommodation of schedules for different student cohorts in systems
 - Timetabling (including classes and exams running at different times within each student cohort academic year cycle)
 - Resit and progression rules – and mechanisms to accommodate different rollover points for students on different academic year cycles
 - Production of transcripts which are not based on current academic year progression (the question was raised as to whether this could be run on a semester-to-semester progression basis)
 - Changes to regulations, policies and procedures
5. Further consultation took place with relevant colleagues in the **Academic Registry (AR)** to encompass Student Records, Timetabling, Exams and Management Information. The issues

identified are based on the assumption that there would be no teaching on campus over the summer (however, it is appreciated that this has still to be confirmed).

Support for admissions and enrolment for January in-takes

- New Student Guide will need to be produced prior to January
- Pre-enrolment record checks will need to be carried out
- Staff resources for enrolment events (PC labs and main events, including late enrolment) (Schools, AR, SSC and other Professional services)
- Programme structures will need to be revised to avoid problems with course registration; different version of programmes for different in-takes.
- Will January intakes need to enrol again in September before continuing in the same stage/year?
- Will the structure continue so that in the following year, students will start the next year of study in the following January and enrol again at that point?
- Space resources for enrolment events on-campus

Timetabling (including classes and exams across different periods)

- Increase in student numbers would have an impact on teaching space capacity and whether there is sufficient space to accommodate additional teaching
- Revision and updates to programme structures would have a major impact on class timetabling, first to update the programmes/courses and then to reschedule activities
- The University would need to consider how synoptic courses and courses with prerequisites are managed within a January in-take structure
- Increase in student numbers would also have an impact on exam timetabling, including identification of venues and invigilator resources (and staff resources from Estate Office)
- If students take semester 2 exams in December, timing of resits would need to be considered (eg April/May?). Would students then have to wait to continue into the next year of study in September?
- If January in-take students study off-campus, there could be an impact on timetabling exams in accordance with the timezones policy due to the increase in student numbers in different locations.

Resit and progression rules, and changing the annual point of rollover as well as timing of exam boards

- Consideration of the resources required to manage exam boards following the December diet exams, including academic and administrative resources in Schools and AR.
- The processes currently carried out over the summer for exam boards, releasing results, rolling records, creating resit records would all have to be undertaken between the end of December and January
- Implications for processes surrounding resit registrations

Production of transcripts that are not based on current academic year progression (for example, could we run from semester to semester progression instead?)

- Currently, assessment results letters (transcripts) are only produced by AR at the point of exit, but if students are completing in December, this process will need to be carried out following award boards (see below). However, the issue of how these are produced when spanning two years is the same, unless they can be run semester to semester.

Impact on graduation and the timing of ceremonies

- If January in-take students complete in December, the timing of award boards would need to be considered. This will have implications for staff resources and the limited time to carry out all associated processes.
- Resources to produce assessment results letters following the award boards

- There would have to be consideration of whether students would be expected to wait until June to graduate.

Other

- There will be implications for statutory returns to HESA and funding councils and further detailed discussions would be required
- For students progressing from one 'academic year' to another but in the same year of study, there will need to be consideration of student status and status for Council tax purposes over the summer, between May and September.
- Implications for Attendance Tracking for Tier 4 students.

APPENDIX B: IMPACT ON CENTRAL RESOURCES

ID	Item	SSU/IS Notes	Range Lower (days)	Range Upper (days)	AR Summary of Notes (also see Comments doc)	Resources	Days
1	Support for admissions and enrolment for January in-takes	Update online applications to enable varying entry dates to be selected and consequent processing: 3 days spec/dev/test. Store that cohort information against the student record automatically, 3-5 days spec/dev/test. Update enrolment to take account of cohort information including variable entry dates: 3-5 days spec/dev/test	9	13	Production of additional New Student Guides. Additional Pre-enrolment record checks. Consideration of resources for enrolment events (PC labs and main events, including late enrolment). Revision of Programme structures.	Staff: AR, Schools, SSC and other Professional services. Accommodation	10
2	Recognising and accommodating the differing student schedules in our systems.	Redesign of Semester structure: 5-10 days. For specifics see below	5	10			
3	Timetabling (including classes and exams across different periods)				Consideration of space for additional teaching. Updates to revised Programme structures and courses. Set up in Enterprise Scheduler and reschedule timetabling activities. Consideration of synoptic and prerequisite courses. Consideration of exam venues for increased numbers. Consideration of timing for resit exams.	Accommodation: exam venues, teaching rooms Staff: AR, Schools, Invigilators, ICE, Timetablers, Estate Office.	30
4	Impact on SAS and Vision – and other student systems - which are current set up to efficiently support the current operating processes of the University	(JLB) VLE: An impact analysis of what would be required in VLE for content management for the different intakes and how this would be best managed (the cohort option was specifically for MFP so may not be the best option). Whatever option is decided on the admin overhead for content management could be significant. 3 days initial analysis, further work would be dependent on outcome of initial analysis??? (MG - will estimate wide range 2 to 8 weeks)	13	43			
5	Programme structures would need to be redesigned to accommodate overlapping academic years with consequences for PAMS	<MG>Banner updates: Framework design: 5-10 days spec. Impact analysis: 5 days. Framework change communication 2-3 days.	12	18			
		PAMS re-development: spec 5 days, dev 10-30 days; test 10 days. </MG>	25	45			
6	Resit and progression rules – and changing the annual point of rollover as well as timing of exam boards	<MG>Impact analysis: 5 days, after that, depends on the impact analysis. Say 2 to 8 weeks</MG>	15	45	Management of exam boards between December and January. Management of results release, rollover etc between December and January. Consideration of the processes for resit registrations. Consideration of progression from Semester to Semester.	Staff: Schools, AR	30

7	Summer period (raised by SBE) – and whether this should be recognised as a teaching period. If so, then systems need to recognise this. However, it could have a big impact on academic staff and their research time. If not, then the question arises of how the gap in the middle of the 'year' for January intakes is managed	<MG>Relates back to item 2, above.</MG>			Note: assumption that January intakes would not have summer teaching.		
8	Production of transcripts that are not based on current academic year progression (could we run from semester to semester progression instead?)	<MG>5-10 days spec/dev/test </MG>	5	10	Resources to produce final Assessment Results Letters for students completing in December.	Staff: AR, Schools	5
9	Impact on graduation and the timing of ceremonies	<MG>No IT changes required? Impact analysis 2-5days.</MG>	2	5	Consideration of timing for award boards for students completing in December (see item 8 above). Consideration of introducing another graduation diet prior to June.	Staff: Schools, AR	10
10	Changes to regulations, policies and procedures	<MG> Not IT changes</MG>			Consideration of staff resources from Senate Services.	Staff: AR, other?	
11	Staff resources across a wider spectrum of the year eg for rollover processes, results processing and exam timetabling.	<MG> Not IT changes – may need changes to security frameworks to support 5-10 days.</MG>	5	10	See items 4, 8, 10 and 11 above and 16 below.	AR Staff: 3.0 FTE (based on 1.0FTE for each area of enrolment, timetabling, graduation)	
12	Update reporting to take account of changes to Semesters.	Update all student reports to include start date cohort info: May be quite straight-forward; but may be complexities: 20-40 days spec/dev/test	20	40			
13	Accommodation	(JLB) Not exactly sure how this would be impacted but would need an impact analysis from functional and IT. 2 days initial analysis, further work would be dependent on outcome of initial analysis??? (MG say 3-10 days)	5	12			
14	Other IS impacts? E.g. other interfaces and acilliary systems	Unknown. Say 1 to 5 weeks.	5	25	Other AR impacts: Implications for statutory returns. Consideration of student statuses. Impact on Attendance Tracking.	AR staff: 0.5 FTE	30
	INVESTIGATE/SPEC/DEV/TEST TOTAL		121	276			115
	WITH OPTIMISM BIAS (see https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/191507/Optimism_bias.pdf)		186	425			
		Months	9.317	21.252			
15	School update work - updates to programme structures in Banner or PAMS	2 to 4 months	40	80			