

Guidance to Staff on Stages Comprised of a Single Module

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Summary

Aston operates a 15-credit module structure as a standard for all its taught programme provision. However, there are several appropriate reasons programmes may deviate from this structure, including PSRB or accrediting body requirements, and the pedagogic need for fully integrated assessment.

An increasing number of undergraduate and postgraduate taught programme areas are choosing to structure their programmes in holistic stages comprised of a single module. The College of Health and Life Sciences (HLS) has operated integrated 120-credit modules on its MBChB and MPharm programmes for some time – this guidance seeks to utilise the learning from these programmes to provide all Colleges and programmes with guiding principles and advice to consider when developing these programmes.

Guiding Principles

Principle 1: Programmes should follow the University 15-credit module structure, unless the standards set by PSRBs require otherwise or there is a clear educational rationale for fully integrated learning and assessment.

Principle 2: Where programmes have one or more stages comprised of a single, integrated module, the need to demonstrate a student meets the learning outcomes of the stage within a single academic cycle should be a core requirement of the programme. Therefore, students are required to study and pass the entire stage in a timely manner or to repeat the stage. A clear teaching and assessment strategy should be established at the outset of the programme.

Principle 3: Programmes comprising of a single module per stage require closely integrated and systematic programme governance; self-governed, programme-specific modules are strongly recommended. The governance structure should ensure that there is a holistic approach to teaching and assessment within each stage and across the programme.

Principle 4: Approaches to referral, deferral, condonement, and trailing that operate counter to those set out in the general regulations should be clearly detailed within Programme Regulations within the relevant Programme Specification and communicated to students within student handbooks. Programme Regulations should be informed by the general principles relating to referral, deferral, condonement, and trailing contained within the relevant General Regulations and any deviation from these principles should be outlined within the programme's assessment strategy.

Guidance

Programmes considering adopting stages comprising of a single module are advised to contact the Quality Team via email; quality_team@aston.ac.uk early on within the design process. Deviation from the 15-credit module structure requires an approved Waiver of Regulations and so early contact with the Quality Team and Regulation Sub-Committee is recommended.

Teaching and Learning

Programmes comprising of a single module per stage should be designed to ensure that there is integration of material throughout each of the stages. Programmes should include some form of topic organisation within the stages, by adopting programme 'blocks' or 'units'. It should be noted that these organisational topics are to aid the structure of the teaching and learning activities within the programme and are distinctly different to modules used in other programmes.

Specific learning outcomes for teaching/assessment blocks/units should be considered, and if used, it should be clear how they contribute to overall Stage learning outcomes.

Assessment

A key advantage to single module stages is the full integration of assessment. Integrated assessment allows a large number of cognate learning outcomes to be assessed more reliably in a smaller number of integrated assessments, which in turn minimises student and staff assessment load. Students have the opportunity to apply their learning from across the stage to assessments in a structured, logical manner, and the breadth of assessment opportunities available encourages innovation in assessment development utilising authentic assessment and integrated practical assessment opportunities. Furthermore, reduced assessment loads enable a greater use of assessment standard setting techniques to ensure assessments are reliable and valid.

However, developing assessments for integrated stages is very work-intensive, requiring careful thought to effectively cover all learning outcomes, assess student progress across the stage, and ensure a level of assessment equivalent to a standard, multiple module stage.

For the purposes of progression and referral, it is advisable for each assessment to be clearly delineated and given a nominal weighting to the overall stage. A clear assessment strategy is required to define the blocks/units of teaching to be assessed, the non-negotiable demonstrations of learning required to progress without compensation, and to ensure students can effectively demonstrate the required breadth and depth of learning required. Careful consideration should be given to the core knowledge required, and how this will be assessed as a requirement for students to progress.

Student progression must be assessed within the stage through the use of administrative blocks and/or gateways to define progress and referral requirements. It is important that students are given the opportunity to resit assessments within the stage, as it is likely that any failed/outstanding elements of assessment at the end of the stage will result in a full repeat.

Options in the Case of Failure

Operating academic stages comprised of a single module has an impact on a number of standard University approaches to failure and progress that require careful consideration:

Referral & Deferral – Referral and deferral should be considered on an assessment element basis, and nominal weighting used to determine whether a

student is given the opportunity to take referrals or instead must repeat the stage. Consideration should be given as to whether outstanding deferred assessment elements will prevent a student from progressing to the next stage. Consideration should also be given to the refer limits set out in the General Regulations when allowing students to undertake referral of multiple assessment elements in the same assessment period. In some cases, full repeat of the stage may be a more appropriate academic judgement.

Repeat, Restart, Trailing and Withdrawal – Failure in any element of assessment within a single module stage that cannot be retrieved via referral will likely result in the requirement for the student to repeat the entire stage or withdraw from the programme. Students should not normally be allowed to trail any elements of assessment into a subsequent stage.

Condonement – 120 credit modules (and equivalent at postgraduate level) should not be condonable. However, individual assessment elements may be condonable, depending upon the nature of the programme and the assessment.

Classification of Award – Borderline calculations require a student to have at least half of their counted credits in the higher award classification in order to be promoted. Where the final stage is comprised of a single module, a student's overall performance in the final stage will effectively determine whether they are eligible for promotion.

Version Control

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