

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

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ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item 7

REPORT ON LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE INTRODUCTION OF INTERNATIONAL
FOUNDATION YEAR (IFY)

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COVER SHEET

To consider the report.

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International Foundation Year – Development Process

Review and Lessons Learnt

1.0 Origin and Background

The International Foundation Year (IFY) development was initiated in response to strong allegorical evidence from GE of demand for multiple-year visa permit to study. The integrated nature of IFY provided the qualifying course characteristic under UKVI regulations. The International Foundation Programme (IFP), by contrast, as a standalone programme qualifies students for a visa for the single year of the programme, with progression to the subsequently chosen progression degree requiring a further visa application.

IFY is a collective term for a series of (to date) 10 'Year-Zero' foundation years that have been integrated into specified undergraduate degrees and provide progression *within* the relevant degree. Progression is accordingly academically aligned *within* the programme. Accordingly, integration requires detailed review and constructive alignment on a degree-by-degree basis. The IFP, by contrast, has been established to satisfy general entry requirements of a wide range of cognate degrees in two pathways, each typically spanning two faculties. Progression possibilities of the IFP are accordingly much wider and academically less restricted. In this regard, there are 109 approved 'progression' degrees of the IFP.

The concept of IFY development came late in the admission cycle (June/July 2019) and in response to GE intelligence.

2.0 Academic Ownership of Modules

All IFY modules are common to the IFP. In this respect, the IFP may be viewed as the academic parent of the IFY. The IFY and IFP are accordingly a complementary and an efficient package to deliver. The IFY, however, has less freedom of module combination given its integrated philosophy.

All modules within the IFY and IFP are housed within Flexible Education. Flexible Education is the academic home of the IFP and its students. While delivery of modules of the IFY are academically managed by Flexible Education, the students belong to the department of the integrated programme.

3.0 General Entry Requirements

Both IFY and IFP are designed for students who do not meet the general entry requirements of the University but whose balance of English and Level 3 study varies. The distinguishing feature of IFY entry is a higher English attainment and, in keeping with the integrated nature, a clear choice of degree of study.

4.0 Development (Late Cycle)

Consulation involved PVC (Education), Director ADDL, IFP Course Director, ADEs and ADGEs (all faculties), Course Directors of IFY candidate courses, Academic Office (CMS and Regulations), International Office (Marketing, Compliance and Admissions).

HESA data informed demand analysis which focused initially on 12 and eventually on 22 potential course candidates which were subsequently incorporated into a CA1 Supplement document for approval. Given the lateness of cycle, the CA1 Supplement was approved by Chair's action between the Chairs of APAG and ASQEC. The Course Director of IFP (and effectively for IFY) worked closely and intensely with faculties to advise on and support the substantial distributed academic administration tasks. Considerable effort was involved due to compression of end of cycle with competing commitments for those involved.

By end June/early July 2019 CMS amendments were complete and Course Directors (through ADEs) were requested, with guidance and offer of support, to finalise alignment of Programme Learning Outcomes of their IFY with those of their Programme Learning Outcomes. Of the 22 candidate courses, 10 have completed the PLO alignment task and have been authorised.

Recruitment secured a single student but not to a planned IFY. The student presented for a course not envisaged for IFY (Architecture). However, the school responded agilely to the opportunity.

5.0 Curriculum Management System

Considerable trouble-shooting was involved with 22 IFY candidate courses on CMS.

One Faculty reported losing access to all candidate courses. While CMS amendment does render a module 'out of action' for the duration of the amendment, the content remains in the background.

Two faculties withdrew courses for IFY candidacy as CMS amendments were due for Revalidation preparations.

6.0 Faculty Feedback

Acceptance of the need for IFY was mixed across faculties; some perceived value, others did not. The following concerns were evident across most perspectives.

1. Poor timing.
2. Excessive CMS administration overhead, disruption and opportunity cost.
3. Sceptical perception of benefit relative to overhead.
4. Lack of clarity in authorisation of amendments (resulting in Associate Heads of School advising of the need to progress through HoSs, AHoSs before Course Directors).
5. Lack of clarity on competing strategic drivers.

7.0 Lessons Learnt

1. Late-cycle changes to courses be considered with caution. Even with good consultation, when problems emerge and cause stress, unanimity and consent is tested.
2. Hold to a proactive evidence-based business approach rather than reactive agility to perceived market demand.
3. Allow good time for marketing channels to prime the recruitment funnel.
4. Make clear the locus and ascendancy of strategic imperative – Education/Global Engagement; Academic Plan/Faculty Plan.
5. Clarify a principle of CMA ownership or co-ownership of distributed modules in distributed programmes such as IFY to address ‘owner v imposter’ perception to amendment.
6. It appears unusual and restrictive that CMS amendment at one end of a programme can lock out the whole system to programme team. This should be either resolved or noted for future system redesign.
7. Improve general understanding of the nuances in the IFY and IFP package and benefits.