

UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER

TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE

11 December 2012

VARIATIONS AND DEPARTURES FROM THE UNIVERSITY'S REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Application for a request for departure from the University's minimum entry requirements for English Language proficiency

BSc (Hons) Applied Sport Management programme (Outcentre)

To be delivered at the Higher Colleges of Technology, Men's College, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Request

The Ulster Sports Academy (USA) has recently (Nov. 27th 2012) successfully undergone an evaluation of a BSc (Hons) Applied Sport Management programme (Outcentre) to be delivered at the Higher Colleges of Technology, Men's College, Abu Dhabi, UAE. As part of its admission requirements to this course, USA is requesting permission from the University's Teaching and Learning Committee to allow a departure from Ulster's minimum entry requirements for English Language proficiency (IELTS 6 – with no contributing band at less than 5.5). Instead it wishes to admit students to this particular course, alongside meeting its other entry requirements, with an IELTS 5, with no contributing band at less than 4.5. The course evaluation document also contains within it a stipulation that students may only progress to level 5 of the degree programme (i.e. Year 3, as Year 1 is offered at level 3) if they have satisfactorily achieved an IELTS 6.

Case

The case for a departure from standard University regulation in this respect is made based upon three key considerations –

- Whilst increasingly common in its usage, English remains a secondary language within the UAE. It is necessary to remain mindful of this when setting standards of English proficiency for applicants seeking entry to a degree programme. It is the contention of the course planning committee that ensuring compliance with Ulster's established IELTS 6 entry point for English language competency is best achieved by offering dedicated, intensive support to students over the first two years of the proposed programme (to facilitate achievement of IELTS 6) prior to admission to level 5 studies.
- In line with this assertion, students will be enrolled on a supplementary, non-credit bearing English Language skills course when they are accepted on the main BSc (Hons) programme. This is an intensive programme of English language instruction designed to enhance their use and understanding of English and to achieve an IELTS 6 or above during the first two years of their studies. Modules will be offered across the entire academic year during levels

3 and 4 and will amount to 64 hours of direct student engagement in English language instruction during each semester. Exemption from this English skills course will be provided to those students who have achieved IELTS 6 upon entry to the course.

- The overwhelming majority of Emirati students that enrol upon a BSc (Hons) programme at Higher Colleges of Technology have first completed a generic Foundation degree where they will have achieved an IELTS (or equivalent) 5. This standard therefore becomes the minimum entry requirement for all students entering HCT at undergraduate level. HCT, with substantial experience of offering support to students undertaking degree courses through the medium of English, confirm that admission of students at IELTS 5 in addition to offering them planned and year-long English language support and tutelage constitutes the optimum response to the needs of such students and in raising their overall proficiency to a minimum of IELTS 6 (with some achieving significantly higher than this score).

Thus, mindful of ensuring parity with other such courses at HCT and conscious of the provision of a non-award bearing 'Post-foundation English' skills course delivered alongside the main degree programme, the Ulster Sports Academy is satisfied, and suitably reassured following discussions with senior management at HCT, of the suitability of setting an IELTS 5 as an appropriate entry level expectation for students and, in addition, of the capacity of such individuals to meet an IELTS 6 standard prior to entry into level 5 (year 3) of the proposed programme.

Additional context

By way of offering some additional context:

- In recognition of the challenges Emirati students experience on entering higher education where the course is taught in English, the first year of this programme will be delivered and assessed at level 3. The Assessment strategy has been tailored to deal with the students' lower level of English Language competency.
- Possessing a minimum 4.5 level competency in each of the IELTS contributing bands is essential to minimize the diversity of student need within this Outcentre programme as all the students will be able to listen, read, write and speak the English language at a level suitable for the assessment types designed for this cohort. This level of competency in each of the components is also important as it will ensure that students can have meaningful interactions with Ulster staff both via online communications and in person during planned immersive teaching periods when dialogue (written and oral) will be essential for the student in order to maximize their learning experience.
- Moreover there are a number of modules that are credit bearing and part of the main degree programme, which will also serve to significantly enhance the English language capabilities of students undertaking this course of study. These are Academic Reading and Writing 1, Academic Spoken Communication (both offered at level 3); and, Academic Reading and Writing 2 and English for Business (both offered at level 4).

- Further support in the development of English competence is offered both within the Higher Colleges of Technology and via online engagement with Ulster staff as all teaching, instruction, feedback and support will take place through the medium of English.

Academic Office Note

- 1 This course was evaluated on 27 November 2012, when a University panel visited the College. The course is taught and assessed in English. The panel explored the question of how students would be able to cope with Level 4 studies (first year undergraduate), for which IELTS 6 is required for admission in the University.

The Panel was assured by the Faculty that students would be able both to understand and express themselves in English in a way which would fulfil the expectations for learning outcomes at this level. This would be demonstrated by performance in the external IELTS test prior to entry to Year 3 (Level 5).

- 2 A lower English entry standard has been exceptionally approved for two other courses: BSc Hons Nursing Sciences offered by the Faculty at the SAAD College (outcentre) and for the BSc Hons Nursing Science offered by Dr Soliman Fakeeh College of Nursing and Medical Sciences in Jeddah.

In both courses students also receive English tuition and are required to meet IELTS 6 before being permitted to progress to semester 1 of Year 3 of the four-year programmes, ie before commencing Level 5.