For APRC APRC.13.05.**12**
16th May 2013

Request for Exemption from Regulation 7 – Assessment, Progression and Award (College of Engineering and Physical Sciences – School of Chemistry)

Topic and Purpose of the Paper

1. APRC is asked ***to consider*** and, if thought appropriate, ***to approve*** an exemption from Regulation 7.3.1(a) (vi) for all MSci (UG Masters) programmes in the School of Chemistry, with effect for new entrants from 2013/14.

Proposals

2. That all MSci programmes in the School of Chemistry be exempt from Regulation 7.3.1 **(a) (vi)**, progression to stage 3 of MSci award.

   Regulation 7.3.1 (a) (vi) states:
   To be eligible to proceed to stage 3 of an undergraduate masters programme, Registered Students must have accumulated 220 credits by the end of stage 2 and the weighted mean mark for stage 2 must normally be 55 or better. Where required for professional accreditation or other academic purposes, Principal Academic Units or Colleges may introduce additional requirements for progression to an undergraduate masters programme, subject to the approval of the Senate or under delegated authority.

3. The School wishes to move the required threshold for the weighted mean mark from 55 to 60 normally to include examination passes in the core inorganic, organic and physical chemistry modules (currently these are the 20-credit modules CHM2C1, CHM2C2 and CHM2C3).

Background

4. The typical student following the MSci programmes in Chemistry has a stage 2 mark in excess of 60%. In recent years, several students with stage 2 marks between 55-60% have struggled to cope with the more demanding Level M modules, often failing to pass them. Students with stage 2 marks below 60% typically have core chemistry exam marks that are less than 50%, and failure in one or more core chemistry exams is not uncommon (despite the module overall being passed due to the contribution from practical work). Given that the pass mark for level M modules is 50%, and there is no contribution to these modules from practical work, students who are struggling to pass core chemistry exams at Year 2 are in jeopardy of failing theory papers in Year 4 (40 credits in total).

5. This year, a number of students with Year 2 marks in the range 55-60% elected to remain on the MSci programme, in some cases against the advice of the School. The attached spreadsheet shows the Y2 overall mark in the left-hand column. Students who have failed one or more core exams (modules CHM2C1, 2 and 3) are indicated in red, along with the marks achieved in these core exams. Not all are on the MSci programme, but several are, including the student on 55.3% who failed all core theory exams in Y2.

Arguments to Support Proposals

6. The first two years of BSc and MSci Chemistry programmes are common, but from Year 3 onward the programmes diverge. Once they have commenced Year 3, students on MSci programmes who find them too demanding do not have the option to change to a BSc programme, nor is it possible for them to exit early, i.e. at the end of Year 3, with a BSc degree. Experience has shown that students with a Year 2 mark of less than 60% rarely improve on this in subsequent years, indeed the normal pattern is to see this drop further as the level H and M modules are more demanding. Although the number of such students electing to take the MSci programme has been small in previous years, some of these students have performed poorly. In 2011-12, seven out of 50 MSci students had a Y2 mark of less than 60%; three of these students dropped 20 of the 40 credits of theory, with one of these dropping a total of 60 credits across stage 3; this student had Y2 exam marks of 20, 23.8, 48.8% in core chemistry modules. In 2010-11, four (out of 34) had a Y2 mark <60%; of these, one passed only 20 Cr of material (in total) in Y4, while the other (Y2 mark 55.1%, core chemistry exam marks of 32.5, 40, 41.3%) failed 30 credits of the 40 credits of theory in Y4.

7. As the attached spreadsheet indicates, of those students in the current Year 3 cohort with an overall Year 2 mark in the range 55-60%, eight failed one core chemistry exam paper, four failed two papers and two failed all three core papers. Despite strong advice to the contrary, several of these students have elected to remain on the MSci programme. Of the students with Year 2 marks above 60%, none has failed more than one core chemistry paper. Typically these fails are marginal and, set against the background of good passes in the other core papers, should not present a barrier to achieving a good outcome on the MSci programme. The normal expectation is for students to pass all core chemistry papers at Year 2, but each case will be reviewed by the Directors of Years 2 and 3, giving flexibility to accommodate individual circumstances or to deal with low-averaging papers. It is proposed that the increased threshold be implemented for new entrants from 2013, so existing students would be unaffected. Student representatives on the School Education Committee have been consulted and are in support of the proposal.

8. The proposal is supported by the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences after consideration by the Director of Education and Deputy Director of Education.

Recommendation

9. It is recommended that APRC **approve** the proposal.

John Snaith (Head of Education, Chemistry)
12th April 2013