UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

SHORTFALL OF CREDITS FROM STUDY ABROAD

1. Purpose of the Paper

This paper sets out the ways in which the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (LLMVC) will deal with a shortfall in credits achieved by students studying abroad at a partner institution as part of their degree, in particular students in Modern Languages.

2. Background

2.1 Historically, students in Modern Languages were not required to achieve credits from study abroad. Students completed courses for the University of Aberdeen while abroad and the period was considered as completing only a ‘residence’ requirement in the country in which the target language was spoken. A number of years ago, the requirement for students to carry a double workload, studying in a partner university while completing courses for the University of Aberdeen was ended. For some time, students have been required to achieve credits from their study abroad which have counted towards their credit total in Aberdeen.

2.2 Achieving credits from study abroad can be challenging for students for a number of reasons, whether linguistic, pedagogical or personal. The support and guidance offered to students by host universities can be very limited, grading systems are variable, expectations are often extremely high, and it is often not an option to take a resit examination. Since it became a requirement for students in Modern Languages to achieve credits from study abroad, the disciplines concerned have had to be responsive to situations where students return to Aberdeen with a shortfall of credits, and decisions often have to be taken quickly as transcripts are received late.

2.3 These are not standard progression issues. Each case requires careful consideration, given that the amount of the credit shortfall may vary considerably, and the individual situation may be challenging, particularly when mental health or other serious mitigating circumstances are involved, as is often the case. The School has developed internal mechanisms for dealing with such situations which involve close consultation between the Go Abroad Manager, the Year Abroad Coordinator and Undergraduate Programme Coordinator for the discipline concerned, the Senior Year Abroad Coordinator and the School Director of Education.

2.4 No decisions are taken by one individual and the response to each case draws on combined extensive experience and historical knowledge of comparable situations, balancing the need for parity of treatment and quality assurance with care for the well-being of the student concerned. Given the small size of the disciplines involved, students are known individually and their individual circumstances are understood and remembered by staff members.

2.5 It is recognised that it can be helpful to have options in place which can provide a clear way forward in straightforward situations. Students in French Studies are required to take the equivalent of 45 credits while abroad and complete one course for the University of Aberdeen worth 15 credits. Should they have a shortfall of credits from their study abroad, they have the possibility of completing:
• Junior Honours Project 1 (15 credits): Should a student gain fewer than 45 credits but more than 30 credits abroad
• Junior Honours Project 2 (30 credits): Taken in addition to the above course should a student gain fewer than 30 credits abroad.

The Modern Languages and Translation and Interpreting Programme has a similar model.

2.9 It is also recognised that there are situations where individual accommodations are necessary and decisions of this nature need to be carefully recorded to ensure that the information is readily available when needed and as a historical record.

3. Proposal

3.1 Careful consideration will be given to either:
   a. Developing further Aberdeen courses such as those listed above for students in other languages, particularly in Spanish and Latin American Studies.
   OR
   b. Developing similar courses with shared course codes which would be available to students in all languages.

3.2 A simple form will be developed which will be used to record:
   • the amount of the credit shortfall
   • the reasons for the shortfall
   • the School decision regarding the way forward
   • the names of those involved in the decision-making process
   • the approval of the Director of Education or delegated authority

This form can be used not only for students in Modern languages but also to record the cases of the very small number of students in other disciplines in the School for whom special arrangements have to be made following issues with achieving credit from study abroad.

4. Timeline

4.1 The development of courses will be considered in an upcoming meeting of the Languages ‘Cluster’ in LLMVC with a view to submitting proposals to QAC for approval in the next cycle.

4.2 A form for recording decisions in cases of credit shortfall will be developed and implemented with immediate effect.

5. Further Information

Further information is available from Dr Shona Potts, Director of Education for LLMVC.