

**e-Business Meeting of the Senatus Academic Policy and Regulations
Committee (APRC)
Friday 18 November – Tuesday 29 November 2022**

AGENDA

For approval		
1.	Activating 2020/21 Covid Academic mitigation: ZJE programmes For approval This paper is closed: its disclosure would substantially prejudice the commercial interests of any person or organisation	APRC 22/23 3A CLOSED
2.	Non-standard academic year dates: Online MBA For approval	APRC 22/23 3B

Comments should be directed to the paper author and Deputy Convener of APRC, Professor Patrick Hadoke (Patrick.Hadoke@ed.ac.uk), copied to APRC Administrator, Olivia Hayes (Olivia.Hayes@ed.ac.uk).

Comments should be returned by **3pm, Wednesday 21 December 2022.**

Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee**20 – 21 December 2022****Exceptional permission to delay start date of Online MBA****Description of paper**

1. This paper is seeking exceptional permission to deviate from the standard academic year dates and delay the start date of the Online MBA programme from January to March.

Action requested / recommendation

2. APRC is asked to approve non-standard academic year dates for the January 2023 intake of the Online MBA
3. APRC is asked to approve a delay to the start date of the Online MBA programme from January to March 2023.

Background and context

4. The Business School is launching a new Online MBA programme. The programme was approved on the 7 June 2022, applications opened in August and the programme was due to launch with the first cohort in January 2023.

Discussion

5. During the testing of Learn Ultra, for which we are a pilot programme, we found that aspects that had been planned were not working as expected. These were fundamental to the navigation of the courses and, as such, delaying the programme will allow a further month for fixing and another for testing. Launching with these aspects not being right and below expectations would have a disproportionately negative impact on the student experience compared with our other in person programmes given the mode of delivery.
6. There were also challenges around recruitment due to the shorter time available for recruitment than normal and launching at the same time as the cost-of-living crisis. This means that those students who have applied but have conditions attached, have more time to fulfil these as well as giving more time to those needing to secure funding. We would hope that the extra few weeks would also help us to recruit a small extra number of students. However, also, we will follow up decliners to better understand their reasons to assist with future recruitment.
7. An additional reason for the change, is avoiding launching a programme following a period of closure for the winter break as, on reflection, a closed university days before a January start is perhaps not sufficiently service oriented. This has benefits for both staff and students; however, this is particularly important for students studying online as they are more likely to need support with systems in advance of the programme launch, compared with students who can get help when they arrive on campus. We will submit a separate request paper for making this change permanent in January.
8. The Online MBA has two cohorts per year, both taking the same courses in each year however in different order to allow the same courses to be taken by different cohorts. This means that there is a knock-on effect to starting the first cohort later to all subsequent cohorts, which need to start 6 months apart in order to maintain the synergistic approach.

9. The School have sought advice from Legal Services to confirm obligations to offer holders, as well as informing SRA. The Legal Services team were satisfied with the approach being taken by the School in terms of their communication with offer-holders and applicants.
10. The Marketing and Student Recruitment team have communicated with offer holders, deposit holders and existing applicants regarding this change in order to give them as much notice as possible. This was a decision taken within the School in agreement with HOS and DOPS, based on the advice of the legal team around giving as much notice as possible, and ultimately with the students' best interest at heart. As such, offer holders have already been emailed out with the new date (induction 9 Feb and teaching commencing 6 March 2023). They have until the 22nd Dec to respond. Follow up is happening today (20 Dec 2023) to any that have not been in touch with the assumption that they are satisfied with the change if they do not respond by the deadline. The feedback that has been received has been positive overall, with students happy to have additional time following the Christmas holidays before starting study as well as having more time to meet conditions and have funding. Offer holders were offered a refund of deposit paid and any costs incurred related to application such as language test fees. Those that had secured a scholarship with us have also been told that we will carry that forward to the changed start date. Fees are paid annually in three instalments for this part-time 2 years 9-month online programme. This will remain unchanged and fee level they are required to pay will remain the same despite the change in start date. All the courses for this programme are run by the Business School so no further consultation is required out with the school.
11. The MBA programme has no exams within the university exam diet and so assessment will continue to be held at the end of every block of courses (of which there are four per year, each being around 3 months) as they would have in the previous set up. Board of Examiners meetings will be held at the end of each academic year for progression and award purposes.
12. Admissions are managed within the Business School and this team have been fully involved with these discussions. The team is supportive of retaining one of the standard start dates as seen on the market of Online MBA programmes, in moving the second cohort to a September start.
13. The programme team have consulted with, and received agreement from, the Dean of the School, the DoPS, the Director of Q&A and the Director of PGT programmes in making this decision.
14. This approach has the support of the College.
15. The change has been discussed extensively within the school but not with the external reviewer due to the urgent nature of the change request; however, we will fully consult with the external reviewer in looking at making the change permanent.

Resource implications

16. The changes should alleviate pressures on admissions and administrative staff by moving the start date away from a period of university closure. The second entry point moving to September and a standard academic year start will allow for synergies in work around this time for these teams.
17. The new programme start date would be the 1st of March with teaching beginning on the 6th of March. Students would have induction materials available to them, including requirements for technology and guides on how to use it from the 6th of

February to ensure a smooth transition. The programme is designed to run for two full years and then a third year of 9 months meaning an end date for this cohort of November 2025. This means that the final capstone project will be marked during the month of December and marks ratified at the Board of Examiners in January.

18. Head of Groups have been informed regarding the change of date however as there are only four live tutorials per course plus other course interaction at a time to suit the teaching staff, no issues have arisen with regards to the change.
19. There are no resits on the MBA other than the capstone project, which can be resubmitted. The new start date has no impact on the graduation date, which will remain in July. Progression boards will be held at the end of each programme year.

Risk management

20. The alternatives to the delayed start date were to either run the programme, when technology was not quite ready and would impact negatively on student experience and University reputation, or to delay to the next planned entry point 6 months later was felt would be much riskier both financially and reputationally.

Responding to the Climate Emergency & Sustainable Development Goals

21. This has no direct impact on the climate emergency and sustainable development goals.

Equality & diversity

22. The School does not anticipate any E&D issues from this change.

Communication, implementation and evaluation of the impact of any action agreed

23. Communication has already been made to all offer holders and applicants advising them of the delayed start to the online programme. This action was taken after consultation with the Legal Team and was deemed important to ensure timely communication and avoid any reputational risk. We will continue to communicate with this group in the New Year to maintain their engagement and commitment to the programme. Feedback will be sought and evaluated at all times.

Author

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Freedom of Information This paper is **open**.