

**Proposal to zero-weight Year 1 of Biology stream degrees**  
**A note by the Deputy President (Education)**

It was proposed at the Science Studies Committee on Tuesday that the first year of Biology degrees no longer count towards the final mark, bringing us in line with pretty much all other Biology courses in the country and as a pilot with a view to considering it for other courses at Imperial.

It would, of course, still be necessary to pass all modules with at least 40% to progress.

Discuss and feed back to me. Bear in mind what our response would be if the year was already zero-weighted and the proposal was to make it count!

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**Proposal to zero-weight Year 1 of Biology stream degrees**  
**raised in Any Other Business, Science Studies Committee, 10-11-09**

The current year weighting for Biology stream three years degrees for the calculation of the final mark for consideration for honours is 0.5 : 3.0 : 6.5. Four year placement degrees are the same, the year out being zero weighted in the calculation but the year must still be passed, and the mark appears on transcripts.

The proposal is to change the weighting to 0 : 3.5 : 6.5 effective for the new cohort arriving October 2010.

A similar change will be made for Biology with Management to take the weighting for the three year degree from 0.5 : 2.5 : 2.0 to 0 : 3.0 : 2.0 and the four year degree from 0.5 : 2.5 : 3.5 : 3.5 to 0 : 2.5 : 4.0 : 3.5. An equivalent change will apply to Biology with management and a Year in Industry (5 year course).

Advantages of the change include a greater emphasis on final year marks (escape velocity) in calculation of marks for honours, reducing the requirement for double marking in first-year exams, and improving the prospects for rapid and effective feedback since scripts will no longer need to be quarantined to await possible external examiner scrutiny in year three. Scripts will not be returned to students but can be used by personal tutors to provide better quality feedback.

Possible disadvantages are mainly that students may decide to soft-pedal the year since it no longer counts in the long term. However the year still needs to be passed and most students will take the precaution of striving for a large margin of error on the upside of the passmark. Also, marks will still appear on a student's transcript and thereby might influence a person's career prospects, potential for postgraduate bursaries etc.

The proposal has been approved by the Biology teaching committee who felt that the disadvantages of zero weighting were minor and had been exaggerated in the past. The change would take us into territory already occupied by most UK universities, including our major competitors.