

First Year Weighting Consultation History

The new College wide Academic Regulations [passed at College Senate on 10/10/18, to be in effect from October 2019] aim to homogenise the student academic experience across College. These regulations prescribe a **7.5% first year weighting** across all College UG programmes. This was a decision made as a result of consultation with staff from faculties and students.

Student Consultation

DPE 2017-18 (Nick Burstow) provided all members of Education and Representation Board the opportunity to rank the following 3 options in order of preference:

1. Hybrid option (In a nutshell: On a case by case basis, if a student's first year grade would *increase* their overall degree grade, then it would be included in their degree classification calculation – otherwise not included)
2. Low weighting (7.5%)
3. Zero weighted

Results of Consultation

DPE received 10 replies, several of which specified that it was the opinion of the entire rep team in that department. The results were as follows

(1=most preferred; 3=least; **the lower the total=the stronger the preference**)

- Zero weighted = 23 (1,3,2,2,3,3,3,1,2,3)
- Low weighting (7.5%) = 19 (3,1,3,1,1,1,2,2,3,2)
- **Hybrid option = 18 (2,2,1,3,2,2,1,3,1,1)**

The hybrid option was the preferred choice, opinions were broadly evenly split across all three options. The hybrid choice is both the numerically favoured preference and also the least polarising, with the most '2s/middle preferences' chosen.

Response to College

DPE then sent an email to Alan Spivey (Assistant Vice-Provost (Education)) – (ERB was given the opportunity to edit the email – with a few members making changes prior to sending).

Dear Alan,

I write to you regarding the proposed changes to year 1 weightings. I have consulted with the Education and Representation Board. Please find the committee's year 1 weighting preferences below:

Preferred choice (1=most preferred)

1. **Hybrid option**
2. Low weighting (7.5%)
3. Zero weighted

The committee raised concerns as to whether there needs to be a standardised weighting of year 1 across the College. Even within departments, courses differ greatly, particular with differing balances

of teaching vs. research and duration of study. Standardising year 1 weighting may not adequately reflect these differences.

The committee recognises that zero weighting may be less stressful for new students and potentially encourages participation in extra-curricular activities. However, the committee believes that a zero weighted first year may not provide adequate incentive for students to fulfil their academic potential. There were also concerns over the potential ramifications of ‘merely passing’ first year at later stages of the degree, particularly where a failure to fully understand core content was concerned.

The committee would also like to highlight the risk that changes to year 1 weighting may have on other years. For example, through decreasing year 1 weighting (to zero), year 2 (often considered to be one of the more challenging years of Imperial degrees) weighting is likely to increase. If students perform unexpectedly poorly in year 2, they will have only these grades when applying for masters or jobs, not reflecting the hard work they have put into year 1.

The committee recognises the benefits and compromise the hybrid option offers. However, there were concerns that the hybrid option may raise incidences of perceived unfairness between students’ experiences: a student may feel a fellow student has only done better because of a different marking system applied to both.

Overall, of the options given, the committee’s preferred choice was the hybrid option. However, it is important to note that, whilst the hybrid option was most favoured by the committee, opinion was broadly evenly spread across the three options and no one option was backed by a clear majority of members.

Finally, committee members felt passionately on both sides of the ‘zero weighted’ vs. ‘low weighted’ discussion. The committee would like to emphasise that to truly reflect this range in opinions between departments, individual departments should be able to decide which option to use.

Kind regards,

Nick Burstow

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the outcome of the events noted above, please contact me (dpe@ic.ac.uk).