Management of Joint and Combined Honours Programmes

Scope/Background

1. There are a range of types of Joint Honours (JH) and Combined Honours (CH) programmes at Newcastle University:
   - Programmes consisting of two subjects/disciplines within the same academic unit (e.g. BA History and Archaeology)
   - Programmes consisting of two subjects/disciplines from different academic units (e.g. BA Classical Studies and English or Joint Honours in Economics and Mathematics)
   - Programmes involving more than one subject area but owned by a central unit, i.e.
     - The Combined Honours programme in HaSS, encompassing a range of study patterns distinguished as ‘combined’, ‘joint’ and ‘major/minor’, and including disciplines from other faculties.

Key Principles

2. The University requires that academic units ensure students on joint and combined honours programmes receive equitable treatment with students on single honours programmes.

   This means that:
   - Every student will be provided with an equal opportunity to achieve their programme’s aims and learning outcomes;
   - Planning, design and delivery of the student experience must take an inclusive approach which bears in minds the needs of students other than those on single honours programmes in relation to such matters as entry knowledge, communication channels and submission deadlines (where practicable);
   - Learning, teaching and assessment activities made available through the programme should be accessible to every student on a module, e.g. field trips, small group teaching, access to staff for academic advice;
   - All students must be provided with clear and current information necessary to their successful completion of their studies regardless of which programme they are on.

Purpose

3. Existing procedures, e.g. AMR, LTR and External Examining, already emphasise the need for academic units to pay particular attention to JH/CH provision in the quality assurance of programmes. At the same time effective management of these programmes requires a particular emphasis on ensuring that information is communicated between academic units in a timely way.
4. The aim of this document is to provide a single reference point with policy and guidelines for the organisation and management of JH provision, which draws on current practice within the University and the experience of those running such programmes.

5. Some of the guidelines will not apply to programmes where the two subjects/disciplines belong within the same academic unit where it is expected that communication is more straightforward.

Ownership

6. Each programme should have an owning academic unit which bears administrative responsibility for the programme and for the application of the University Regulations. The programmes fall within the remit of the Faculty Education Committee to which the owning academic unit belongs.

7. Transfers of programme ownership should follow the procedure set out in the University’s Policy on Changes to Programmes.

8. In the interests of effective, inclusive and timely communication, the owning academic unit of a programme should establish strong links with other academic units involved in the programme.

Quality Assurance

9. Each programme should be allocated a Degree Programme Director who fulfils the role description set out at https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-dpd-depdpd-jobdescription.pdf

10. Each programme should be the responsibility of a Board of Studies within the owning academic unit, with appropriate representation from partner academic units (see BoS Terms of Reference). It is not necessary to have a separate BoS for JH/CH programmes, provided there is a BoS which can give due attention to the requirements of the BoS schedule in relation to the programme(s) alongside its responsibility for other cognate programmes. However, having a separate BoS is permitted if an academic unit feels this is a more efficient way of meeting the specific interests of the programme(s).

11. Boards of Examiners (BoE) can be arranged in a similar way to the BoS within the owning academic unit. The responsibility for decisions relating to degree classification or student progression resides with this BoE. It is recommended as effective practice that the BoE should receive a verbal report from each contributing subject, if only to confirm there are no issues around the assessment of modules.

12. Changes to programmes, e.g. relating to programme structure and/or assessment, should be dealt with by the owning BoS and consulted on with the partner academic unit(s) without delay. Similarly, partner academic units should have efficient procedures to communicate changes, such as those relating to modules which contribute to the programme, to the owning academic unit.
13. Each module should have a ‘home’ Board which will have ownership of the marks and, once reviewed, will release these marks to other Boards of Examiners. The results of assessments and examinations should be passed by partner academic units to the academic unit owning the JH programme as soon as they are available. It is recommended as effective practice that there should be discussions at, or preferably before, the start of each semester between partner academic units during which reasonable terms for the sharing of marks are negotiated.

14. Specific consideration should be given to Joint and Combined Honours programmes within the AMR report(s) compiled by the owning academic unit.

15. The Board of Studies responsible for each programme should make appropriate use of data which will allow it to compare and reflect on the relative performance of Joint, Combined and single honours students including programme statistics and the summary results of module evaluation questionnaires. With regard to module evaluation results, the Academic Unit owning the module should, upon request, share the results of the core quantitative questions and the overall satisfaction question, and may share the results of the open, optional, subject specific or module specific questions. The owning academic unit should not share the results of the staff specific questions, or any open comments that mention individual academic staff.

16. Programme content, including modules taken by Joint and Combined Honours students, is included in the Learning and Teaching Review of the relevant subject area. In such cases, the LTR should pay particular attention to how the needs of Joint and Combined Honours students are addressed in subject teaching. The review of the management of these degrees will take place in the LTR of the subject or academic unit which owns the programme.

17. For most Joint Honours programmes, external examiners from relevant Single Honours subject areas are asked to provide separate comments on the comparability of standards and student performance specifically relating to joint provision.

18. For Combined Honours and Joint Honours in Science programmes, external assessors are appointed by the appropriate Faculty Education Committee in line with the criteria for external examiners. The external assessor is not required to scrutinise the work of candidates but is required to attend the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners and to report to the University on the reliability and integrity of the process of deciding awards.

19. For all Boards of Examiners, internal examiners must be present from partner academic units to provide effective liaison where appropriate and practicable.

20. There should be a definitive programme record for each programme (the ‘Programme Specification’), which should be maintained by the owning academic unit.

**Academic and Pastoral Support**

21. For programmes which consist of subjects spanning different academic units, there should be one academic member of staff who has special responsibility for joint or combined honours, and to act as the key contact for the DPD and JH students (known as the ‘Subject

22. Subject Advisers in partner academic units should be involved in the production of programme handbooks. Arrangements for contacting subject advisers and their details should be clearly set out within the programme handbook. Depending on the constitution of each academic unit, there may be one or more Subject Advisers, with one acting as School Adviser. The Subject Adviser (or suitable nominee if the SA is unavailable) must represent the subject area at the Board of Studies which owns the programme.

23. Inclusion – academic units should take appropriate steps to ensure that joint and combined honours students are treated as ‘subject students’ in each of their disciplines as well as members of a programme cohort.

24. Communication – Joint and Combined Honours students must be included in all communication to all students on modules, rather than just to those on a programme. Care needs to be taken in sending out messages to students, so that joint and combined honours students are not inadvertently excluded. Care also needs to be taken in the use of programme-based Blackboard communities where communication needs to include joint and combined honours students.

25. Each student should be allocated a Personal Tutor who fulfils the role description set out within https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-personaltutoring-fwk.pdf. The responsibility for ensuring that each student has a Personal Tutor resides with the academic unit owning the programme. Each student should also have a key contact in the partner academic unit (see below). Arrangements for personal tutoring should be clearly set out within the programme handbook.

26. There should be a Degree Programme Handbook for each programme.

27. Induction – first year students should have meetings in both academic units within induction week. Timings should be communicated between DPD and Subject Adviser to avoid clashes. A separate Joint or Combined Honours programme-level induction for all students regardless of their subjects should also take place. Participating academic units might also consider holding regular cohort meetings attended by the relevant individuals from each of the participating academic units at other intervals throughout the academic year.

28. Module selection – Joint and Combined Honours students on all stages should be made aware of how they register for modules in the academic unit that owns their programme, and in partner academic units. DPDs, Personal Tutors and Subject Advisers should expect to be consulted by students and to provide advice on module changes. Where module choice is unavoidably limited, the owning academic unit (in liaison with Subject Advisers) should seek to provide students with a clear explanation.

29. Peer mentoring – all Stage 1 students must be assigned a peer mentor by the owning academic unit and put in touch with their mentee group before induction week. Further information is available at https://www.ncl.ac.uk/ltds/assets/documents/qsh-peerment-principles.pdf.
30. Student representation – elected course representatives should sit on all Student-Staff Committees within the owning academic unit that relate to Joint and Combined Honours programmes. Course representatives should be included from all programmes covered by the SSC and from as many stages as is practical. Academic units are encouraged to include course representatives who are Joint or Combined Honours students on subject-based SSCs.

31. Careers – all academic units should have systems in place to ensure consistency and equity in access to careers information and activities across all programmes.

32. Learning resources – Joint and Combined Honours students should have fair access to field trips, student societies, electronic (including Blackboard or other VLE) and, where applicable, other specialist resources.

Late updated by LTDS, July 2018

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