

INDEPENDENT STUDY MODULES (ISMs)

1 DEFINITION

- 1.1 Independent Study Modules (ISMs) are credit bearing modules that are created for individual students who need to retrieve a credit deficit in a core module, which is no longer available, to enable them to gain an award. In such cases, the agreed learning outcomes for the ISM must be consistent with those of the core module that is being replaced.
- 1.2 Independent Study Modules are not formally approved as taught modules within an award. Proposals for ISMs therefore need to be considered by the relevant Course Leader in consultation with the student concerned, followed by formal consideration and approval or rejection of the ISM proposal by the relevant Departmental Board. In approving an ISM proposal, the Departmental Board will take account of the resources required to support completion of the module and the need to uphold the quality and standards of the academic award to which the ISM will contribute. If the timing of the Departmental Board prevents a timely decision on an application Chair's Action may be taken; and the decision will be reported at the next meeting of the Board.

ISMs can only be undertaken by individual students, subject to approval of the proposal.

2 CRITERIA FOR CONSIDERATION AND APPROVAL OF ISMS

All of the following criteria must be met in order for study and assessment of an ISM to be negotiated and for Faculty approval to be sought:

- i. there is no appropriate alternative module available and running
- ii. the appropriate academic level and amount of credit sought is consistent with the anticipated learning outcomes
- iii. the proposed ISM would be a coherent contribution to the student's programme of study
- iv. the student demonstrates a level of competence, and ability to benefit from independent study
- v. the proposal does not demand resources more than pro rata to a cognate taught module
- vi. the appropriate level of resources must be made available

3 LIMITS ON THE USE OF INDEPENDENT STUDY MODULES WITHIN A SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY AWARD

There are limits on the amount, level and aim of ISMs which may be included within an award, as follows:

- a) ISMs are normally undertaken at levels 5, 6 and 7 only. **ISMs are not normally appropriate for level 4 study**, unless in very exceptional circumstances.
- b) ISMs may be permitted **up to a maximum of 20 credits** within an undergraduate award. At postgraduate level, **ISMs may be permitted up to 15 credits** within a masters award.

- c) When an ISM at level 6 or 7 is being considered, careful consideration is needed to ensure that the ISM proposal is sufficiently distinct in subject from any project or dissertation the student is required to undertake as part of the validated programme of study.
- d) A student cannot undertake both ISM and *ad hoc* Learning from Work/WBL modules based on the same source of learning and assessment, even if the modules are at different levels.
- e) ISMs must avoid repetition of learning on similar modules, except when an ISM is being undertaken to replace a module previously studied and failed but no longer available (normally a core module) and which would be necessary to meet certain specified learning outcomes to obtain the award for which the student is enrolled.
- f) ISMs cannot be used to shorten the normal duration of an award, ie. an ISM cannot replace study and assessment of taught modules that are readily available within a programme but which would take a longer period to complete.
- g) ISMs cannot be used for cohorts of students; nor, can they replace formally approved phasing out arrangements for courses that have been closed and/or are due to be replaced by new or revalidated provision. Phasing out arrangements are normally considered at validation and the use of ISMs for this purpose will not be considered.
- h) An ISM must consist of 100% coursework

4 COMBINING ISMs WITH DISSERTATIONS AND OTHER FORMS OF INDEPENDENT LEARNING

ISM's may be combined with other types of independent learning provided these are mandatory, formally validated components of the award to be undertaken by all students on the programme e.g. dissertations or project modules, formal WBL modules. Therefore, both an ISM and a dissertation module (or equivalent) may be studied within an award, provided there is sufficient distinction between them. Similarly, ISMs may be undertaken in combination with teaching, clinical or professional placement periods, where these are a mandatory, formally validated component of an award, or with other placement or work based/work experience components within a formally validated sandwich award. However, a student cannot undertake an ISM in addition to credit being sought for other forms of *ad hoc*, individually designed and negotiated learning where this would occur at the same level within an award.

5 APPLICATION PROCESS

5.1 The application process must establish:

- i. the level of credit sought (normally level 5, 6 or 7)
- ii. the proposed credit value
- iii. agreed content, the learning outcomes to be demonstrated, the assessment methods to be used including word limits, notional study time required (based on a tariff of ten hours per credit point), the level of support to be provided including the number of contact hours, and deadline date for completion of the ISM
- iv. any other additional resources such as any technical or specialist resources, and any necessary contingency arrangements
- v. when marking and moderation procedures are to be completed, eg. double marking and external moderation, to be completed in time for the mark to be considered by the relevant Departmental Assessment Board

- vi. who the supervisor of the ISM will be
- vii. if necessary, the proposal complies with the University's Ethical Research Policy

5.2 Timing of Applications

Applications for an ISM should be considered as early as possible in the semester and prior to the anticipated start date. An ISM application form, completed by the Course Leader, giving all relevant details, must be submitted in time for consideration and approval through the process below.

6 APPROVAL PROCESS

- 6.1 The relevant Course Leader should obtain written approval from their Faculty Head of Quality and Course External Examiner for the ISM proposal.
- 6.2 The application form must be countersigned by the Head of Department, to confirm support for the proposal and to confirm that they, as budget holder, agree that the necessary resources are available to support the proposal.
- 6.3 The relevant Departmental Board will receive and note details of all approved ISMs.
- 6.4 If an ISM proposal is approved subject to specified amendments or is rejected the relevant Course Leader should provide feedback and advice to the student concerned. If amendments are required a revised proposal will need to be submitted for approval.

7 ASSESSMENT OF ISMs

- 7.1 The ISM must be assessed according to the level and credit value assigned to it at approval, unless it is re-approved before the final assessment with a different level and/or credit value. Credit achieved as a result of successful completion of an ISM will be recorded on the student's transcript.
- 7.2 Departmental Assessment Boards will consider the assessment of the ISM and confirm the mark.

8 MONITORING AND REVIEW

Faculty Academic Boards delegate responsibility for the monitoring and approval all of all departmental ISM proposals to the relevant Departmental Board. They are to ensure equitable consideration of all ISM applications and the sharing of good practice.

***Approved by Academic Board 16 June 2015 (AB/3/15/11)
Revisions to 5.2 and 6 to clarify process July 2015***