

Mid-year Test and Resits at the University of Westminster: an Update

Background:

Eliminatory interim exams have been held on the CIT course at the University of Westminster since the academic year 1994-5, before which date there were exams that were not eliminatory.

A couple of years ago, following an attempted appeal, the then Dean of School suggested that we ought perhaps to introduce resits for the interim exams, given that the students have only 12 weeks of teaching before them and that our entrance tests are tough. The first resits were held in January 2007.

It should be noted that the interim exams are internal, chaired by the course leaders and with all speeches given by our regular teaching staff, though we do sometimes have observers.

This is the second year of what we see as at least a two-year assessment project. Last year (2006/2007) was the first one during which we ran resits for students who failed the interim exams. Only one of the nine students retaking the exams failed but the final exam results largely confirmed the interim results. One of those who passed the resit went on to obtain the PG Diploma. It should be noted that some (5) who passed the interim exams at the first attempt did fail the finals.

Update:

We started this year (2007-8) with 30 students, seven active and nine passive languages. This is the first time we have run Chinese (8 students started the course). The other languages are:

Active: English, French, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Irish and Chinese

Passive: all of the above plus Portuguese and German

We have had the 2007/2008 interim exams and resits.

December exams results:

- Outright fails: 15 (7 of whom were Chinese students).
- Passes who had to retake a test to keep a language (C or B) in their combination : 2.

January resit results (NB: the resits involve consecutive only)

- Outright fails (exclusion): 6 (3 of whom were Chinese students)
- Downgraded language combinations : 4 (including one student who decided to drop French C before the resits)

24 students are now preparing for the Diploma exams.

All but one of the Chinese students had to resit: 3 had to do both tests, 2 retook the consecutive into English and 1 into Chinese. Three of them failed the resits. Teething problems with respect to recruitment help to account for the high number of Chinese fails. For example, not all of the students had face to face interviews and some were accepted on to the course by representatives of the course/University who were conducting general MA interviews in China.

This year we will be giving all students who pass the first stage in China a phone interview with the course leaders as well, as the main reason for their failing the interim exams was their poor command of English.

The fails do justify exclusion in that those who did not pass at the second attempt all had major problems with their command of their A or B language(s).

It is otherwise difficult at this stage to say how much of a predictor the interim exams might be. While we do feel that it is fair to exclude students who fail at the second attempt, we are inclined to keep the resits going. It is only fair to allow students who do not thrive in an exam situation to have a second chance - and this is the only time on CIT that they have that second chance. It is also good practice for the final exams, and arguably also for later professional exams.

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