Proposed extension of the Preparatory Resit Exam Programme (PREP)

**Context**
PREP (Preparatory Resit Exam Programme) was founded in 2002 and runs in the two weeks immediately before the beginning of the summer resit examination diet. Organised and run by the Academic Achievement Teaching Unit, the programme offers a number of revision advice workshops and a structured series of one-to-one tutorials whereby resit candidates meet for twenty minutes with an allocated tutor on five separate occasions over the two weeks. Students must sign-up for the programme and pay a small fee to cover administration costs.

**Problems/Challenges**
- Students are likely to have been revising for a number of weeks before arriving on PREP. Much of the workshop material/content thus arguably comes too late in the revision cycle, and would be of more utility to the students earlier in the revision process. Further, students are unlikely to be willing to ‘risk’ changing their revision methods so near to the exam(s), whereas they may be persuaded to adopt new but potentially more effective techniques if the time-scale is more favourable.
- PREP only reaches a small fraction of resit candidates each year (estimated at around 10%). Some may be put off by the fee, others by the fact that PREP requires them to be resident in Dundee (or nearby) for the two weeks before the resit exam diet (leading to further costs re-accommodation, loss of earnings, etc.). Others still may simply be unwilling to undertake such a programme, or prefer to ‘go it alone’. Whatever the case, and despite its success, PREP is currently failing to reach the vast majority of students with resit exams.

**Student Feedback**
The 2012 PREP participants were surveyed at both the beginning and end of the course. Detailed feedback was thus garnered in a number of areas. Key findings were:
- many students started revising before PREP and felt that some content and advice would have been useful to them at an earlier stage; conversely, many students lacked the discipline to commence revising until they were ‘forced to’ by being on PREP. In both cases, the structure and support provided by PREP would have been valuable at an earlier stage;
- students expressed concern that PREP ran until immediately before the resit diet, thus limiting the time left afterwards for more intensive revision; similarly, some students felt that in its current form PREP broke up the day too much and adversely affected the revision they were able to complete;
- participants ranked their personal tutorial meetings as by far the most useful element of the course; introduction to new and more efficient revision techniques also scored particularly highly, as did the sense of structure & motivation given to their revision by being on the course;
- there was a strong feeling amongst students that the on-campus element of PREP should be maintained but that an additional online provision in the weeks before PREP would be useful;
- a sizeable minority of students misunderstood the generic nature of PREP and expected something more subject-focused. Whilst we attempt to arrange subject tutorials where possible, as a unit we cannot provide this kind of discipline-specific support.

**Proposed Changes**
- An online (VLE-based) resource to be made automatically available to all resit students immediately upon release of summer diet results. It would be different to the present PREP, but the two would link closely together in philosophy, intention and direction. Online element would include some of the content currently presented in early PREP workshops (e.g. learning styles, revision techniques, time management),
thus allowing resit candidates to make use of these techniques earlier in the revision process;

- Reduce PREP On-campus to 10 days: retain the 5 Personal Tutor meetings, but spread them evenly across the 10 days, i.e. Mon, Wed, Fri, Mon & Wed. Hold all workshops from 9 - 10am then PTs immediately afterwards (on days where both occur), thus allowing students to have all afternoon/evening available to study. Evidence from the evaluation also suggests that the On-campus PREP ought to be a week earlier in the summer, i.e. beginning 15th July 2013, to allow for revision techniques to be applied after the course;
- The Online PREP module would need to have Registry download the lists of students with resit exams to give them access, plus highlight this provision to the students (as is done with the on-campus element at present).
- The Online PREP provision needs to be sequential so that students can work through it at their own pace. AATU Tutors could offer a ‘virtual’ Office Hour each week for online queries, and also monitor a dedicated e-mail account. This provision will be comprehensive, but will not go into the same depth as the On-campus PREP workshops, which will aim to build on the initial concepts;
- One annual problem is the VLE Upgrade. In 2013 this is scheduled for Wed 17th to Wed 24th July. Given that the Online PREP would become available at the end of the main exam diet, mid-May, there is little excuse for students to not have begun to work on their revision prior to the VLE shutdown. The on-campus PREP activities and workshops do not have to be too heavily reliant on the VLE, but the materials will be made available to those who attended as soon as the VLE has returned to normal;
- The issue of charging for the PREP course remains to be finalised. We do not want to charge for the Online PREP provision, as that would be impossible to manage and contrary to our aims of offering the broadest possible coverage. We normally charge £35 for the PREP On-campus provision. This could remain the same or possibly increase a little to cover extra costs - £50 might not seem unreasonable, but ensure that only those who really are committed sign up;
- Two contrary concerns emerge: firstly, that students believe that all the information they need is the online materials, and therefore numbers attending the on-campus element are reduced. To this end, the Online PREP module should repeatedly emphasise the benefits of attending the On-campus workshops, especially the role of the Personal Tutors and the impact this has had on previous participants; conversely, the online element may lead to much larger numbers wishing to attend on-campus. A limit on student numbers might need to be established in order to realistically reflect what we are able to achieve with current staffing levels and resources (this figure may not be far in excess of current numbers who attend PREP);
- The online element perhaps allows us to address, to some extent, the lack of subject specific focus. This would depend on co-operation with and from the Schools and Colleges. The exact nature and level of this subject-specific material would likely, therefore, vary between different disciplines, and may need to be developed over a period of years.

**Next steps**

- Resit students who did not attend PREP to be surveyed to establish reasons for non-attendance (anticipated reasons include geographical, social, and cost factors), and whether the online model would have been useful/helpful;
- Design of VLE element;
- Possible discussions with Schools/Colleges regarding their potential input into the online element.

**ENDS**

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GS October 2012