

MEMORANDUM

From	Clare McCauley Assistant Director (Academic Policy & Quality) Academic and Student Administration	To	Heads of Schools College Directors of Education College Directors of Quality Assurance and Enhancement College Heads of Operations Sabbatical Officers of the Guild of Students Collaborative partners
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Changes to University Regulations and Codes of Practice from 1 August 2009

The academic and student related Regulations (i.e. Sections 5 to 8 of the Regulations) and Codes of Practice are no longer cohort based but are updated annually on 1st August for all Registered Students for the proceeding academic session.

This memo includes information regarding substantive changes to academic and student Regulations and Codes of Practice, which were approved by the Academic Policy & Regulations Committee and which come into effect on 1st August 2009. These are revisions to:

- (a) The Regulations and Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence
- (b) The Code of Practice on Plagiarism
- (c) The Regulations governing the Format (of Research Degree) Theses or Reports
- (d) The Regulations on the Determination of Results of Assessment for the posthumous award of qualifications
- (e) The Regulations governing Professional Doctorates
- (f) The Regulations governing Intercalated Programmes
- (g) The Regulations governing the calculation of an award where programmes involve modules marked as pass/fail

and (h) the introduction of a new Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment, replacing the Assessment Protocols.

The University Regulations and Codes of Practice are available at: <http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/>.

KEY POINTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

To notify of changes to University Regulations and Codes of Practice, which came into force on 1 August 2009.

OF INTEREST TO:
Those listed above.

DEADLINE:
N/A

KEY WORDS:

Legislation
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Changes to University Regulations and Codes of Practice from 1 August 2009

(a) Regulations (sections 7.8 and 7.9) and Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence

The existing Code of Practice on Reasonable Diligence was derived from a document that had been in existence for a number of years, and whilst it had been periodically updated, was judged to be due for extensive revision to take account of feedback from across the University.

In addition, at its meeting on 29th January 2009, the Learning and Teaching Committee received a paper on Attendance Monitoring and the implementation of the Points-Based System (Minute 09/10 refers), and resolved that:

- (i) The monitoring requirements for non-EEA students should be written into the revised Code of Practice on Reasonable Diligence.
- (ii) Schools and Colleges be permitted to identify contact points for their own programmes as appropriate, with the requirement that for each full programme year (or length of programme if shorter than an academic session), there must be at least ten identifiable contact points.

This recommendation was subsequently endorsed by University Executive Board on 31st March 2009.

Accordingly, work was commenced to develop a revised Code of Practice and to assist in this process, a working group was convened, including academic, administrative and student members. The Committee approved a new Code which incorporated UEB's decision and regulations were subsequently amended in line with the Code of Practice. The Committee acknowledged that this was a sensitive issue, but one that was required to ensure that the University was able to comply with government requirements.

The substantive changes are:

- Considerable revision of the section dealing with the responsibilities of Schools, clearly sub-divided by reference to the attendance of Registered Students, academic progress of Registered Students, and the monitoring of attendance and academic progress by the School;
- Clarification, re-ordering and simplification of the procedures for dealing with unsatisfactory attendance and/or academic progress by Registered Students. This is now provided via a two-stage process:

Section 4: The Initial Stage, which allows for dealing with cases on an informal basis, progressing to a formal basis, should the Registered Student continue to demonstrate a lack of reasonable diligence with regard to their programme of study and research.

Section 5: Referral to Boards of Examiners, which is undertaken when a Principal Academic Unit deems that a Registered Student's continued absence is of such a degree that they are not meeting the

academic requirements of their programme of study or research. [Under the existing Code of Practice, a “Reasonable Diligence Panel” had to be convened – this was seen by many academic and administrative staff as bureaucratic and cumbersome.]

- The sections concerned with the Progress and Awards Board and the right of appeal have also been revised to provide fuller information and reflect recent changes to the University’s structure.

(b) Code of Practice on Plagiarism

A review was undertaken of the Code of Practice, as part of the second stage of legislation review. Plagiarism Contacts and Directors of Education were consulted on the proposed amendments and a revised Code was approved.

The principal changes are:

- the introduction of an initial meeting between a member of Academic Staff and the student suspected of having committed plagiarism prior to the formal Plagiarism Interview;
- the postponement of the decision as to what level the suspected plagiarism should be assigned until the initial meeting, so that the student has an opportunity to present his or her case and to inform the member of Academic Staff’s decision;
- the levels of suspected plagiarism have been redrafted, in order to emphasise the difference between ignorance of conventions (low level), ignoring the guidelines as to what consists one’s own work (moderate) and attempting to deceive the marker (serious), with the corollary that a repeated offence at one level will be treated at the higher level. Fabrication of data has been incorporated into serious plagiarism;
- the removal of the process whereby if a student failed to attend a Plagiarism Interview, the case would be referred to a further member of Academic Staff to decide whether it was plagiarised or not;
- ensuring students have the right to appeal a penalty imposed as a result of moderate plagiarism having taken place if new evidence is forthcoming or a procedural irregularity takes place;
- a revision of the procedure for plagiarism in group-based exercises (now extended to include possible cases of collusion) to emphasise that where possible students should be seen individually to reduce the risk of coercion or of all students adopting the same story in a meeting;
- as a result of changes being made to the registration process, the revised Code of Practice on Plagiarism assumes students will have accepted that their work may be electronically examined for plagiarism, as this is now agreed to as part of registration.

(c) The Format (of Research Degree) Theses or Reports (section 7.4.2)

An amendment to Regulations was approved so that it is a formal requirement for students to deposit a print and electronic version of their thesis with the University before their degree is awarded. This means that access to theses is greatly enhanced by making the content available in searchable form and available to general and specialised search engines and bibliographic databases.

(d) The Determination of Results of Assessment for the posthumous award of qualifications (section 7.2.5)

University Ordinances already allow for the award of aegrotat degrees, although the exact methodology is not specific. On average, one aegrotat degree is awarded each academic session, normally for students who have a terminal illness and are unable to complete the final parts of their programme of study. Accordingly, changes have been made to Regulations to enable qualifications to be awarded posthumously if specific criteria are met.

(e) Professional Doctorates (section 6.1.3.(a))

Following a review, including consultation with the relevant programme directors in Schools, the regulations have been amended to reflect current practice and national guidelines by increasing the number of credits for taught modules within these programmes from 120 credits to 180 credits.

(f) Intercalated Programmes (sections 6.1.2.(r) and 6.2.2.(f))

The University offers a number of intercalating programmes, i.e. programmes where a student, normally between second and third year, suspends their registration on their programme in order to undertake study which develops new practical or academic skills. Following a review of existing legislative provision, the Committee approved amendments to ensure the provision was made more explicit in the Regulations, but which continued to reflect current practice within this suite of programmes.

(g) Modules marked as Pass/Fail (section 7.3.1.(d) (iv))

The Committee approved a clarification of Regulations to ensure that marks awarded for credits taken at other Higher Education institutions and accepted by the University under Accreditation of Prior Learning, and any nominal marks attributed to a module that was pass/fail, would not be included in the calculation of the final award.

(h) Postgraduate Research Programmes (sections 6.1.3 (a), 7.4.2 (d); 7.4.8-9)

A number of points relating to postgraduate research programmes were clarified with the Committee's approval:

- the definition of several masters by research was clarified to make it clear that only the taught elements of the programme were credit-bearing modules;
- the incorporation of an official word-limit for 2 year MPhils in the Colleges of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Life and Environmental Science and Medical and Dental Sciences;
- a right of appeal was explicitly introduced for students transferred from a doctorate to a research masters due to lack of progress;
- the procedure under which a student failing to make the required academic progress can be required to withdraw from a programme has been clarified and detached from the reasonable diligence procedure.

(i) Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment

The Assessment Protocols took the form of two sets of discrete standalone documents, dealing with undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes respectively. The Protocols were lengthy documents that featured a significant number of common sections and clauses. The Committee approved a review of the Protocols at its meetings in 2008 and this led to proposals to rationalise the regulatory provision through the adoption of a new and unified Code of Practice. Members of the University Progress and Awards Board were consulted on the changes.

(i) Code of Practice on the Assessment and Award of Higher Doctorates

A review was undertaken of the Code of Practice, as part of the second stage of legislation review. A working group consisting of staff with experience in the administration and examination of higher doctorates, and staff who had taken a higher doctorate at the University of Birmingham, was convened and recommended a number of changes. Substantive changes are:

- that the application form for candidature for a higher doctorate and the accompanying CV are now submitted for approval by a review group, who decide whether to approve the candidature. Only then is it necessary to submit the full body of work and accompanying synopsis. Therefore only the assessors need to read the full body of the higher doctorate submission;
- the anonymity of the review panel, assessors and adjudicator (if required) has been established, in order to offer them security in making what they feel is the correct decision without fear of adverse comeback and ensure no undue influence can be exerted by candidates;

- time-limits for the decisions of review panels and assessors have been determined, as these have not been previously specified leading to potentially inordinately long periods of waiting for candidates;
- formalisation of the right of a candidate to apply again three years after a review panel, assessors or an adjudicator reject the submission;
- candidates now have the right to suggest to the Head of School names of those they would like and would prefer not to assess their submission;
- the inclusion of details on submission for a DMus as composer of electroacoustic music;
- the process for appointing an adjudicator in cases where assessors has been made clearer, with the Head of College identified as the appropriate individual to make an appointment. This process has also been applied to situations where Examiners cannot decide on a decision for normal research theses.