

**For the Academic Policy &  
Regulations Committee**

**University of Birmingham**

**Request for Exemption from Regulations governing the Assessment of  
Postgraduate Taught Courses for the MA in Counselling and the Postgraduate  
Diploma in Counselling**

**Topic and Purpose of the Paper**

1. To request an exemption, both for present students and retrospectively, from regulations concerning the assessment of modules for the awards of MA in Counselling and Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling.

**Consultation**

2. Consultation has been undertaken with staff involved with teaching these programmes, both currently and in the past, and within Academic and Student Administration.

**Proposals/Recommendations**

3. That exemption be granted to MA in Counselling and to the Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling from Regulations Section 7, Assessment, Progression and Award 2.1.6, which states:

*The assessment of each module shall generate a single mark between 0 and 100 except in cases specified by the Senate or a delegated authority where the mark shall be pass or fail. Linked modules shall produce a single mark.*

4. That exemption be further granted to the MA in Counselling and to the Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling from Regulations Section 7, Assessment, Progression and Award 3.2.2, the requirements for merit and distinction.
5. That modules comprising part of the programmes of MA in Counselling and Postgraduate Diploma in Counselling which involve clinical practice should be pass/fail, for the reasons stated below.
6. That for these programmes there be no award of distinction or merit.
7. That these exemptions be applied retrospectively in order to recognise practice as followed on the relevant programmes since their inception.

**Background**

8. The MA in Counselling and the Graduate Diploma in Counselling were originally offered by the Centre for Lifelong Learning, and subsequently were incorporated into the School of Public Policy.
9. From the beginning, the majority of modules on these programmes were marked as pass/fail, rather than being given a numerical mark. The final award for the programme was also pass/fail; no merits or distinctions were awarded. This was made clear to the students.
10. The University is no longer accepting students onto these programmes (which are now being delivered by Newman College) but existing students will be awarded a University of Birmingham qualification.

**Arguments to Support Proposals/Recommendations**

11. The majority of the modules (four out of six) undertaken by students on the MA in Counselling and the Graduate Diploma in Counselling involved clinical practice, that is actual work with a client, which formed the basis of assessment.
12. Professional requirements limit the number of clients a trainee counsellor might see to three. At least two different clients must be used in the clinical modules, so therefore students' choice of client for the clinical modules is strictly limited.
13. It is regarded as unfair to assess students numerically on the basis of performance with clients who may have a range of issues and personality types, and who therefore do not provide a stable baseline against which the students' ability is measured. Therefore modules involving clinical practice have always been marked pass/fail.
14. As four of the six modules that comprise the taught element of the MA in Counselling and the whole of the Graduate Diploma in Counselling involve clinical practice and are therefore marked pass/fail, there has not been enough numerical information to satisfactorily award distinctions or merits.
15. The Postgraduate Diploma and the MA in Counselling are accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy and it is this accreditation, rather than the classification of any award, that matters to graduates on these programmes.

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