

**For the Academic Policy &
Regulations Committee**

University of Birmingham

**Request for Exemption from Specified Regulations for the Proposed
Programme of PhD with Integrated Study in Physical Science of Imaging in the
Biomedical Sciences**

Topic and Purpose of the Paper

1. To request exemptions from specified regulations for the proposed PhD with Integrated Study in Physical Science of Imaging in the Biomedical Sciences (PSIBS) in order that the requirements of the funding body concerning the conduct of this course shall be fully and satisfactorily met and to ensure that this programme can compete against competitor programmes at Warwick and Imperial funded under the same mechanism. These exemptions shall stand for one year in the first instance.

Consultation

2. The decision to seek this exemption from regulations arose from discussion with the Postgraduate Marketing team as to how the proposed programme could remain competitive with competitor institutions offering similar programmes.
3. Consultation concerning the issues raised by this request for exemption from regulations has been undertaken within Academic Services. The proposals within this request for exemption from regulations have been read and agreed by the Assistant Directors of Academic and Student Administration (Student Services and Systems and Academic Policy and Quality).

Proposals/Recommendations

4. That the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS shall be granted an exemption from regulation 7.4.1 (k):
A Registered Student may be awarded only one University qualification following completion of a programme. Where credit for research and generic skills, subject-focused or professional elements is required for the award of the research degree no additional qualification shall be awarded for satisfactory completion of these elements. Where credit in research and generic skills, subject-focused or professional elements is not required for the award of a research degree, Registered Students who achieve this credit may be awarded an appropriate additional qualification.
5. That the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS shall be granted a further exemption from regulation 6.1.3 (a) (vi), the definition of the programme requirements for a PhD with Integrated Study:
A programme, normally of four years' duration, which integrates research with taught postgraduate work in a range of skills and subject focused courses, up to a maximum of 120 credits. Registered Students must produce a thesis which makes an original contribution to knowledge, worthy of publication in whole or in part in a learned journal.

6. That the first year of the programme shall be treated as equivalent to a 180 credit MSc, and be assessed under regulations pertaining to taught postgraduate courses. That on completion of this stage, students shall be eligible to receive the award of MSc in Physical Science of Imaging in the Biomedical Sciences.
7. That, as relates to this award, a further exemption be granted to the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS, from regulation 6.1.2 (q) (iv):

The programme requirements for a programme leading to a Taught Postgraduate Degree shall designate one or more Level M modules to be "dissertation components" which shall (individually or as a collection of related modules with a total credit value of 60) consist of a research project and a substantial piece of written work or such other work as may be accepted by the Senate or delegated authority as equivalent.

8. That the master's component of the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS shall include three modules, each of 30 credits value, to a total of 90 credits worth of research modules, and therefore 90 credits of taught modules.
9. That progression from the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS is dependent upon successful completion of all modules, so that a student has achieved 180 credits. Award of the MSc PSBIS will not suffice for progress to the next stage of the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS if modules have not been successfully completed and this will be made clear to students in all documents offering places and the programme handbook.

Background

10. The first EPSRC Life Science Interface Doctoral Training Centres (LSI-DTC) were established five years ago to develop areas which bridge traditionally discrete academic fields (chemistry, physics, engineering, computer science, biology, and medicine). The LSI-DTC programmes were to establish 4-year (new route) PhD programmes with training across the disciplines. The University of Warwick and Imperial College were among the first to be established. Birmingham has been successful in the latest call and was selected to host an LSI-DTC in physical sciences of biomedical imaging.
11. From the beginning, both the University of Warwick and Imperial College offered programmes which awarded both a master's degree at the completion of the first year of training and a doctorate at the end after a further 3-year period of research.
12. The success of the initial programmes led to the EPSRC seeking further applications last year: Birmingham was successful and was selected to host an LSI-DTC focused on physical sciences of biomedical imaging.
13. The University of Birmingham successfully submitted a tender for £6 million from the EPSRC (under the dual funding mechanism a further £2 million will flow from HEFCE in associated postgraduate unit of resource, giving a total of £8 million) over eight years in the first instance in order to run the proposed PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS. This would allow the programme to be offered five times, after which the contract with EPSRC may be renewed if the programme is successful.

Arguments to Support Proposals/Recommendations

14. The University of Birmingham will be competing with the University of Warwick and Imperial College for students on this programme. Both of these

institutions offer a master's degree upon completion of the first year of the programme and a doctorate upon final completion. It is likely that any future programmes at other competitor institutions will offer the same awards, using these programmes as a model. It would therefore be a hindrance to the University's efforts to attract quality students to offer only the one degree on the programme.

15. It is a requirement of the agreement made with the EPSRC that there be a year's training at the 'equivalent of master's' level on the programme, equivalent to 180 credits. This is to ensure that all students have the opportunity to acquire a sufficient level of knowledge of all the constituent subjects involved in the physical science of imaging in the biomedical science to be able to undertake research at a satisfactory level. This is achieved by theory modules from across the disciplines and that three individual research projects be undertaken to enable students to become familiar with researching in fields outside their own previous academic experiences. Each of these projects is required to involve 300 hours work, the equivalence of 30 credits.
16. As a result of these requirements, students upon the programme will have completed a number of level M credits equivalent to the amount required in order to be eligible for a master's degree.
17. The level M modules which compose the first year of the programme are designed in order to ensure students who invariably come from a background in which they have experience of only one or two disciplines are able to conduct research which involves a wide-range of disciplinary expertise. It is necessary to pass all modules to progress to doctoral research as competence is required in all relevant fields in order to undertake the research.
18. This first year forms a discrete stage of the programme, with an internal hurdle at the end of the year in the form of the requirement that all modules be successfully passed before doctoral research may be undertaken. Therefore, although completion of the level M modules is necessary in order to undertake doctoral research, their assessment is not part of the final award, which is based upon the equivalent of 540 credits undertaken in the three years of doctoral research. This means that the first year of 180 credits is not assessed for the final award, and that there is no danger of double counting.

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