

21<sup>st</sup> May 2009

### **Application to Indefinitely Extend Two Exemptions from Regulations**

#### **Purpose of Paper**

1. To seek approval from APRC for the continued operation of two Exemptions from Regulations concerning PhD with Integrated Study programmes that award both a masters and a doctoral degree.

#### **Proposal**

2. That APRC approves the renewal of the two attached Exemptions from Regulations, originally APRC.08.07.01 (Appendix A), granted to the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology, and APRC.08.07.02 (Appendix B), granted to the PhD with Integrated Study in the Physical Science of Imaging in the Biological Sciences, both of which were granted in July 2008 with an initial duration of the 2008/09 session.
3. That the new duration of the two attached Exemptions from Regulations shall be five years in the first instance.

#### **Background**

4. The PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and the PhD with Integrated Study in the Physical Science of Imaging in the Biological Sciences are the only doctoral programmes within the University that offer a masters degree in addition to a doctoral award. This reflects the unusual structure of both programmes, which for reasons set out in the appendices use the first year of the four-year programme to train students to a level where they are capable of undertaking doctoral research, a level of training which is practically identical to the requirements of a taught master's degree.
5. Applications for Exemption from Regulations for both programmes were submitted to the then Chair of APRC in July 2008, and were granted as detailed in the attached appendices. At the time the decision was made to grant the Exemptions from Regulations for an initial period of one year whilst a review of the regulation of the PhD with Integrated Study was undertaken, with a view to examining the feasibility of incorporating the award of two degrees on PhD with Integrated Study programmes where the equivalent of a taught master's degree was undertaken.
6. After consultation with Schools and the International Office, an internal review within Academic and Student Administration concluded that the current Regulations governing the PhD with Integrated Study were sufficient, and that it was satisfactory for the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and the PhD with Integrated Study in the Physical Science of Imaging in the Biological Sciences to re-apply for Exemption to remain outside Regulations.

### **Argument to Support Proposal**

7. The Exemptions from Regulations for both programmes remain as originally granted, and the circumstances that lead to the effective teaching of a master's degree programme in the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and the PhD with Integrated Study in the Physical Science of Imaging in the Biological Sciences are also unchanged. Considering that the first cohort of students to undertake either programme under these exemptions will not complete the master's element until September, it is impossible to state whether there is any problem with the implementation of the Exemption from Regulations.
8. The review within Academic and Student Administration could find no option that would allow the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and the PhD with Integrated Study in the Physical Science of Imaging in the Biological Sciences to retain their current structures that would be preferable to the current arrangement. Indeed, it is for just such eventualities that the system of Exemptions from Regulations was designed.
9. A duration of five years for the Exemptions from Regulations will allow three cohorts of students to complete both programmes since the Exemption from Regulations came into force. This will allow for further, more informed and detailed consideration of the Exemptions from Regulations in five years time.

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**Request for Exemption from Regulations Concerning the Requirements for the Award of PhD with Integrated Study and the Principle that only One Award may be made on any Programme for the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology**

**Topic and Purpose of the Paper**

1. To request exemption, for one year in the first instance, from specified regulations for the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology, which would enable students undertaking the programme to be awarded both an MSc and a PhD upon completion of the relevant award criteria and achieving the required standard at MSc for acceptance to the PhD phase of the programme.

**Consultation**

2. This exemption to regulations was requested by the Medical School after internal consultation.
3. Support for this exemption to regulations has been stated by International Relations, transmitting the opinions of the funding bodies for students on this course, in this case generally foreign governments, mainly in the Middle East, Pakistan and India.
4. Extensive consultation concerning the issues arising from this exemption to regulations has been undertaken within Academic Services, and this exemption has been approved by the Assistant Directors (Student Services and Systems and Academic Policy and Quality).

**Proposals/Recommendations**

5. That the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology should 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.*

6. That the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology should be granted a further exemption from regulation 6.1.3 (a) (vi), defining the degree of 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.*

7. That students who successfully complete the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and meet all the requirements of the award shall be awarded an MSc, and that students who subsequently produce a

thesis of the required standard as specified under regulation 7.4.1 (k) shall be awarded a PhD.

8. That, in order to meet the requirements of the MSc (regulation 7.3.2 (a) (ii)), the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology shall consist of 120 taught credits and a research project equivalent to 60 credits.
9. That in order to progress from the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology to undertake work on the PhD thesis and be eligible for the award of PhD, a student must achieve at least merit in the MSc (as defined in regulation 7.3.2 (b)). As this requires students to pass all modules, the requirement of regulation 7.4.1 (b) that students on a postgraduate research programme must pass all taught modules undertaken in order to attain the award (in this case the PhD) will therefore be met.
10. That the advertising literature and any documents making offers of places for the PhD in Integrated Study will be required to make it clear that satisfactory completion of the MSc, to a standard worthy of merit or distinction rather than pass, is necessary for completion of the programme.
11. That this exemption be granted for one year in the first instance, to allow wider issues regarding the University's development of PhD with Integrated Study programmes to be discussed by the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee, after which it may be resubmitted if necessary.

### **Background**

12. The Department of Immunology within the Medical School is one of the leading centres worldwide in the study of immunology. It is the premier ranked establishment within the field of immunology within the United Kingdom and is an MRC Centre of Excellence.
13. The reputation of the department attracts students from an international market, including those from countries whose undergraduate and masters level education may not provide essential skills necessary in research.
14. In order to maintain the department's high standards, and in view of the state of the art technical nature of much of the department's research, the department has a clear policy of requiring candidates for entry to a PhD programme to demonstrate some experience of modern research methods. For home students this is generally not a difficulty as most will have gained laboratory skills during their undergraduate degrees. For overseas students this can present difficulties as their undergraduate degrees generally do not prepare them for laboratory based research.
15. Overseas students applying to the department are generally funded by their governments. In the case of the Middle East, Pakistan and India, these governments will generally not fund master's courses and favour four-year doctoral qualifications. Unfortunately, the undergraduate and master's education available within these countries also fails to provide the essential research skills required by the department as a prerequisite.
16. The department has therefore used the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology as a vehicle to attract overseas students, as it offers a four-year programme leading to a doctorate and can attract funding from the students' governments, whilst the first year provides the essential research training and skills that is necessary for the students to undertake further research at a doctoral level.

### **Arguments to Support Proposals/Recommendations**

17. A student on the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology undertakes exactly the same work as a student who takes the MSc in Immunology and then subsequently a PhD, including the 60 credit research project. It seems to be disadvantageous to the students on the PhD with Integrated Study that they should receive lesser qualification for the course of study.
18. Although the programme specifications for the PhD with Integrated Study state that it will integrate taught modules up to 120 credits, and therefore the use of these credits to achieve a master's qualification appears to be double-counting, the subsequent three years of study have a nominal value of 540 credits, the same as required to attain the award of PhD normally. Therefore, it is questionable whether these credits are being double-counted, since the final award of the PhD is dependent only upon the 540 credits-equivalent research.
19. There is no possibility of the 60 credit research project undertaken in year one of the programme being then used as part of the doctoral thesis. The department would not allow this practice, which would anyway be impractical as almost all students change supervisors and area of study between the 60 credit research project and undertaking doctoral research; furthermore, research at a master's level would not be sufficient to produce a successful PhD thesis.
20. The quality of the students recruited to the PhD with Integrated Study has been excellent, although all have needed the practical research training provided in the first year to bring their skills to the required level, and also to adapt to the requirements of the British education system that they take responsibility for finding their own projects and supervisors. No student on the programme has yet failed to attain merit, and some obtain distinctions at master's level.

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**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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