

**For the Academic Policy &  
Regulations Committee**

**University of Birmingham  
Proposal to Reduce the Maximum Duration of the BDS**

**Purpose of Paper**

1. APRC is requested to **approve** a change to Regulations to reduce the maximum duration of the BDS to seven years.

**Proposal**

2. That Regulation 6.2.1 (a), which was altered by APRC.09.05.06 (attached as Appendix A), whereby the maximum duration of the MBChB was reduced to eight years, be further modified as follows (additions underlined, deletions struck through):

*The minimum and maximum periods of study permitted for programmes prescribed for Undergraduate awards of the University shall be as follows.*

...

<i>BDS</i>	<i>5 years</i>	<i><del>12</del> <u>7</u> years</i>
<i>MBChB</i>	<i>5 years</i>	<i>8 years...</i>

3. That Regulation 6.2.1 (d), which was altered by APRC.09.05.06 (attached as Appendix A), be further modified as follows (additions underlined):

*The maximum period within which a Registered Student may complete an award is calculated from the date of first registration to the date of the final award and is three times the minimum period stated in (a) above, subject to an overall maximum of 12 years, except in the case of the University Certificate, University Diploma and Advanced Certificate for which the maximum is 3 years, and the MBChB for which the maximum is 8 years and the MBChB for graduates and BDS, for which the maximums ~~are 8 years and is 7 years respectively~~.*

**Consultation**

4. The School of Dentistry have been contacted about this proposal, and the Head of School has given his approval.
5. The General Dental Council (the statutory body governing dentists in the United Kingdom) has approved in principle the reduction in time allowed to qualify as a dentist from twelve years, which was felt to be excessive.

**Background**

6. APRC.09.05.06 originated with the Medical Education Unit and the Director of the MBChB, who were concerned with the seemingly maximum duration of the medical degree, and sought a reduction. As such, it did not concern the BDS, delivered by the School of Dentistry.

7. At the meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> May, during the approval of APRC.09.05.06, the Chair of APRC suggested that the School of Dentistry be contacted to see if they wished to reduce the maximum duration of the BDS to eight years also.
8. The School of Dentistry has been unaware that there was a twelve year maximum duration for the programme, and had previously applied a seven-year maximum duration in line with General Dental Council guidelines.

### **Arguments to Support Proposal**

9. As with the arguments put forward in APRC.09.05.06 for medical doctors, it seems inappropriate that dentists should be able to take over twice the normal period of delivery of their programme in which to qualify. This would be likely to produce poor quality dental practitioners, and therefore imperil both the statutory recognition of the University's dental provision and the University's reputation as a trainer. Therefore, a maximum duration of twelve years appears to be excessively long.
10. The General Dental Council formerly issued guidelines suggesting a maximum duration of a programme of seven years, although these have been discontinued from this year. The School of Dentistry has adhered to these guidelines without problems, and it is proposed that this practice be formalised in Regulations. Consultation with the General Dental Council has confirmed that although the guideline is no longer current, they prefer a shorter duration to programmes.
11. Where students have genuine circumstances that will prolong the duration of their registration for more than seven years, systems exist through Progress and Award Board to provide for this; therefore, it is only students who are failing to meet the requirements to qualify as a dentist who will be affected by these changes.

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For the Academic Policy and  
Regulations Committee

APRC.09.05.06

21<sup>st</sup> May 2009

## University of Birmingham

### Proposal to Reduce Maximum Duration of MBChB

#### Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is requested to **approve** the proposals that the maximum duration of the MBChB be reduced to eight years, and that a minimum and maximum duration for the MBChB for graduates of four years and seven years be introduced into Regulations.

#### Proposal

2. That the maximum duration of the MBChB, as specified in Regulation 6.2.1 (a) be reduced from twelve to eight years, and that the MBChB for graduates be incorporated into Regulation 6.2.1 (a) with a minimum duration of four years and a maximum duration of seven years as follows (deletions crossed through, additions underlined):

*The minimum and maximum periods of study permitted for programmes prescribed for Undergraduate awards of the University shall be as follows.*

...

<del>BDS, MBChB</del>	5 years	12 years
<u>MBChB</u>	<u>5 years</u>	<u>8 years</u>
<u>MBChB for Graduates</u>	<u>4 years</u>	<u>7 years</u>

3. That Regulation 6.2.1 (d) be altered as follows (additions underlined):

*The maximum period within which a Registered Student may complete an award is calculated from the date of first registration to the date of the final award and is three times the minimum period stated in (a) above, subject to an overall maximum of 12 years, except in the case of the University Certificate, University Diploma and Advanced Certificate for which the maximum is 3 years and the MBChB and the MBChB for graduates, for which the maximums are 8 years and 7 years respectively.*

#### Background

4. The MBChB is the University's medical degree, which trains students to a level of qualification where they can take up a post of junior doctors.
5. The MBChB for graduates was introduced in August 2003,<sup>1</sup> as a graduate-entry level programme to allow students from a life science background to retrain as medical doctors. Due to the fact that students would have acquired a good degree in a related discipline, the amount of study required for completion of the learning objectives was judged to be less and the programme was designed to have a duration of four years.

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<sup>1</sup> AB.03.10.09 (b), 7.

6. Neither the MBChB nor the MBChB for graduates is available as a part-time programme.
7. The maximum duration of an undergraduate programme of the University of Birmingham as specified in Regulation 6.2.1 (a) is mechanistically calculated under Regulation 6.2.1 (c) as “three times the minimum period” of registration, “subject to an overall maximum of 12 years”. This calculation allows for the programme to be undertaken part-time, and for a number of leaves of absence and repeated years for any student. The maximum duration includes leaves of absence as well as repeated years.

### **Arguments to Support Proposal**

8. The proposal to reduce the maximum duration of the MBChB from twelve years originates with the programme director and the Dean of Medicine in the College of Medical and Dental Sciences. It has been checked by staff in Academic and Student Administration.
9. The current maximum duration of 12 years for the MBChB arises from the incorporation of the medical degree programme into the main regulations. At that point the maximum duration of the MBChB was listed in 6.2.1 (a) using the standard formula of multiplying the minimum duration by three (minimum duration + same length of time for 50% part-time students + same length of time to allow for repeating each year) with the total duration of the degree capped at twelve years, according to the procedure established in Regulation 6.2.1 (d).
10. Neither MBChB programme offers a part-time mode; therefore, the University of Birmingham’s maximum duration of twelve years is over double the minimum period of registration for either programme.
11. As a professional programme leading to employment in an industry with extensive competition for jobs as junior doctors, the MBChB programme director regards it as unlikely that many students who take longer than five years to complete their programme (other than for medical reasons) will find employment. Indeed, where students have taken much longer than five years to qualify, there is a fitness-to-practise issue, with possible negative implications for the University’s reputation: it is debatable whether students who have repeatedly failed assessments designed to test their ability to successfully diagnose and determine treatment for medical conditions would make good medical doctors. There is therefore a risk to the reputation of the University and in particular its medical programmes if a situation is enabled whereby students who fail to consistently show the standards required of a trainee medical doctor are allowed more than twice the length of the programme in which to qualify.
12. Sector norms are to have shorter maximum durations on the MBChB than that currently in force at the University of Birmingham, as detailed in the following table, summarising maximum durations at other medical schools, received in response to a request for information.

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Maximum duration of medical degree programme.</b>
Aberdeen	6 years, excluding intercalation, with opportunity of extension if justified.
Barts & Queen Mary's	Double length of programme (i.e. 10 years) – currently under review.
Cambridge	8 years.
Dundee	7 years including intercalation, but with flexibility in interpretation.
Glasgow	5 years, 6 in exceptional circumstances.
HYMS (Hull & York)	7 years.
Keele	7 years.
Leicester	7 years.
Manchester	7 years.
Nottingham	6 years for an honours degree generally, but enquiry noted Medical School of need to reassess.
Peninsula (Exeter)	7 years.
Sheffield	7 years excluding intercalation and leave of absence.
Southampton	7 years excluding intercalation.
University of East Anglia	7 years including intercalation.
University College London	13 years. Have been considering 3 fails and out policy due to excessive length of maximum duration.
Warwick	6 years (for a 4 year programme).

Other than two institutions within the University of London, with maximum durations of ten and thirteen years, a figure between five and eight years seems to be the norm across the sector. Notably, those with short durations within this range (other than Nottingham, where there does not seem to be separate regulation for medical degrees) seem to have mechanisms to allow extensions. Warwick has a four-year programme, which is therefore more comparable to the MBChB for graduates than the MBChB.

13. A maximum duration of eight years for the MBChB and seven years for the MBChB for graduates is broadly in line with other institutions. This allows three years above the minimum duration of the programme; mechanisms exist through Progress and Awards Board to extend this in cases of individual necessity.

14. The MBChB for graduates, being a programme of four years duration, is in breach of Regulation 6.2.1 (a) which states the minimum duration of an MBChB programme shall be five years. In order to avoid this contradiction without reducing the minimum duration of all MBChB programmes to four years (which would not ensure the required level of expertise to qualify as a medical doctor for those without a degree-level background in the life sciences) it would be necessary to specify separate minimum and maximum durations for the MBChB for graduates.

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