

## University of Birmingham

### **Proposed amendment to Regulations to require an electronic copy of postgraduate research theses to be held by the University's Library.**

#### **Purpose of Paper**

1. To propose an amendment for effect in 2009/10 to Regulation 7.4.2 (b) that will require students in research degree programmes to deposit a copy of their thesis in a format that meets modern standards.

#### **Proposal**

2. Regulation 7.4.2 (b) currently states that "The thesis or report must be bound in accordance with University requirements before the degree may be awarded."

#### ***Proposed new text:***

*The final, corrected version of the thesis or report must be bound in accordance with University requirements deposited with the University before the degree may be awarded, presented in an appropriate printed and electronic format in accordance with current University requirements.*

#### **Background**

3. **The present requirements**

A copy of each research thesis is deposited in the Library in order that the content may be accessible to other researchers. The printed copy is available for reference in libraries, and has traditionally been reproduced on request by microfilming or photocopying.

The "University requirements" specified in the Regulations can be found at <http://www.library.bham.ac.uk/searching/guides/sk05presentingthesis.pdf>. These requirements specify standards of presentation to fit the three stages in the lifecycle of a thesis:

- 1) a layout that suits the needs of examiners
- 2) use of materials suitable for archival storage
- 3) a layout suitable for reproduction and dissemination

This proposal is concerned mainly with the third of these (reproduction and dissemination) and anticipating future developments in the second of these (archival storage).

4. **Effect of the amendment**

This proposal would require a revision of the Author Declaration Form, which outlines the conditions of deposit and access to theses, and a proposed revised version of this is appended.

Only minor amendments would be needed to the “University requirements” as specified in the Library guide *Presenting your thesis*, and a copy of this guide is appended, annotated with proposed changes.

Students would still be required to submit a final paper copy of their thesis to the Library, until such time as i) electronic submission is fully integrated into the thesis submission process, and ii) we are confident in the arrangements for long-term preservation of the electronic copies. However, in many cases, a cheaper “fastback” form of binding would be acceptable for this final copy. The longer term intention is eventually to drop the requirement for a paper copy.

5. **Accessibility of research findings**

There is a growing expectation amongst the research community that research findings should be made available in a web-accessible format. Theses contain primary research material and the practice of making theses and dissertations available online is growing internationally. The UK has recently introduced a national e-theses system (EThOS) that replaces the microfilm-based service at the British Library.

6. **Examination**

The Library has no involvement in the handling of the thesis for examination, so no changes are proposed here to the requirements for copies for examination (related to Regulation 7.4.2 (c): “Two copies of the thesis or report must be presented for examination in accordance with the guidelines published by Academic Services.”). However, if examiners wish to adopt an electronic process Library Services are happy to support it.

**Arguments to Support Proposal**

7. **Support from the research community**

There is widespread dissatisfaction amongst researchers with the current cumbersome systems for access to theses. Access to the information contained in theses is greatly enhanced by making the content available in searchable form and available to general and specialised search engines and bibliographic databases.

Birmingham authors have in recent months been invited to deposit an electronic copy of their thesis with the Library and EThOS, and to date over 200 theses have been volunteered by their authors. The Library now recommends that the University establish a formal requirement for parallel print and electronic deposit of research theses.

## 8. **Practical feasibility**

All theses are produced using word processing software, and the original electronic text can be readily converted to a web-viewable version. Some authors also include supplementary digital materials with their thesis, and access to these materials will be enhanced via their inclusion in an electronic repository. Most thesis authors are happy to make their work available in this way, and Library staff are available if necessary, to help with the conversion process.

The Library already has a suitable eTheses Repository that conforms to current standards. (There is potential to achieve further integration of the deposit process to this repository with existing student records systems, as outlined in a separate project brief, but this is not essential to the present proposal.) Via the UK EThOS system, the electronic copies will be included in the British Library's digital preservation programme.

Electronic submission will reduce handling costs for the University and binding costs for the student. Ready access to theses will save the time of researchers.

## 9. **Safeguards**

Following extensive consultation within the University and via EThOS, necessary measures are in place to protect any confidential material that should not appear on the web.

Readers of theses are advised via a statement accompanying each item, that the work is copyright. Via EThOS, theses content will be submitted to the corpus of texts that are used in plagiarism detection systems, as a deterrent to plagiarism of thesis work.

Guidance is already provided (by the Library and by Training and Skills Development courses and materials) on seeking permission to include any third-party material in theses.

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