

University of Birmingham

**Proposed changes to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally
Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations**

Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is requested to **approve** the changes and addition to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations proposed by the Examinations and Congregations Office.

Proposal

2. That the following changes be made to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations 2.3 and 6.5 from the 2010/11 session (additions underlined, deletions struck through):
 - 2.3 *The rubric of each examination question paper must: comply with the Guidance provided by Academic Services.*
 - ~~2.3.1 Provide clear and unambiguous information as to what is permitted and is not permitted in an exam.~~
 - ~~2.3.2 Identify any permitted texts.~~
 - ~~2.3.3 Specify whether calculators may be used (and any restrictions relating to these).~~
 - 6.5 *Where a School is not represented through the Senior Invigilator in a venue, or where the appointed Senior Invigilator could not reasonably be expected to resolve any student queries which may arise in connection with the School paper(s), the School will arrange for a competent person to attend the examination venue for the initial fifteen minutes of the sitting for the purpose of resolving any queries. If a query arises after the initial fifteen minutes the School should arrange for a competent person to attend the venue to resolve the query. Where a number of different examinations from a School are taking place in a single venue, this duty may involve more than one person. This requirement does not apply to overseas sittings.*
3. That the following clause be added to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations as 6.18:
Registered Students must leave all question sheets and answer books provided during an examination sitting in the venue when the Registered Student leaves.

Background

4. The Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations governs the conduct of examinations organised through

the Examinations and Congregations Office and sat during the main and supplementary examination periods. It sets out all requirements for such examinations, including ensuring the examination papers are to a suitable standard.

5. To ensure consistency and that essential instructions are presented to students, centrally co-ordinated examination papers have a standardised rubric, the form and content of which is determined by the Examinations and Congregations Office each year. This information includes what texts, calculators and other resources may be used in an examination, but also includes other standard information such as the requirement to obey the invigilators' instructions.
6. Although examination papers are proof-read several times, the specialised nature of many questions means that it is possible that potential ambiguities are missed. In such cases it is necessary for Schools to provide staff with the relevant expertise to resolve the enquiry.
7. Currently there is no requirement for students sitting an examination to leave question sheets behind, and it is not uncommon for students to take these with them upon completion of the examination.

Arguments to Support Proposal

8. The rubric of the examination paper is, along with the senior invigilator's instructions, one of the key ways in which instructions are passed to students as to what is acceptable within an examination. There is however a growing list of requirements as to what should be included in the rubric in particular circumstances, especially in relation to subjects where particular types of calculator or computing equipment might be used. It is apparent that current section 2.3 would therefore need regular updating to provide a usable guideline to those producing examination papers.
9. Rather than regularly requiring APRC to consider increasingly long and technical amendments to the list of what should be included in the rubric of an examination period, it is suggested that the maintenance of this list should be conducted through the annually-updated guidance on producing examination papers produced by the Examination and Congregations Office. This will still ensure that the rubric contains all necessary instructions, but will allow for greater flexibility in defining content, especially in those fields where there is evolving requirements for the use of technology.
10. There have been two cases in the last year of an ambiguity in an examination paper having been discovered more than fifteen minutes after the start of an examination. In both cases, upon being notified of the fact, the Examinations and Congregations Office have had to contact the Module Co-ordinator at home to seek clarification, and then to relay information to the Senior Invigilator, with all the attendant risk of confusion that relaying messages through staff not familiar with the subject of the examination may involve.
11. It does not seem unreasonable to require that Schools ensure wherever possible that a member of staff with suitable expertise is available, which will generally mean on campus, to ensure any queries about examination papers can be rapidly resolved with much less chance of confusion.
12. There has been several cases over the last few years of students taking both question sheet and answer booklet out of examinations, generally by mistake although in at least one case an attempt was made to reinsert the answer

sheet into the examination venue after the examination finished. Students have also admitted to deliberately removing the answer book after examinations they felt had gone badly. At the very least this risks disadvantaging students who have accidentally picked up their answer book along with the question sheet, and will then face examination irregularity proceedings as a consequence. In order to reduce this risk and the possibility of deliberate attempts to cheat by removing the answer book hidden in the question paper it is suggested that students are required to leave the question sheet behind.

13. There seems to be no argument that students need to be able to remove question sheets from an examination venue, whilst there is a clear reason to stop them doing so, to ensure there is less chance to remove, by accident or design, the answer book at the same time.

Allan McKinley
Curriculum Development Officer
Academic and Student Administration