

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Academic Policy & Regulations Committee

8 October 2009

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES

Members present: Professor A J Randall, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Academic Quality and Students (in the Chair)
Professor K Dowden, College of Arts and Law
Ms B Jones, Vice-President (Education and Access), Birmingham University Guild of Students
Ms C L McCauley, Academic and Student Administration
Ms C M Pike, Director of Legal Services
Mr N Ross, College of Medical and Dental Sciences

Observer: Professor J S Bale, College of Life and Environmental Sciences

Apologies: Dr C Ryan, College of Social Sciences

In attendance: Mr P A Fantom, Academic and Student Administration (Secretary)

Papers The Minute Book contains copies of all written papers or reports referred to below. Agenda and papers are also available via <http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/APRC.shtml>.

09/32 **Welcome**

The Chair welcomed all existing and new members to the first meeting of the Committee for the 2009/10 academic session.

He introduced and welcomed Professor Jeff Bale of the College of Life and Environmental Sciences who, as Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Students) designate, and pending the ratification of his appointment to this post by Council, would be chairing future meetings of the Committee.

He also introduced and welcomed Ms Brigid Jones, the Birmingham University Guild of Students' Vice-President (Education and Access) for 2009/10.

09/33 **Vote of Thanks**

Noted:

That Professor Stephen Shute, the University's former Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Quality and Students) and Chair of APRC, had now left the University to take up the position of Head of the new School of Law, Politics and Sociology at Sussex University.

Resolved:

That the congratulations of the Committee be extended to Professor Shute on his new appointment, and that the Committee's thanks be recorded for all of the considerable work undertaken and support given to APRC during his time with the University.

09/34 **Terms of Reference and Membership of the Committee**

Resolved:

That the Terms of Reference and Membership of the Committee during 2009/10 (APRC.09.10.01) be approved, subject to the incorporation of the following amendment (deletions struck through, insertions underlined):

- *Acting as a Progress and Awards Board:*
- *To determine recommendations made notwithstanding regulations (where special or mitigating circumstances have not been considered previously ~~by the School~~) received from Boards of Examiners for taught programmes.*

Noted:

(a) That the following vacancies on APRC had now been filled:

- Professor Glyn Humphreys of the College of Life and Environmental Sciences, to replace Professor John Heath, as representative from Directors of Research and Knowledge Transfer.
- Professor Achim Jung of the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, as a representative from Heads of Schools.

(b) That the proposed Terms of Reference and Membership of the Progress and Awards Board and of the Research Progress and Awards Sub-Group (a sub-panel of the Progress Awards Board) for 2009/10 would come forward to a future meeting.

09/35 **Minutes**

Resolved:

That the minutes (APRC.09.10.02) of the meeting held on 21 May 2009 be approved, subject to the amendment of the numbering of Minute 09/18 (b) to rectify the duplication of (vi) therein.

09/36 **Matters arising****Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment (Minute 09/18 (a) refers)**

Resolved:

That following advice from the Director of Legal Services, the term 'Principal Academic Unit' be retained in all University legislation, with the exception of Codes of Practice, within which it was permissible to employ the term 'School'.

09/37 **The provision of awards leading to the Degree of Master of Philosophy**

Considered:

A paper seeking APRC's approval for the establishment of a working group to consider issues arising from the current provision of master's degree level postgraduate research degrees in the University (APRC.09.10.03).

Noted:

(a) That this paper had been prepared in accordance with the request of U-QAEC, following feedback received from external examiners that raised questions with regard to the University's MPhil provision, that APRC should review the relevant Regulations, consider provision in comparable institutions and have regard to the guidance issued by the QAA and other related organisations.

- (b) That the University currently offered a range of research master's degrees, included the one-year full-time MRes, the one-year full-time MPhil Mode A and Mode B, and the two-year full-time MPhil or MLitt. However, comparison with other institutions demonstrated that there were two main types of research degrees offered at master's level. These were either a one-year full-time MA/MSc/MRes requiring the completion of a notional 180 credits, including at least 60 taught credits and a dissertation, or a two-year full-time MPhil requiring the completion of a 50-60,000 word thesis. Furthermore, examination of information available from the QAA, including the recently issued consultation document on the master's degrees characteristics reference point, indicated a preference for those models.
- (c) That there were potential implications for any changes to provision with regard to the fee structure, marketing and the production of the prospectus, module and credit rates, and that a transitional period might be required to allow any changes to be introduced in a phased manner for existing students undertaking these programmes.

Resolved:

- (a) That a working party be established, with Terms of Reference to be agreed by APRC by circulation, to consider and formulate a strategy for resolving the issues identified in the paper.
- (b) That the proposed composition of the working party be as follows:
- Director of the Graduate School (Chair)
 - Graduate School leads in each of the five Colleges of the University
 - Postgraduate and Mature Students Officer, Birmingham University Guild of Students
 - Postgraduate Research Student Services Manager
 - Assistant Student Records Manager (Research)
 - Academic Policy and Curriculum Development Officer (Secretary)

09/38 **Proposed changes to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations**

Considered:

A paper seeking APRC's approval to proposed changes for effect from 2010/11 to the Code of Practice, in order to remove an ambiguity and ensure consistency of approach (APRC.09.10.04).

This request was made following the identification of a small number of ambiguities by the Examinations and Congregations Office.

Resolved:

- (a) That the following proposed amendments to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations be approved (deletions struck through, insertions underlined):
- (i) Clause 3 to read:
- The rubric of each examination question paper must: comply with the Guidance provided by Academic Services.*
- (ii) Clauses 2.3.1 to 2.3.3 to be deleted:
- ~~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).~~

(iii) Clause 6.5 to read:

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.

(b) That having regard to the proposed additional clause requiring Registered Students to leave all question sheets and answer books provided during an examination sitting in the venue when they left, some members expressed concern that this prevented students from discussing the questions posed with their peers, which was an important part of the learning process. Furthermore, it could be potentially disadvantageous to those students who might require a copy of the question sheet at a later stage to assist them should they wish to lodge an appeal. Accordingly, APRC requested that the Examinations and Congregations Office provide further information in support of this proposal. In particular, responses were requested on the following:

- (i) The costs and benefits of providing additional copies of question sheets, to be made available to those students requiring them immediately after the end of the examination and outside of the exam venue.
- (ii) The costs and benefits of publishing an electronic version of the question sheets immediately after the end of the examination period.

09/39 **Proposal to reduce the minimum duration of the BNurs to three years to bring it into line with Programme length**

Considered:

A paper seeking APRC's approval to proposed changes for immediate effect to Regulations to ensure that the minimum duration of the Bachelor of Nursing (BNurs) in Regulations is in accordance with practice (APRC.09.10.05).

Resolved:

(a) That the proposed amendment to Regulation 6.2.1 (a) be revised to read (deletions struck through, insertions underlined):

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

<i>Award</i>	<i>Minimum period</i>	<i>Maximum period</i>
<i>Bachelors (unless otherwise stated below)</i>	<i>3 years</i>	<i>9 years</i>
...		
<i>BNurs, Bachelors, including year in industry or additional year abroad</i>	<i>4 years</i>	<i>12 years</i>

(b) That on the question of the maximum duration of the BNurs programme, Nick Ross be requested to investigate and report back to a future meeting of APRC, taking into account previous decisions made by the Committee on the BDS and MBChB.

09/40 **Proposal to clarify an ambiguity concerning the Points-Based System in the Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence**

Considered:

A paper seeking APRC's approval to a change to the Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence on order to clarify an ambiguity relating to the implementation of the points-based system (APRC.09.10.06).

Resolved:

That the proposed amendments to the Code of Practice be approved to read (deletions struck through, insertions underlined):

2.1.3 Points-Based System

Under the Points-Based System, the University is required to define a series of specific ~~10~~ contact points to verify the attendance of non-European Economic Area (non-EEA) Registered Students; non-contact from non-EEA Registered Students ultimately requiring the University to make a report of the non-EEA Registered Student's non-attendance to the UK Borders Agency. The nature and definition of these contact points may vary between programmes of study and research, and will be determined by individual Schools.

3.1.2 *Where a non-EEA Registered Student has missed ~~the~~ 10 specified contact points, as determined by the School, the School will inform Academic and Student Administration, who will notify the UK Borders Agency, regardless of whether the Reasonable Diligence procedure has been invoked.*

09/41 **Proposal to amend the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment in relation to student access to and the retention of scripts**

Considered:

A paper seeking APRC's approval for an amendment to the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment to clarify an ambiguity relating to student access to and the retention of scripts (APRC.09.10.07).

Noted:

That there were contradictions between Regulation (7.2.3 (e) (ii)), which stated that *all answer books and other papers shall remain confidential to the Examiners*, and between the Code of Practice which stated that *all written examination answer books and other papers shall **normally** remain confidential* (clause 7.1) and that *principal academic units may, at their discretion, allow Registered Students to view their examination scripts* (clause 7.2).

Resolved:

- (a) That, following lengthy discussion, the principles concerning student feedback from examinations and possible access to examination scripts be considered by the Committee, via circulation or a working group.
- (b) That, until such time that the principles were agreed and any amendments to the Regulations and Code of Practice had been approved (for effect in 2010/11), current Code of Practice clause 7.1 be amended to more accurately reflect the Regulations and current Code of Practice clause 7.2 be suspended.

09/42 **Chair's Action***Reported:*

That Chair's Action was taken between May and September 2009 to approve:

- (a) The following amendments to legislation:
 - (i) To Regulations, in order to reduce the maximum duration of the BDS.
 - (ii) To Regulations, in order to clarify the recruitment process of the Investigating Officer appointed for the purpose of investigating matters of student conduct.
 - (iii) To Regulations, with respect to postgraduate research programmes, in order to make certain processes relating to postgraduate research programmes and students clearer.
 - (iv) To Regulations, and to the Code of Practice on Centrally Coordinated Formal Written Examinations, relating to examination irregularities.
 - (v) To Ordinances, with respect to the inclusion of the award of the degree of Master of Public Administration.
- (b) The following amendments to Codes of Practice:
 - (i) The Code of Practice on Assessment and Award of Higher Doctorates.
 - (ii) The Code of Practice on Plagiarism.
 - (iii) The Code of Practice on Senate Review.
 - (iv) The Code of Practice on the External Examiner System for Taught Programmes
- (c) The following exemptions:
 - (i) A request to amend Regulations in respect of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education.
 - (ii) A request from the Birmingham Law School in relation to the use of Adjusted Regulations and 30 credit modules on the LLB for Graduates two year programme for 2009/10.

09/43 **Dates of meetings for the Academic Year 2009/10***Noted:*

That future meetings had been arranged to take place on:

- Thursday 4th February 2010 at 10.00 am
- Thursday 20th May 2010 at 2.30 pm

However, as some Committee members had expressed a preference for future meetings not to be held on Thursdays, the possibility of arranging alternative dates would be considered, in consultation with the Chair.