

University of Birmingham

**Further information regarding the proposed amendment of the Code of Practice
on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations**

Topic and Purpose of this Paper

1. For APRC to **consider** the response to the Committee's request for clarification and further information on this matter, as provided by the Examinations and Congregations Office, and to **approve** the addition of a clause to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations.

Proposal

2. That, in view of the comments and information provided by the Examinations and Congregations Office, 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 examination venue when the Registered Student leaves the venue.

Background and Context

3. At its meeting on 8 October 2009, the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee received a paper (APRC.09.10.04) on proposed changes to the Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations.
4. These changes included the proposed addition of a clause to require Registered Students to leave all question sheets and answer books provided at the examination venue when the Registered Students left the venue. This clause is an addition to the Code of Practice because there is currently no requirement for Registered Students to leave their question sheets behind.

APRC resolved:

- 09/38 (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.

Arguments in Support of the Proposal

5. In responding to this request, the Examinations and Congregations Office have noted that they work closely with Senior and Supporting Invigilators and receive extensive feedback from them on those examinations that they have overseen. The following comments and information are provided for the Committee:

- In the 2007/08 academic session, the Examinations and Congregations Office dealt with five examination irregularities that arose from the unauthorised removal of the completed answer booklets from centrally-managed examination venues. Candidates were either using the question paper to conceal and remove blank answer books from the exam venue (to pre-prepare essay plans/answers) or using them to conceal and remove their completed answer books (to imply that their answer book had been lost by the invigilators). In the latter case invigilators have often found completed answer books in bins outside the venue, however the majority go undiscovered.
- Although figures on the number of blank answer books removed from examination venues have not been collated, the Examinations and Congregations Office have dealt with an examination irregularity case where a Registered Student brought a prepared and completed answer booklet into an examination venue with a view to substituting it for the blank answer booklet provided at the venue. If Registered Students are prohibited from removing all examination materials, i.e. question sheets and blank answer booklets from examination venues, the possibility of a Registered Student attempting to carry out such an irregularity would be considerably reduced.
- Past question papers are published online at the beginning of each academic year. However, the publication of question papers immediately after each examination period is considered inadvisable as some Schools tend to use similar questions in the subsequent examination session. Therefore, the publication of papers at this stage would limit Schools from drawing on the pool of potential examination questions that might otherwise be available.

- Invigilation teams already have a substantial task in collating and reconciling the answer booklets at the end of each examination. This activity is carried out under considerable pressure and requires concentration and diligence. Furthermore, given the logistical constraints of collecting in the examination materials and ensuring that what has been gathered correlates to the requirements for the particular examination, asking invigilators to distribute additional copies of question papers after the examination will place an additional burden on invigilators already operating under time-limited and stressful circumstances.
- Making additional copies of question papers available outside of the examination venue at the end of the examination also poses other, wider implications. For example, there is the possibility that a group of students gathering in such a manner might, by action or noise, cause disruption to other examinations being held in close proximity but which had not reached their conclusion. It is possible, however, that additional copies of question papers could be sent to academic schools to be made available to Registered Students after the examination. This would allow the schools some measure of control over which papers are made publically available.
- The Examinations and Congregations Office currently spends approximately £50,000 on the printing of question papers. Working on the conservative estimate that 50% of candidates would seek a copy of the question paper, this would have financial implications of an additional £25,000 in printing costs.
- Under current University legislation and Codes of Practice, Registered Students do not have grounds to appeal against academic judgement and, therefore, the benefit of them having the ability to take the question paper out of the examination is of limited value. Nevertheless, if a Registered Student maintained that a copy of a question paper was required to assist them in making an appeal, the Student Conduct and Appeals Team would be able to provide one to that Registered Student.

Conclusions

6. As has been indicated in this paper, there have been a number of cases of Registered Students committing examination irregularities, either by mistake or occasionally with intent. In order to reduce the risk of irregularities, and so as not to disadvantage Registered Students who might accidentally pick up examination materials and then face irregularity proceedings, the proposed amendment to the Code of Practice clarifies the position for all concerned with the conduct of the University's centrally co-ordinated examinations.

Michael Davis
Assistant Manager – Examinations and Congregations
Academic and Student Administration

Paul Fantom
Academic Policy and Curriculum Development Officer
Academic and Student Administration