

University of Birmingham

**Request for Exemption from Regulations Concerning
the Number of Credits for a Module on the LLM**

Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is asked **consider**, and if thought appropriate, **approve** a request for an exemption from Regulations for the LLM allowing modules on these programmes to have credit values of 15 credits.

Proposal

2. That the LLM (to be understood as all programmes at the University leading to the award of LLM, including programmes leading to this award not yet approved) be exempt from Regulation 6.1.2 (g), which reads as follows:
The credit values of modules shall be expressed in multiples of 10 credits up to a maximum of 60 credits, unless otherwise permitted by the Senate or under delegated authority. As an exception, study undertaken as a year abroad/in industry may be defined in terms of a single module of 120 credits.
3. That the credit value of modules on the LLM may be 15 credits, and that otherwise modules on the LLM will comply with Regulation 6.1.2 (g) in having a credit value up to a maximum of 60 credits (as a Master's programme, the LLM will not need year abroad modules).
4. That the exemption from Regulation 6.1.2 (g) stand for as long as the LLM programme is active.

Background

5. The LLM is the School of Law's main taught postgraduate programme, with large numbers of students (increasing from c. 50 to almost 90 in recent years). Since 2004 the LLM has been structured around four 30 credit modules selected from a list of options, plus a 60 credit dissertation.
6. Students on the LLM select a number of areas of specialised legal study to undertake, which form the basis of modules. No LLM programme of study at the University has compulsory modules other than the dissertation. This flexibility is one of the key features of LLM provision across the sector.
7. There are seven main competitors to the University of Birmingham LLM, on which the teaching elements of the programme are organised as follows:

Institution	Organisation
University of Bristol	4 X 30 credit modules
University of Durham	8 X 15 credit modules
University of Leeds	8 X 15 credit modules
University of Manchester	8 X 15 credit modules
University of Nottingham	8 X 15 credit modules
University of Sheffield	8 X 15 credit modules
University of Warwick	Not modularised

8. A survey of current students undertaking the LLM found that all respondents agreed that a combination of 30 credit and 15 credit modules would provide a more attractive structure than the current structure based solely on 30 credit modules.

Argument to Support Proposal

9. The current 30 credit module only structure of the LLM at the University of Birmingham is not ideal, as it limits the choice available to students and therefore acts as a deterrent to recruitment. In terms of intake, the University of Nottingham is roughly comparable with the University of Birmingham, but due to using 15 credit modules is able to offer 55 modules in comparison to the 30 modules offered by the University of Birmingham. It is therefore desirable to offer smaller 15 credit modules in addition to 30 credit modules, in order to allow more choice and flexibility to students and therefore increase the marketability of the LLM.
10. The School of Law feels that the structure of the LLM must not be unnecessarily complicated, and that therefore combinations of 10, 20 and 30 credit modules are undesirable: introducing more than two credit options (i.e. a mix of 30/20/10 credits) would be difficult to fit into the existing timetable (where a number of other established programmes, including the LLB and Graduate Diploma in Legal Studies mean that there is little flexibility), to administer and would be confusing for the students. It is also vital for the market that the programmes are clear and easy to understand. There is still the intention to offer some core 30 credit modules on each LLM programme, which would allow for optimised curriculum design with 15 credit modules.
11. The LLM Board have unanimously rejected the idea of using 10 credit modules, as it is felt that a nominal 100 hours of study is not enough for students to fully engage with the complexity of any particular area of legal studies in enough depth. It is furthermore felt that whilst it might be possible to restructure the programmes into 20 credit modules, this would be a complex task which would result in a programme structure that was well away from the norms of other LLMs offered by competitor institutions.
12. The possibility of offering 15 credit options would make it much easier for the School to increase the range of options on offer. Academic staff would be

able to offer specialised, bespoke modules falling within their existing areas of research without being required to take on the much more burdensome and resource-intensive task of developing a 30 credit option, and this would also aid the recruitment of external specialists. The resourcing implications for the School should a member of staff wish to offer a new LLM module would also be much more manageable.

13. Although splitting some existing 30 credit options would mean very little change in terms of the substance of what is taught and its resource implications for the School, it would serve the important marketing (as well as academic) purpose of increasing the number of specialised options on offer on the LLM. This is particularly important for advertising literature. At present, many of our competitors appear to offer many more modules than the University of Birmingham. It is only on much closer inspection that it becomes clear that this is only because the modules are smaller. Although this is in many ways cosmetic, it is disadvantaging the University in the market place.

Existing University Policy

14. The requirement for modules to be measured in multiples of 10 units has been a component of University Regulations since the central Regulations for undergraduate programmes were introduced in 2000. Although the reason for this decision is not stated in the paperwork, there is a general understanding that the background to this decision is that 10 credits approximates to 100 hours of work on average, so 1 credit would approximate to 10 hours of work and 5 credits to 50 hours. It was decided that whilst it was possible to distinguish between a nominal 100 hours work and a nominal 200 hours work, the borderlines between a nominal 100 hours work and a nominal 150 hours work (a 10 and a 15 credit module respectively) would be unclear.
15. The School of Law requested in 2008/09 that approval be granted for the use of 30 credit modules on the LLB for Graduates two year programme. APRC's decision was that the School of Law should be allowed to use Adjusted Regulations in respect of the LLB for Graduates programme and the use of 30 credit modules during the 2009/10 session, and that a review of that programme would then be undertaken. Therefore, it is open to question whether a proper evaluation of alternative structures for the LLM programme has been undertaken or whether the School of Law's proposal is the result of comprehensive programme review.

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