

University of Birmingham

Proposed amendment to Section 7 – Assessment, Progression and Award of the Regulations

Topic and Purpose of this Paper

1. For APRC to **consider** the proposed amendment to regulations to include an *aegrotat* award for students undertaking Research Degrees. Aegrotat awards are available for students on Taught Programmes under Section 7 of the Regulations.

Proposal

2. That the following clauses be included in the Regulations pertaining to postgraduate research degrees:

7.4.1 (l) In exceptional circumstances, where a Registered Student is unable to complete the requirements of his or her programme due to serious illness, death or other significant cause, the Examiners of the thesis may recommend the award of an aegrotat degree, diploma or certificate. Such recommendations shall be subject to the approval of the Research Progress and Awards Sub-Panel. Degrees which are subject to fitness to practise requirements shall not be awarded as aegrotat degrees.

7.4.8 (g) Aegrotat Awards shall be listed as 'aegrotat' on the central University record and certificates.

A Registered Student who has been awarded an aegrotat qualification shall not be permitted any further opportunity to complete the requirements of his or her programme.

Background and Context

3. The Research Progress and Awards Sub Panel recently received a request for the waiving of the viva examination due to severe ill health and possible inability of the student to complete any corrections/revisions.
4. The issue of aegrotat awards was raised. The following regulations apply to taught programmes and the taught elements of research degrees:

7.2.5 (h) In exceptional circumstances, where a Board of Examiners considers that a Registered Student is unable to complete the requirements of his or her programme due to serious illness, death or other significant cause, the Board may recommend the award of an aegrotat degree, diploma or certificate. This recommendation replaces any decision to award a lower alternative qualification for which the student may have obtained sufficient credit. Such recommendations must be made in accordance with the Code of

Practice on the Assessment of Taught Modules and shall be subject to the approval of the Progress and Awards Board. An aegrotat degree should be unclassified. Degrees which are subject to fitness to practise requirements shall not be awarded as aegrotat degrees.

7.3.4 (a) Aegrotat Awards shall be listed as 'aegrotat' on the central University record and certificates. Undergraduate aegrotat degrees shall not be classified or designated as "honours" or "pass" degrees. Taught postgraduate aegrotat degrees shall not be awarded with merit or distinction.

7.3.4 (b) A Registered Student who has been awarded an aegrotat qualification shall not be permitted any further opportunity to complete the requirements of his or her programme.

5. There is no equivalent provision for students undertaking research degrees.

Arguments in Support of the Proposal

6. The scenario that led to the raising of this issue is not unique. A recent case led to the waiver of the viva and the recommendation that the PhD be awarded on the following basis:
 - a) that there were grounds for making the award of PhD; that the work was tragically cut short and that it was not possible for the candidate to carry out even minor corrections.
 - b) that, if the University was open to proceeding on the basis of the potential of the work, the thesis be bound and presented in the usual way for the award, but not deposited for public consultation unless a statement about the reasons for its incomplete form appended to the thesis.

The Sub Panel approved the recommendation pending advice from Library Services and the Legal Office regarding the final copy of the thesis.

7. Best practice would suggest that, where appropriate, regulations should be equivalent across the University's suite of degree programmes.

Conclusions

8. APRC is requested to consider, and if thought appropriate, approve the amendment to regulations.

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