

University of Birmingham  
Request for Exemption

**Topic and Purpose of the Paper**

1. APRC is asked to **consider**, and if thought appropriate, **approve** a request for an exemption from Regulations to allow a professional Doctorate in Forensic Psychology be awarded to a certain category of student with prior and experiential learning and to allow students applying to the Doctorate in Forensic Psychology to use more than one-third pre-awarded credit towards the degree.
2. Successful applicants may register as full-time students for a minimum period of 1 year and a maximum of 2 years, or as part-time students for a minimum period of 2 years and a maximum of 3 years.

**Consultation**

3. Academic staff from the Centre for Forensic and Criminological Psychology met with colleagues from the Curriculum Development Unit, Research Student Administration and Admissions.

**Proposals/Recommendations**

4. That a certain category of applicant for the Doctorate in Forensic Psychology be exempt from Regulation 5.1.2 (b) (ii) which is as follows:

*In the case of research degree programmes with taught elements, the use of pre-awarded credit towards a University Award is subject to a maximum of one-third of the total credits required for the Award. Successful completion of the Award depends on achievement of the remaining credits (which must include any compulsory dissertation or thesis element stated in the programme requirements) at the same level as or at a more advanced academic level than the preawarded credits (see subsection 6.1.4).*

**Background**

5. The Centre for Forensic and Criminological Psychology currently offer a Doctorate in Forensic Psychology (Foren.Psy.D: programme 5338) to trainee psychologists. The aim of this programme is to provide trainee psychologists with a complete package, whereby they can learn the necessary academic, practice and research skills needed to become a Forensic Psychologist (registered with the Health Professions Council) in the minimum three year period. Therefore, not only do they leave with a Doctorate but they also leave with the ability to be registered by their professional body as a Chartered Forensic Psychologist. This programme is one of two courses on offer in Europe currently.
6. Trainee psychologists do have other options available to them to become Chartered Forensic Psychologists without having to complete the Doctorate in Forensic Psychology at the University of Birmingham. Trainee's can

complete a recognised MSc (approved by the Health Professions Council) at one of several universities in the UK. This type of MSc typically provides students with the necessary 180 credits, as it covers academic information about Forensic Psychology only. Trainees then go onto work in clinical settings with offenders for a minimum of 2 and maximum of 5 years post MSc. During this time they have to submit exemplars of their work with clients, that must meet pass criteria before they can be approved for registration with the Health Professions Council. Therefore, Forensic Psychologist completing this route will have successfully gained an MSc and successfully completed 2-5 years practice experience and associated assignments.

7. Forensic Psychologists who have achieved registered status outside of the Doctorate in Forensic Psychology programme will have gained the necessary academic and practice experience needed to become a registered practitioner. However, they have not completed the necessary level of research that trainees on the Doctorate in Forensic psychology have completed to gain their Doctorate.
8. As years one and two of the Doctorate of Forensic Psychology are directly comparable to the study (i.e. the MSc) and professional experience of existing Chartered Forensic Psychologists, there is no educational basis for requiring them to repeat either of these activities.

### **Arguments to Support Proposals/Recommendations**

9. Forensic Psychology is an evidenced based profession; this means that it encourages psychologists to complete research to inform practice in the area. Therefore, we have a duty to provide professionals with advanced knowledge and training in this area in order to ensure that professionals, who have become registered via the alternative route to the Doctorate in Forensic Psychology, are provided with an opportunity to learn and develop these extra research skills.
10. Typically people completing the Doctorate in Forensic psychology are those trainees who can afford to self fund the three years. Very few people are provided with funding from their employers and there are no scholarships available from the School of Psychology. Therefore, many trainees can not complete the Doctorate due to a lack of available funds, which limits their opportunities. The University would be providing a more inclusive course if it were to provide students with a route that would allow them to 'top up' their knowledge and qualifications at a later date, when they are likely to have more funding available to them.
11. Currently the University of Birmingham and Nottingham University are the only two universities that offer a Doctorate in Forensic Psychology. Nottingham University and also offer a Top Up version of the Doctorate, similar to what is being proposed. Therefore, it is important that the Birmingham also offer this version to compete with other market providers.
12. This course will not require extra modules to be developed or taught. Students will simply be supervised through existing modules and research output to produce a research thesis. Extra resources will simply be time allocated to their supervision and examination of the thesis. Thus, we will be gaining extra student fees for minimum output, thus maximising existing resources.

13. It is important to note that Forensic Psychologists 'topping up' their qualifications are not taking an easy route to Doctoral status. Suitable applicants will have completed an MSc (gaining merit or above), in addition to 4 years practice (on average) in the field to gain registration as a Forensic Psychologist. In addition to all this work, they are then going to complete a further research thesis and oral examination to gain Doctoral status. This is in comparison to existing Doctorate students who complete all the necessary work in a three year period.

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