

02 February 2012

**Request for Extension for a series of exemptions for PhD with Integrated Study in  
Physical Science of Imaging in the Biomedical Sciences**

**Purpose of Paper**

1. APRC is asked to **consider**, and if thought appropriate, **approve** an extension of a series of exemptions from Regulations for the PhD with Integrated Study in Physical Science of Imaging in the Biomedical Sciences, in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences.

**Proposal**

2. That the exemptions for this programme granted from the following regulations are extended:
  - (a) 6.1.2 (q) (iv):  
*The programme requirements for a programme leading to a Taught Postgraduate Degree shall designate one or more Level M modules to be "dissertation components" which shall (individually or as a collection of related modules with a total credit value of 60) consist of a research project and a substantial piece of written work or such other work as may be accepted by the Senate or delegated authority as equivalent.*
  - (b) 6.1.3 (a):  
*A programme, normally of four years' duration, which integrates research with taught postgraduate work in a range of skills and subject focused courses, up to a maximum of 120 credits. Registered Students must produce a thesis which makes an original contribution to knowledge, worthy of publication in whole or in part in a learned journal.*
  - (c) 7.4.1 (k):  
*A Registered Student may be awarded only one University qualification following completion of a programme. Where credit for research and generic skills, subject-focused or professional elements is required for the award of the research degree no additional qualification shall be awarded for satisfactory completion of these elements. Where credit in research and generic skills, subject-focused or professional elements is not required for the award of a research degree, Registered Students who achieve this credit may be awarded an appropriate additional qualification*
  - (d) 7.3.2 (a) (iii):  
*A registered student must:*
    - *Have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the taught component on the programme; and*
    - *Have gained credit in dissertation components with a total credit value of 60 credits at level M taken during the course of the programme and*
    - *Have gained a weighted mean mark of at least 50 in the taught component of the programme; and*
    - *Have achieved a mark of 40 or more in all taught modules.*
3. That instead, the following alternative procedures take place:

- (a) That the master's component of the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS shall include three modules, each of 30 credits value, to a total of 90 credits worth of research modules, and therefore 90 credits of taught modules.
- (b) That the first year of the programme shall be treated as equivalent to a 180 credit MSc, and be assessed under regulations pertaining to taught postgraduate courses. That on completion of this stage, students shall be eligible to receive the award of MSc in Physical Science of Imaging in the Biomedical Sciences.
- (c) That progression from the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS is dependent upon successful completion of all modules with an average (weighted mean) mark of 60 – in both the taught element and the research part – so that a student has achieved 180 credits. Award of the MSC PSBIS will not suffice for progress to the next stage of the PhD with Integrated Study PSBIS if modules have not been successfully completed with a mark  $\geq 60$  and this will be made clear to students in all documents offering places and the programme handbook.
- (d) Instead of adhering to regulation 7.3.2.(a) (iii), the principle of proportionality be applied to those students wishing to exit the PSIBS programme after one year with an MSc, i.e. that students on the PSIBS programme should:
  - *Have gained at least 60 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the taught component on the programme; and*
  - *Have gained credit in dissertation components with a total credit value of 90 credits at level M taken during the course of the programme and*
  - *Have gained a weighted mean mark of at least 50 in the taught component of the programme; and have achieved a mark of 40 or more in all taught modules.*
- (e) That these exemptions be extended for as long as the programme shall run.

## Background and Consultation

4. The PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and the PhD with Integrated Study in the Physical Science of Imaging in the Biological Sciences are the only doctoral programmes within the University that offer a masters degree in addition to a doctoral award. This reflects the unusual structure of both programmes, which use the first year of the four-year programme to train students to a level where they are capable of undertaking doctoral research, a level of training which is practically identical to the requirements of a taught master's degree.
5. The PhD with Integrated Study in Physical Science of Imaging in the Biomedical Sciences was granted exemption on a one year basis from Regulation 6.1.2 (q) (iv), 6.1.3 (a) and 7.4.1 (k) via Chair's Action in July 2008 (APRC.08.07.02). An extension of these exemptions for a further three years was granted in the APRC of May 2009 (APRC.09.05.15). Following this, a further exemption was granted from Regulation 7.2.3 (a) in October 2010, as it was felt that adherence to this regulation would disadvantage students, due to the existing exemptions granted, and the credit weighting of the programme. According to the cover paper of the extension submitted in May 2009, the reason for granting a time limited exemption as opposed to a permanent exemption appears to be in order to allow

for further, more informed and detailed consideration of the exemptions from Regulations at the point at which the exemptions were due for renewal.

### **Argument to Support Proposal**

6. This programme is a very successful and innovative UoB programme, that has been positively reviewed by EPSRC in the recent (Summer 2011) DTC review process. It has been highlighted as an example of best practice and EPSRC have granted a funding extension. It is operating successfully and with high academic standards (as evidenced by Year 1 results and the first doctoral student papers in high-impact journals).
7. The particular Regulations which pertain to these exemptions have not changed in the subsequent years since the original exemption was granted. In addition, the reasons for the extension of the exemption remain the same as the reasons given for the original exemptions, as follows:
8. The MSc programme structure differs from that of a standard MSc course at Birmingham in that it has 90 credits of taught material and 90 credits of research material rather than the standard MSc split of 120:60 taught modules to dissertation.
9. It is a requirement of the agreement made with the EPSRC that there be a year's training at the 'equivalent of master's level on the programme, equivalent to 180 credits. This is to ensure that all students have the opportunity to acquire a sufficient level of knowledge of all the constituent subjects involved in the physical science of imaging in the biomedical science to be able to undertake research at a satisfactory level. This is achieved by theory modules from across the disciplines and that three individual research projects be undertaken to enable students to become familiar with researching in fields outside their own previous academic experiences. Each of these projects is required to involve 300 hours work, the equivalence of 30 credits. The two competitor EPSRC life science interface DTCs (Warwick and Imperial) offer two awards on completion of the programme, therefore in order to be competitive it is necessary for Birmingham to offer the same.
10. As a result of these requirements, students upon the programme will have completed a number of level M credits equivalent to the amount required in order to be eligible for a master's degree.
11. The level M modules which compose the first year of the programme are designed in order to ensure students who invariably come from a background in which they have experience of only one or two disciplines are able to conduct research which involves a wide-range of disciplinary expertise. It is necessary to pass all modules to progress to doctoral research as competence is required in all relevant fields in order to undertake the research.
12. This first year forms a discrete stage of the programme, with an internal hurdle at the end of the year in the form of the requirement that all modules be successfully passed before doctoral research may be undertaken. Therefore, although completion of the level M modules is necessary in order to undertake doctoral research, their assessment is not part of the final award, which is based upon the equivalent of 540 credits undertaken in the three years of doctoral research. This means that the first year of 180 credits is not assessed for the final award, and therefore are not double counted.

13. When regulation 7.3.2 (a) (iii) is applied to the PSIBS programme, students can be disadvantaged. A PSIBS student only has 90 taught credits, and applying the regulation would mean that the student can fail only one 10 credit taught module to gain 'at least 80 credits at level M in modules taken as part of the taught component', rather than the 40 credits for standard MSc programmes.

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