

**Request for exemption from the Regulations for a suite of programmes in
Communications, Electronics and Computing**

Topic and Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is asked to consider, and if thought appropriate, approve a request for an exemption from Regulations for students on the suite of MSc programmes in Communications, Electronics and Computing (CEC), to introduce an internal programme hurdle for progression to the project and to remove the right to resit the project.

Proposal

2. These proposals relate to the suite of M.Sc. programmes in Communications, Electronics and Computing (CEC). Specifically, this means the following programmes:
M.Sc.in Communications Engineering FT & PT (8499 and 8501)
Title changed to M.Sc. in Communications Engineering and Networks FT & PT (9506 and 9507)
M.Sc. in Satellite and Mobile Communications FT & PT (7355, 7356)
M.Sc. in Communication Networks FT & PT (7369, 7370, withdrawn)
M.Sc. in Radio Frequency Engineering FT & PT (8499, 8501)
Title changed to M.Sc. in RF and Microwave Engineering (9506, 9507)
M.Sc. in Electromagnetic Sensor Networks FT & PT (8503, 8504)
M.Sc. in Electronic and Computer Engineering FT & PT (7390, 7391)
M.Sc. in Embedded Systems FT & PT (7376, 7377)
M.Sc. in Interactive Digital Media FT & PT (7383 and 7384, now withdrawn)
3. That the M.Sc. programmes that form part of the CEC suite in the School of Electronic, Electrical and Computer Engineering should be exempt from the following regulation:
7.2.6 (a) Subject to sub-clause 7.2.6 (c) below, all Registered Students who fail a module, other than modules taken in the final stage of a classified honours degree programme not exempted from this clause by decision of the Senate, shall have one opportunity to retrieve the failure, either by re-assessment (i.e.re-sitting the examination and/or resubmitting coursework) or repetition. Such opportunity shall be normally provided and taken within one year of the initial failure except when, for reasons of frequency of module delivery, the Senate or a delegated authority has agreed otherwise
4. That an additional programme requirement is implemented for the above programmes, in which students are required to pass 60 taught credits before they are allowed to commence onto the project. This additional requirement will be governed by Regulation 6.1.2 (l):

6.1.2(l) The programme requirements may indicate specific modules which must be passed and any other requirements for progression between stages and/or for successful completion of the programme.

In this case it is not specific modules that must be passed but modules to a total of 60 credits.

5. As the School have been operating these programme requirements since 2010, it is requested that the exemption is granted with immediate effect.

Consultation

6. These changes were approved by the College Teaching and Learning Committee on 10 August 2010 and from the perspective of the College, do not constitute an “in year change” for current students. The changes would only affect current students if they were not confirmed, as student expectation has already been set. The School took all the action it was asked to in making the submission in 2010. The resulting documents were passed to the Curriculum Development Unit. The Curriculum Development Unit actioned the proposals at that stage by updating the on-line programme details. The School implemented the changes and informed students of procedures in good faith that the changes had been approved.

Background

7. In August 2010, the School submitted a Module Modification Form to the Curriculum Development Unit. In this form, the School indicated that these modifications constituted the following changes:
 - a. That students would be disallowed the right to retake the 60 credit project,
 - b. That completion of 60 taught credits was a pre-requisite for progression onto the project.

At the time, it was not recognised centrally that these changes actually constituted modifications that was outside of the University's Regulations, and therefore should have been submitted to APRC for approval.

8. In December 2011, a student appealed against his failure of the project. His appeal was based on medical grounds, and it was supported. At this point it was realised that the School did not have an exemption in place to disallow the right to resit the project. It should be noted that this administrative irregularity did not have a bearing on the outcome of the appeal.

Argument to Support the Proposal

9. As the School had indicated the change to the module on a programme change form, and understood the change to be a minor modification. They were also advised that this change was within the remit of the College Learning and Teaching Committee to approve. As new programme codes were issued and no queries raised they understood that this modification was therefore in place, and have been operating in this way ever since that date. Students have been informed of the specific requirements as detailed in paragraphs 2 and 3 and therefore student expectation has been set.
10. The progression to project and criteria and the exemption from the right to retake the project are addressed together as they represent a coordinated strategy.
 - a. The individual project is a major undertaking of 60 credits. It is an exercise of individual study that involves the development of research and advanced design skills for which a sound understanding of the taught component of the relevant degree programme is essential. There is no sound basis to suppose that a student could improve their performance at

resit. Over the last 15 years 1 in approximately 15 students has passed the project after a resit in the absence of mitigating circumstances. This supports the premise that it is not appropriate to permit a resit of the project. To permit a resit of the project gives students a false hope of recovering their degree.

- b. There is a small but significant number of students who under the present regulations proceed to the project with resits of a major part (more than 60 credits) of the degree programme pending. Not only is their understanding not at a level appropriate for undertaking the individual project but they are in addition required to take resits whilst undertaking the individual project. University regulations do not recognise academic weakness to be a sound basis on which to defer resits. In addition it is not appropriate for students to defer resits in order to advance to the next phase of their studies. The result is that students in this situation are compromised in both their ability to prepare for and take resits for taught modules and in their ability to pursue the project; they are penalised twice.
11. The professional body that accredits these degrees, the IET (Institution of Engineering and Technology), has declined to accredit degrees obtained as a result of resitting the project. Thus, project resits produce a two class degree, and potentially undermine the standing of the M.Sc. programmes concerned.
 12. The need for an opportunity to retake taught modules (other than the project) and the need for students to have an unfettered opportunity to complete the individual project is best addressed by ensuring that students have reached a suitable level before proceeding to the project. This will also spare staff the need to supervise project work for weak students. The burden of supervising the project for a weak student can be several times the work load of supervising a strong student and the benefit of this is likely to be substantial.
 13. The option to resubmit, at the discretion of the examiners and the option to repeat a project when there are extenuating circumstances would remain. The option to repeat the project when there are exceptional circumstances is considered to be a valid reason for repeating the project by the School and the IET. In most cases over the last 10 years where this has been the case students have passed the project as a result.
 14. This would effect a return to an earlier scheme under which students were required to pass at least 60 taught credits before proceeding to the project. If this were achieved after resit in the supplementary examination period then the project would run alongside M.Eng. undergraduate projects in the subsequent academic year, minimising the impact on staff loading. This is a tried and tested scheme that is known to work and meet the concerns of the IET.
 15. In the period from the taking of resit examinations to proceeding to start the project students are required to register, in person, with the staff in the Postgraduate Office. The School has been advised by Tam Milner that this is sufficient to address the requirements of the UK Borders Agency.