

University of Birmingham

**Request for exemption from the Regulations for a series of programmes in
Biosciences**

Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is invited to **consider**, and if thought appropriate, **approve** an exemption from Regulations for four MSc programmes in the School of Biosciences in the College of Life and Environmental Sciences.

Proposal

2. These proposals relate to four taught Masters programmes offered by the School of Biosciences. In the first instance this exemption would apply to MSc Toxicology FT & PT (0322, 0324) and MSc Molecular Biotechnology FT & PT (8349, 8621). If approved the proposed additional programme requirement would be included in future programme proposals.
3. 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 progress to 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.
4. An implication of the implementation of this requirement is that in some exceptional cases, a student who has not passed 60 taught credits after a resit attempt would not be eligible to progress to the project. In such cases the student would not be eligible for an exit qualification of PGCert or PGDip, as they would not have achieved the requisite number of credits to be awarded an exit qualification.
5. If approved the additional programme requirement would be introduced for all students commencing their programme of study on or after Autumn 2012

Background/Consultation

6. The problems presented for both students and staff of the current progression rules with respect to projects have been raised at meetings of the Masters Teaching Committee on a number of occasions. The School of Biosciences operated a regulation restricting progression to the project component between 2005/6 and 2008/9. It was proposed that the School of Biosciences seek to introduce a similar requirement across all taught Masters programmes in the School.
7. In preparing this request, advice has been sought from Student Records and the International Students Advisory Service as to the implications of implementing this proposal, should it be approved. It is noted that there would be the following implications:

(i). **Implications for Fees**

Students required to delay the start of their project

In relation to fees, if students have paid their fees in full but need to register in the next academic year in order to undertake the project, we would not charge them any additional fees, as they have already paid for project supervision that they did not receive during the previous academic year.

Students required to delay the start of their project

Tuition fee refunds are normally calculated on a sliding scale, according to the date that the student left the programme. As the students will have been in attendance for the full academic year, they would not normally be eligible for a refund. However, as they have already paid for project supervision which they will not receive and as the decision that they should not complete the project is an academic decision, and not the student's own choice we may need to make an exception in these cases and refund part of the fee.

(ii). Implications for International Students

Students applying for the full-time versions of these programmes would be given a visa for 12 months plus an additional four months. Students who will be required to delay the start of the project due to the requirement to achieve at least 60 taught credits and who will not therefore complete their programme of study before their visa expires, will need to apply for a visa extension in the usual way, consulting ISAS for advice. They will not be able to apply for a longer visa at the start of their programme, as the duration of the programme hasn't changed, and the majority of the students will complete the programme before their visa expires.

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 in order to meet the requirements of the UK Borders Agency.

8. This proposal has been approved by the School of Biosciences Learning and Teaching Committee and by Jon Green LES DoE. They are happy for it to be considered by APRC.

Arguments to Support Proposal

9. 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 taught component of the degree programme pending. Not only is their understanding not at a level appropriate for undertaking the project but they are in addition required to prepare for resits whilst undertaking the project. 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.
10. The need for an opportunity to retake taught modules and the need for students to have an opportunity to complete the 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 or ill prepared students.
11. Resit examinations are usually held either during the period when students are working on their projects or 2 weeks after submission. If this proposal were accepted students who had not passed 60 credits of taught material at the first attempt would be required to take all of their resit assessments and pass at least 60 credits before they would be allowed to start their project. Once the student has met the criteria for progression to the project the start time for the project will be agreed with the supervisor. This would normally be within 2 weeks but would not be later than the start of the subsequent academic year.

12. Under standard University regulations there are 2 exit qualifications available to students who do not qualify for a masters degree (PG Cert and PG Dip). The 60 credit project can contribute towards the minimum credit requirements for these qualifications. Under the proposed additional requirement a student who failed to pass 60 credits after resit would not be offered the opportunity to undertake a project and would therefore not be able to achieve the requirements for award of a PG Cert or a PG Dip. The School of Biosciences expects this to be a very rare occurrence indeed. The regulation is designed to give the student the best possible chance of passing their resit assessments and therefore of achieving sufficient credits for a higher award ie MSc degree.