

Language Other Than English

1. Topic and Purpose of Paper

- 1.1 The Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC), at its meeting held on 2 February 2012, resolved to recommend to the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC) that Guidance Notes for programmes delivered in a language other than English be approved, subject to ensuring that all applicants meet the English Language requirements of the University and the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA).
- 1.2 APRC is invited to **consider**, and, if thought appropriate, **approve** the recommendation of the CPC that Guidance Notes: Language other than English (Appendix A) should be added, in particular, to the range of documentation supporting collaborative provision arrangements, and to the University's Legislation.

2. Background

- 2.1 Section 4: The Principles of Collaborative Provision Arrangements in the Collaborative Provision Policy (<http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/collab/>) are silent on the question of whether or not programmes leading to an award of the University of Birmingham may be delivered and assessed in a language other than English. The reasoning behind the omission was that it had always been assumed that English would be the medium of instruction and assessment. With the development of wider types of collaborative provision arrangements, and with countries where English is not necessarily the medium of instruction and assessment, it was appropriate to re-consider that omission.
- 2.2 The QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements, under the heading of Language of study and assessment states:

“Some awarding institutions choose to offer collaborative programmes in languages other than those in which they ordinarily work. While this may extend the range of students they can reach, it raises important questions about the capacity of an awarding institution to satisfy itself about the quality of the provision that leads to its awards. Similarly, assessment of students' work in a foreign language poses serious challenges to the ability of an institution to be in proper control of the academic standards of awards made in its name. Institutions which do permit assessment in languages other than those in which they ordinarily work will need to be confident that they have a continuing availability of external examiners who are both able to work easily in all the languages concerned and fully trained to perform their role effectively. Any intervention between the examiner(s) and the work produced by the student, such as language translation, introduces another level of risk in making reliable and valid judgments about student achievement. An awarding institution will need to be especially vigilant in ensuring that students are neither advantaged nor

disadvantaged by the use of translations of assessed work.”

- 2.3 The QAA’s UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning re-iterates the theme of 2.2 above, and, under the heading of Language of study and assessment, states:

“Indicator 11

The languages used in teaching and assessment are normally the same. If, for any reason, this is not possible, institutions ensure that their academic standards are not consequently put at risk.

Institutions that permit assessment in languages other than those in which they ordinarily work need to be confident that they can assure the academic standards of the awards made in their name. Circumstances in which institutions might permit assessment to be conducted in a language(s) other than that used for teaching and study include educational partnerships or collaborative programmes, particularly those involved with overseas provision. These circumstances may include those where British Sign Language is used.

Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements of the Quality Code also covers this topic.

In anticipation of receiving requests from students for assessment to be undertaken in a language not used for teaching, institutions may find it helpful to publish clear criteria for evaluating such cases. Such criteria should include guidance about the time at which requests can be made. Where requests are granted, it is important to mention this on the student’s transcript.

Important factors to take into account in setting criteria are ensuring that staff involved in teaching and assessing students have the necessary subject knowledge and expertise in the relevant language(s), and identifying and appointing suitable external examiners. Guidance should also cover institutional policy on whether reference tools such as dictionaries are permitted in examinations.

It is also a priority to ensure that students are not disadvantaged or advantaged by the potential need to translate assessed work. It is best to avoid translation wherever possible. Where it is necessary, mechanisms are required to assure the reliability and validity of the assessment outcome.”

- 2.4 Reference had been made by the QAA in its series of Outcomes from collaborative provision audit: External examining arrangements: Sharing good practice concerning the sufficient fluency in the language other than English to ensure that external examiners are able to carry out their role effectively, the effects of translation, independent scrutiny of modules taught in a collaborative organisation in dual awards, and related matters.
- 2.5 The QAA has developed Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition, which offers additional advice.
- 2.6 With the University’s strategic aim of internationalisation it is increasingly

possible that delivery of parts of programmes of study at all levels may not necessarily be in English.

- 2.7 While the default language for research degree theses is English, the development of dual PhD degrees may mean that the thesis and the oral examination may not necessarily be conducted in English; the exact details would be set out in any over-arching and/or individual learning agreements, following consideration of the academic benefits of such submissions by the Research Progress and Awards Panel.

3. Arguments to Support the Topic and Purpose of Paper

The introduction of Guidance Notes: Language other than English:

- a. supports greater compliance with the QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education;
- b. formulates the University's approach to the delivery and assessment of programmes of study in a language other than English, which lead to a University of Birmingham award;
- c. provides detailed guidance for Colleges, Schools and members of academic staff who may be contemplating collaborative provision arrangements where English is not the medium of instruction or assessment;
- d. supports greater emphasis on Language requirements in due diligence for potential collaborative provision arrangements;
- e. supports the Characteristics of Dual Degrees concerning the language of the thesis and oral examination (CPC.12.02.09, Section 6c).

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Appendix A

Guidance Notes: Language Other Than English

While these guidance notes are primarily for taught programmes, they should also be taken into consideration for joint and dual PhD degree programmes, where some of the study may be in a language other than English.

All applicants for all programmes of study must meet English Language requirements of the University, and specific programme requirements, and those of the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA).

1. General

- Significant demands on both the awarding institution and the collaborative organisation for quality and maintenance of academic standards
- Very careful consideration of the potential costs and risks to all concerned, including the number of exchange visits
- Capacity of awarding institution to satisfy itself about the quality of the provision that leads to its awards
- Avoidance of translation preferred

2. Production and distribution of appropriate publicity, advertising and other material

- specified by awarding institution
- awarding institution retains the right to see proofs of material prior to use
- translation arrangements closely specified

3. Delivery in a language other than English

- academic and administrative staff of the collaborative organisation must have sufficiently high levels of English language proficiency and the necessary subject knowledge if they are to liaise effectively with the awarding institution
- relevant staff of the awarding institution need sufficient proficiency in the language of delivery and the necessary subject knowledge if they are to exercise adequate oversight of the quality of provision
- students will need appropriate language skills on entry to the programme, and may require further support during the programme

4. Assessment

4.1 Internal and External Examiners

- appointment of internal and external examiners who are linguistically and academically competent to make judgements on the language other than English is regarded as a first principle
- the awarding institution must have proper control of academic standards in the assessment of students' work for the awards made in its name

4.1.1 Internal Assessment

- bilingually competent internal examiners from within the School providing the programme
- include within examination regulations how the bilingual competency of internal examiners for this purpose is determined
- where an internal appointment is not possible, consider appointing a bilingual examiner in the appropriate specialism/discipline from elsewhere. As an associate internal examiner, this person could work with the examination team, for example, in setting the assessments in English and the other language and marking together assessments in both English and the other language. Consider how examination regulations can assure the quality of such a process

4.1.2 External Assessment

- ensure external examiner is fluent both in English and the language of assessment in order to be able to carry out the role effectively, as well as meeting the generic criteria for all external examiners' appointments
- should be sufficiently familiar with UK higher education to reach reliable judgements on standards should they not be UK-based
- clear guidelines should be provided on how assessment processes for provision taught and assessed in languages other than English should operate
- sufficient pool of potential external examiners to support the continuing programme
- consider establishing a database of bilingually competent subject specialists

4.2 Additional Support

- where not feasible to appoint bilingually competent external examiner who meets the normal criteria, consider appointing an associate external examiner, with the appropriate subject expertise, who is bilingually competent. Associate external examiner works closely with the designated external examiner in considering examination scripts and assignments.
- additional UK-based bilingual experts to support external examiner for provision in a language other than English
- appointment of non-UK specialist with appropriate language skills, paired with a second external examiner from a UK HEI

5. Joint or Dual PhD Degrees

Any proposal for the development of a Joint or Dual PhD degree should take into consideration:

- Regulations 7.4.1 Award Requirements
 - *"7.4.1 (i) A Registered Student should submit a synopsis (in English) of about 200 words of the work presented, to be included in the bound copies of the work submitted. The examiners shall be required to certify that the synopsis is an accurate summary."*
 - *"7.4.2 (a) Format of theses or reports: The default language for all research degree theses is English. With the approval of the Senate or delegated authority, and on an exceptional basis,*

where there are demonstrable benefits, the thesis may be submitted in another language. The report of the examiner(s) will be submitted in English."

- that, approval, on an exceptional basis, for the thesis to be written in a language other than English must be obtained prior to any proposal for the development of such arrangements being considered by the Collaborative Provision Committee, and be reflected in any over-arching institutional agreement and individual student learning agreements
- these guidelines
- where the University of Birmingham is not the lead university in such arrangements, a member of University of Birmingham staff, who is competent in the language, must be available to handle any queries which may arise

6. Translation

6.1 General

- consider implications for security of academic standards of introducing a process of translation between, for example, the original work of the student and the examiner
- reliance on translation for the purposes of setting assessments and grading completed assignments carries a high risk
- establish secure mechanisms for translation
- translations subject to quality assurance processes, including independent sampling for accuracy
- subject sensitive translators to ensure that the nuances of language codes associated with particular disciplines can be addressed in the translation process. Where not possible consider commissioning second translation for comparative purposes
- consider the extent to which different levels of risk attach to different modes/styles of assessment and to different discipline areas, and counsel students accordingly
- intervention between the examiner(s) and the work produced by the student, such as language translation, introduces another level of risk in making reliable and valid judgements about student achievement
- ensure students are neither advantaged or disadvantaged by the use of translations in assessed work

6.2 Planning

- identify at an early stage in each year, set and publish clear timetables to facilitate sound and timely translations of all relevant materials

6.3 Ensuring comparability

- important that there should be comparability of expectations and standards where assessment set initially in English and translated into another language
- undertaken in such a way that provides for equality and does not advantage or disadvantage the student

6.4 Verification

- translated examination papers/assignments need to be verified. Consider the standard practice of 'back translation' as a means of securing this

6.5 Translators

- may be internal or external to the institution. In all cases steps to be taken to ensure they are independent from teaching, examining, marking process, in respect of the students whose work is being translated

6.6 Cost

- which party will bear the cost of any translations

7. Policy

- whether reference tools such as dictionaries permitted in examinations to be set out by awarding institution

8. Certificates and Transcripts

- include name and location of collaborative organisation
- include language of study and assessment recorded on transcript – acknowledges link formally and produces a more accurate representation of the student that the award represents
- ensure, both by what they say and what they omit, that neither document intentionally or unintentionally misleads

9. References

Information contained in this document draws heavily on the following publications:

- Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition (2003)
- QAA's UK Quality Code for Higher Education – Chapter B10: Management of collaborative arrangements (2011)
- QAA Code of Practice: Section 6: Assessment of students (2006)
- QAA Outcomes from Collaborative provision audit: External examining arrangements (2011)
- CVU handbook for Practitioners The Quality Management of Collaborative Provision (2011)