

01 June 2012

University of Birmingham

Purpose of Paper

1. APRC is invited to **consider**, and if thought appropriate, **approve** amendments to the following Regulations and Codes of Practice for 2012-13:

Section 1	Definitions and Interpretation
Section 5	Admission & Registration: 5.2.3
Section 6	Programmes of Study - 6.2.3
Section 7	Assessment, progression and award - 7.4.3
Section 8	Student Conduct - 8.1.1

Code of Practice for Supervision & Monitoring Progress of Postgraduate Researchers – 3.2; 3.6; 4.8; 5.2

Code of Practice for Split Location Study for Postgraduate Researchers - 8.2

Code of Practice for Misconduct and Fitness to Practise - 1

Drug & Alcohol Policy – 1.5

in order to remove ambiguities and clarify the position regarding thesis awaited status, previously referred to as “writing up status”.

Proposals/Recommendations

2. That the Regulations and Codes of Practice are amended as detailed in:

Appendix A – Changes to Regulations

Appendix B – Changes to Codes of Practice

Additions have been underlined and deletions struck through:

Background

3. The Graduate School Management Board (GSMB) meeting held in March 2011 approved an increase in the annual continuation fee paid by postgraduate researchers in thesis awaited status (writing up) from £125 to £180 with effect from the beginning of the 2011-12 academic year. During the discussion at the meeting it became apparent that there were inconsistent practices across the University regarding the time at which postgraduate researchers are transferred from normal registration to thesis awaited status (writing up) and therefore GSMB recommended that a working group be established to explore the issues that had been raised.

Consultation

4. A working group consisting of representatives from the University Graduate School, each College; the Guild of Students, The Planning Office and Legal Services was established with the aims and purpose of the group being:

To agree a revised definition for writing up status

To review current practices of transfer to writing up status

To consider funding implications

To consider amendments to Regulations & Codes of Practice.

Arguments to Support Proposal & Topic and Purpose of the Paper

5. Terminology – Replacing “Writing up” with “Thesis awaited”

The Working Group considered that the term “writing up” created an impression that this

was an available stage within a research degree registration to be used for compiling research data and writing the thesis and that postgraduate researchers therefore had an expectation of having a period of “writing up” throughout their research degree registration.

It was noted that other institutions used terminology such as “thesis pending” and “thesis awaited”. The Working group therefore recommend that the term “Writing up status” should no longer be used and be replaced with “thesis awaited”.

On the University’s Student Record system (Banner) both those writing up and waiting to submit their thesis and those who have submitted are referred to as having a status of “thesis awaited” and therefore the recommendation that Regulations & Codes of Practice be updated to refer to “thesis awaited” would be consistent with the Student Record System.

Transfer to “thesis awaited status”

The Working Group were of the opinion that the current wording in the Regulations & Codes of Practice referring to “substantive supervision” was unhelpful and therefore required rewording. They were in agreement that transfer to thesis awaited status should not take place until the primary research activity had been completed. This would mean that where laboratory work had not been completed a transfer to writing up status could not be sanctioned. It was noted by the Group that in the College of Arts & Law a postgraduate researcher must have a complete full draft before being permitted to transfer to thesis awaited status.

The Working Group wish to emphasise that it is essential that supervisors closely monitor the progress of their postgraduate researchers, paying particular attention at the end of year 2 for full timers (equivalent for part timers) to the feasibility of transferring to writing up status at the end of year 3 and submission of the thesis within the maximum period of time.

A postgraduate researcher ceases to be liable for tuition fees cease on transfer to thesis awaited status and is then liable for payment of a continuation fee (currently £180 per year). Those in writing up status are covered by the University’s various insurance policies.

Funding

The Working Group noted that it was becoming more and more common for funding to be available to postgraduate researchers for 3 and half and four years and this inevitably would affect the point at which some were transferred to thesis awaited status. They were also aware that some overseas sponsors only provide sponsorship for a maximum of 3 years and often difficulties are encountered if the postgraduate researcher does not transfer to thesis awaited at the end of the funded period and the minimum period of registration is extended, as the sponsor will not normally fund the additional period of normal registration.

It was thought normal practice for stipends to cease once a postgraduate researcher transfers to thesis awaited status but that there appeared to be some inconsistency across the University. It was thought that this was dependent upon whether the postgraduate researcher was continuing to carry out work for their department on their research but the work not included in their thesis.

Follow up actions

If APRC approve the proposals the University Graduate School web site and all Research Student Administration documents will be updated to reflect the change in terminology from “writing up” status to “thesis awaited” status.

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