UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

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# 9. Code of Practice on the Conduct of Centrally Co-ordinated Formal Written Examinations:

## 1. Introduction

The efficient running of the University's examinations is of critical importance both to the University and its students. This Code of Practice has been drawn up to clarify the legitimate expectations and corresponding responsibilities of all interested parties – students, academic staff and members of the University's administration. The Code is intended to ensure that the University's examinations are organised and conducted in a consistent and professional manner, and covers centrally co-ordinated examinations only.

The central section of the Code deals with the examination sitting. This is augmented by Appendices A and B dealing respectively with the period before and after the examination sitting and by Appendix C covering off-campus assessment.

This Code of Practice should be interpreted and applied in conjunction with the following documents:

- Code of Practice on Final Examination Procedures for First Degrees
- Invigilation Duty: Notes for Guidance
- Mitigations: Guidelines for Students
- Postgraduate Assessment Protocols
- Undergraduate Assessment Protocols
- University Regulations section 4

These documents may be viewed at http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/policy/legislation/

*Where a School has devolved responsibility to Departments, throughout this document for "School" please read "Department".*

## 2. General

This Code is intended to apply only to formal, written examinations of the University organised by the University's central Examinations Office (see University Regulation 4). It covers both undergraduate and postgraduate examining.

A formal written examination is defined for the purposes of this Code as a time-limited assessment undertaken by a student at a previously specified time, date and venue and based upon written responses to a question paper.

The Code also covers examinations which are conducted away from the Edgbaston or Selly Oak campuses, including examinations conducted abroad by agents or partners of the University.

The Code does not apply to any form of assessment which does not contribute to the overall mark for the module.

Provided that sufficient notice is given, the University will ensure wherever possible that the requirements of individual religious observation are taken into account when drawing up examination timetables.

## 3. The Examination Sitting

### Responsibilities of the Academic Office

(i) The University will provide suitable examination conditions for its students.

(ii) Each examination venue will be laid out with desks arranged in a manner which will ensure that each student's work cannot be read by other students.

(iii) The possibility of external noise disturbance will be minimised through appropriate liaison between the Examinations Office and the relevant parties.

(iv) Each examination session will begin promptly. Where an examination is also being held overseas in a different time-zone, the Examinations Office will ask the host organisation to schedule the examination sitting at a time which will minimise the possibility of a breach of the security of the examination.

(v) The University will appoint to each examination venue a team of invigilators to ensure that the examination session is conducted in a proper manner and in accordance with the published guidelines. Venues will, wherever possible, be invigilated by mixed-gender teams. The Senior Invigilator will always be a member of the academic staff (see University Regulation 4).

(vi) Each student will be provided with an examination answer book designed to facilitate the

anonymous marking of the completed script (see Appendix B (ii)). No other answer books may be used. Mark-list documentation based on student ID numbers only will be provided for examiners' use to maintain anonymity.

**Responsibilities of Schools**

(vii) The rubric of each question paper must:

- provide clear and unambiguous information as to the format of the paper
- identify any permitted texts
- specify whether calculators may be used (and any restrictions relating to these).

(viii) Any other information necessary for the guidance of both students and invigilators must also be stated.

(ix) Schools must review each question paper to ensure that the final version is not subject to textual error or is drafted in a way which is likely to require clarification during the sitting. A single member of staff for each module will be nominated within each School to be responsible for the production of the question paper(s) associated with that module. (See Code of Practice on Final Examination Procedures for First Degrees, Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols).

(x) Where a School is not represented through the Senior Invigilator in a venue, or where the appointed Senior Invigilator could not reasonably be expected to resolve any student queries which may arise in connection with the School's paper(s), the School will arrange for a competent person to attend the examination venue for the initial fifteen minutes of the sitting for the purpose of resolving any queries. Where a number of different examinations from a School are taking place in a single venue, this duty may involve more than one person. This requirement does not apply to overseas sittings. (See Undergraduate Assessment Protocols).

**Responsibilities of Students**

(xi) It will be the responsibility of each individual student to make sure that they are aware of the finalised date, time, duration and venue of each of their examination papers and to arrive in good time for each sitting.

(xii) Students will be required to provide evidence of their identity during the sitting. This will usually be done by displaying their University ID Card photograph on the desk. Where there is uncertainty over the identity of a student during the sitting, the student will be permitted to finish the examination before any enquiries relating to their identity are made.

(xiii) Students must listen carefully to the Senior Invigilator's announcements at the start, during and at the end of the session and act upon these. Before the session begins students should ensure they have left all notes, textbooks, bags and coats in the area designated within the examination venue. (See Invigilation Duty: Notes for Guidance).

(xiv) Students must ensure that they take note of instructions regarding the permitted use of electronic calculators. Failure to comply with these instructions is likely to constitute an examination irregularity (see University Regulation 4).

(xv) Students must ensure that they do not engage in any form of cheating in connection with the examination. The University treats any form of cheating under examination conditions as an extremely serious matter (as it does the related offence of plagiarism). It will instigate examination irregularity procedures against an individual student where there is sufficient evidence of cheating based upon the Senior Invigilator's report (see University Regulation 4).

(xvi) Students must ensure that they write legibly in their examination answer books. If it is necessary because of illegibility to arrange for a transcription of the script to be produced in advance of marking, the student will be liable to the School for the direct costs involved in this work (see University Regulation 4).

(xvii) Students whose first language is not English will be permitted to use a standard, unannotated and unmarked dictionary during their examinations. This may be either solely English-based or cover English and the student's first language. Any student wishing to make use of this concession must obtain a letter of authorisation from the Examinations Office and bring this to every examination attended. Technical or electronic dictionaries will not be permitted.

(xviii) Students will be allowed to consume sweets, mints and similar items, as well as non-alcoholic, bottled drinks during an examination session, provided that no disturbance is caused to other students and that students remove any litter at the end of the sitting. Other types of food are not permitted. In particular, students must not consume any kind of nut because of the potential risk of secondary allergic reaction amongst the other students.

**APPENDIX A**

**Before the Examination**

**Responsibilities of Schools**

(i) At the start of each module students will be provided with adequate information on:

- the examinations to be taken and their durations;
- the consequences of failure in any examination;
- the possibilities, if any, of compensation;
- the general principles used in determining degree classification on the basis of individual examination results;
- the relevant criteria for determining progression to the next year of study (for non-final year students).
  (See Code of Practice on Final Examination Procedures for First Degrees, Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols.)

(ii) Any changes to the format of the examination, including changes to duration and type of questions (e.g. multiple choice, essay etc.) should be notified to the students before the examination.

(iii) Where relevant, the contribution of each examination paper to the determination of Final degree classifications will be notified to students in advance of the examination sitting. The headings of all such examination papers will include either the words "Final Examination" or a statement that the result of the examination will, or may, contribute to the Final degree classification. (See Code of Practice on Final Examination Procedures for First Degrees)

(iv) Students will be told how and when to submit evidence of mitigating circumstances so as to ensure that Boards of Examiners have full access to all relevant information. In particular, the importance of medical certificates where illness is being cited as a factor which has materially affected student performance must be stressed. (See Mitigations: Guidelines for Students, Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols).

(v) Schools will ensure that checking and, where necessary, correction of the general examination data submitted to Schools by the Academic Office will be undertaken to facilitate the production of stable examination timetables. (See report on late examination timetable changes to Academic Board 21 November 2002, minute 02/65 approved recommendation 9).

**Responsibilities of the Academic Office**

(vi) Once the provisional examination timetable for an examination series has been compiled, this information will be made available on the Examinations Office website in the form of a Personal Examination Timetable to those students registered for assessment.

(vii) Draft Personal Examination Timetables for the main Summer examinations will be published before the start of the Easter vacation. The Summer timetable will be finalised early in the Summer term and displayed on notice-boards.

(viii) The Final timetable for the Supplementary Assessments held in late August/early September will be posted to students at their home addresses no later than ten working days before the start of the series. This information will also be available on the Web.

(ix) The complex nature of examination scheduling, together with the limited time available for examinations, may lead to students having two examinations scheduled on the same day. This cannot be avoided and no adjustment of the timetable will be undertaken.

(x) Where it is necessary to make a change to the arrangements for an examination after the Final timetable has been published, those students registered for the assessment will be notified in writing. This notification will be done in sufficient time to allow any necessary adjustment to patterns of revision, travel arrangements etc.

(xi) A student who is classified as overseas for fee purposes will, where possible, be allowed to undertake any necessary supplementary assessment (usually in late August/early September) in their home country. This concession also covers EU students normally domiciled outside the UK. Examination sittings will be arranged through the British Council. Where there is no local British Council representation, alternative arrangements will be made where possible, providing that the security of the University's examination procedures is not compromised. To make use of this facility, students must pay the overseas resit fee no later than the end of the third week in July. Overseas sittings are not available to students going on holiday.

## APPENDIX B

### After the Examination

*Detailed information relating to the post-examination period is provided in the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols.*

(i) The University understands that students will wish to receive the results of their examinations without delay. However, it is the University's duty to ensure that examination scripts are marked and monitored in a rigorous, consistent and academically sound manner.

### Responsibilities of Schools

(ii) Schools will have in place the appropriate measures to ensure that examiners, as far as possible, are not able to identity the student concerned when marking the examination script. (See Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols)

(iii) Schools will publish provisional lists of results, progress decisions and final awards as soon as possible after the meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners. (See Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols)

(iv) Students who are continuing their studies during the following academic year will be advised through progress review tutorials of their module marks. Students who have completed their course may, on request, be given the marks which they have achieved in final level modules. (See Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols)

(v) Schools will provide timely feedback on individual assessments to inform students' learning and progression. Individual Schools will have discretion as to whether to release the marks for each individual assessment component of a module. (See Undergraduate Assessment Protocols and Postgraduate Assessment Protocols)

(vi) Schools will ensure that completed examination scripts remain confidential to the examiners and are destroyed after a period of not less than twelve months after the release of the examination result (see University Regulation 4).

## APPENDIX C

### Examination Sittings Held Off-Campus

*An off-campus examination is defined for the purposes of this Code as any examination held away from the Edgbaston or Selly Oak campuses.*

The University will appoint a host organisation to run its examinations overseas. The host organisation must be able to:

a) arrange the examinations concerned in the time period required, and

b) conduct the examinations in accordance with the main body of the University's Code of Practice on the Conduct of Formal Written Examinations.

In addition to the Code of Practice please note the following:

(i) The University Examinations Office will provide the host organisation with the details of the examinations required, including date and time of the UK sittings and the names and contact details of the student.

(ii) Where a time difference exists between the University of Birmingham and the host organisation, the University will require the timing of any off-campus examination to be as close as possible to the UK sitting to ensure the security of the University examination procedures are not breached.

(iii) If a student has two examinations on the same day they should, where possible, be allowed the same period of time between sittings as would apply at the University.

| Duration of Morning Examination | Time Between Sittings |
|---|---|
| 1 hour | 3.5 hours |
| 1.5 hours | 3 hours |
| 2 hours | 2.5 hours |
| 3 hours | 1.5 hours |

(iv) The University Examinations Office will provide the student with details of the host organisation. It is the responsibility of the student to contact the host organisation for information about the examination arrangements.

(v) Any charges levied by the host organisation to cover administrative costs, room and invigilation hire and courier costs for the return of completed examination scripts are payable

by the student. These charges must be notified to the student in advance of the sitting and paid prior to the commencement of the examination. The host organisation has the right to refuse to conduct an examination sitting if the charge has not been paid.

(vi) The University Examinations Office will forward to the host organisation by courier the relevant question papers together with University examination stationery in time for the examinations.

(vii) After the examination sitting the host organisation will be required to collect the completed answer books and question papers and return these, along with any unused material. These must be returned by courier service to the University's Examinations Office within 24 hours of the sitting. However, if the host organisation is holding a number of University examinations a bulk despatch may be returned within 24 hours of the final examination sitting.