UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

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Academic English and Skills Development for the International Pre-Masters Programmes

1. Introduction:
The University of Birmingham is operating in an increasingly internationalised environment, with students from many parts of the world coming to study programmes that have been established primarily for home students. There seems to be a growing demand for discipline-based programmes to include Academic English and study skills, which would support students with different first languages and exposure to different educational cultures. This document, therefore, aims to provide guidance about setting up a pre-masters programme aimed, primarily at supporting international students.

The development of curriculum of this nature is in line with the University's International Strategy and will contribute to the goal of increasing international student numbers. In response to the Strategy a number of Schools have put forward programme proposals, which include English Language modules. The Programme Approval Review Group were reluctant to approve such proposals because of the nature of the English Language components, in that they were modules, which had been developed as part of a pre-sessional programme for international students, prior to entering the University.

This policy document will therefore set out the main tenets for development of programmes aimed at the international market for a pre-masters foundation year.

2. Pre-masters Award:
The award that should be used as the pre-masters foundation programme would be a Graduate Diploma. This award is a level H qualification, normally comprising of 120 credits at level H. To achieve the award a student must achieve, at least, 100 credits at level H or above. The award can therefore include up to 20 credits lower level credits (C or I).

The main aims of providing a pre-masters programme are to equip students with the academic English and study skills to successfully engage in a postgraduate degree in the discipline being studied and to familiarise and sensitise them to UK academic culture.

Whilst the programme would emphasise the development of analytical and evaluative skills and promote an independent learning culture it should also explicitly target discipline material and encourage the students to operate from within their chosen academic field.

3. Setting the programme up:

3.1 The programme can be set up in 2 different ways:

1. As a stand-alone programme, which is awarded at the end of the academic year as a Graduate Diploma in the discipline with Academic English. The student may wish to progress to a Masters programme at Birmingham University or at another institution, but they should be processed for admission in the usual way for the masters programme, or
2. It can be identified as a 2-year Masters programme. In this scenario the Graduate Diploma qualification would not be awarded to the student (unless they left the course after the first year, when it would be awarded as an alternative qualification). The student would register on a 2-year Masters programme and would be funded and hold a visa for the 2 years of study.

3.2 Title of the Award:
If the pre-masters foundation programme is set up as a stand-alone Graduate Diploma and includes more than 20 credits of English and study skills, then the title of the award should reflect this and be

'Graduate Diploma in [subject specialism] with English'. If, however, the Graduate Diploma will be incorporated into a 2 year masters course and the amount of English in the overall programme will be minimal, it is not necessary to include English in the title.

4. Entry to the Pre-masters programme:
The students may be entered onto the pre-masters programme because they do not have formal academic qualifications to enable them to enter a master's level programme directly and because their English language and study skills are considered below that required for a student entering a masters level programme.

4.1 Formal Qualifications:
Schools will be required to identify their entry requirements for the programme. Where students have good English skills, it would be envisaged that the student would follow the programme and replace the English Language modules with discipline-based modules.

4.2 English Language Skills:
It is recommended that students enter the programme with an IELTS score of, at least, 5.0.

5. Academic English and Skills Development:
At least 80 credits should comprise of discipline-basesd content, with no more than 40 credits providing academic English and skills development specific to the discipline being studied. The 40 credits can be made up of any values 10, 20, 30 or 40 credits, with up to 20 credits at a lower level, if this is appropriate for the programme. The 40 credit Academic English and Skills Development module(s) should enable the student to develop their English and study skills through intensive support and guidance, which will allow a smooth transfer to masters level study. The module(s) should be focussed on English and study skills relating to the main discipline area and provide the range of skills, knowledge and understanding to be able to succeed at masters level.

6. Programme Development Support:
When the programme is being planned, the proposer should submit a Plan to Develop a Programme form - http://www.ppd.bham.ac.uk/progmods/approval/f-planprog.rtf. This will be circulated within Corporate Services, so that staff can provide support.

Contact should be made with:
EISU – (English for International Students Unit) - http://www.eisu.bham.ac.uk/
Admissions – http://www.marketing.bham.ac.uk/admissions/index.htm.
International Office - http://www.international.bham.ac.uk/contact.htm