UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Archived Legislation

This is an archived version of the legislation current for the Session 2007-08. It is no longer current. Current legislation can be found at www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation.

Please use documents found there rather than archived documents.

3. Code of Practice on Admission, Monitoring and Assessment of Research Students:

Preamble

The Code of Practice applies to registered research students, but not to those who, having completed their period of registration, are paying a continuation fee before submission of their thesis. It is, however, expected that Schools will monitor the progress of, and where necessary advise, such students in relation to the completion of their theses.

The Code of Practice defines responsibilities to be carried out both at School level and by individual staff and students. It is a responsibility of the Head of School to ensure that copies of the Code of Practice are distributed to all staff and students concerned.

It is important that, as part of the educational process, students' progress is carefully monitored and that they receive appropriate feed back in good time to enable them to adjust their patterns of work as necessary. The aim of this Code of Practice is to provide a systematic framework to enable members of staff to ensure that this aim is achieved. The Code of Practice defines a minimum basis for supervising and monitoring the progress of research students and Schools may wish to operate procedures and requirements additional to those defined in the Code. If particular circumstances make any requirement of this Code of Practice inappropriate, specific approval for exemption must be obtained from the Senate or delegated authority.

It is recognised that the unit responsible for certain aspects of the admission, monitoring and assessment of research students varies for good reason across the University and may be either the Department or the School. For the sake of brevity the following Code of Practice refers only to the School (except when referring to those aspects of the procedures which are clearly a University-level responsibility). All references to the School should therefore be interpreted as referring to Department or School in accordance with practice in the particular part of the University concerned.

1. Admission
    1. Admission requirements and admission procedures detailed in University publications should include an indication whether and at what stage an interview and/or qualifying examination is normally required.
    2. Applicants resident in the United Kingdom will normally be required to attend for interview before a decision to recommend admission is taken.
    3. In the case of applicants from overseas, whom it is not possible to interview, special care will be taken in assessing the candidate's suitability to undertake the research programme proposed in the light of study previously undertaken and qualifications obtained.
    4. Applicants whose first language is not English shall be required in accordance with the Regulations, to provide evidence satisfactory to the University that they have adequate knowledge of written and spoken English of a standard sufficient to undertake their research and also such taught courses as are a required part of research training. A listing of evidence acceptable to the University is attached as an Appendix to this Code of Practice.
    5. It shall be made clear to such applicants that they will be required to submit their thesis in English unless formal permission to use another language is given before the candidate is admitted to the University.
    6. The recommendation to admit an applicant to a programme of research shall in all cases be made by the Head of the School concerned or his or her nominee for approval under procedures approved by the Senate or delegated authority.
    7. Before making a recommendation to admit, the person responsible for making the recommendation shall be satisfied:
        a. that the candidate is appropriately qualified for the proposed programme of work;
        b. that, on the information available, the proposed programme of work should be capable of being studied to the depth required to obtain the degree to which the candidate aspires;
        c. that the proposed programme of work can reasonably be expected to be completed within the maximum time permitted in the regulations for the degree to which the candidate aspires;

    d. that appropriate necessary resources (eg library, computing, laboratory facilities, technical assistance) are available and are likely to remain available throughout the expected period of research;
    e. that proper supervision can be provided and maintained throughout the likely period of research, including during any periods of study leave by the supervisor or time spent abroad by the student and that satisfactory contingency plans exist for adequate supervision in the event of the discontinuation of the arrangements originally made. In making this judgement, account will be taken of the fact that supervision can best be provided by persons active in research and with a research interest related to that of the student.
  8. The formal offer of admission shall be issued to the applicant by the Academic Registrar, or his/her nominee, acting on behalf of the University authority responsible for taking the decision to admit.
     It shall include the following information:
     a. the field of study;
     b. the start date and likely duration of study and the minimum and maximum times permitted;
     c. any conditions to be satisfied before admission;
     d. any conditions affecting progress to successful completion of the proposed work (including any qualifying thesis or other work required for formal assessment);
     e. any preparatory courses which the student may be required to take on or before arrival and, if appropriate, their effect on the overall period of study;
     f. the fees for the first year of the programme including information on the level of any bench fees, and a statement of the date by which payment is required;
     g. (for full-time students not receiving a British Academy or Research Council Scholarship), the current estimated annual cost of maintenance;
     h. the name of the member of staff provisionally appointed as the supervisor;
  9. A copy of the formal offer letter will be sent to the applicant's sponsor (if any) if this is requested by either the applicant or the sponsor or is otherwise thought to be appropriate.
  10. Further information, as specified in section 3.9, shall be sent to the applicant, either with the formal offer of admission or at some other date before initial registration.
  11. Applications for admission should be dealt with as expeditiously as possible by all concerned in the process and any valid reasons for delay recorded. The progress of applications will be monitored by the Academic Office. Brief reasons for a rejected application should be recorded with the application form.
2. Choice of Research Topic
  1. The field of study will be determined in at least general terms before admission. A final choice and definition of the research topic may be taken before or after admission according to circumstances. Decisions shall be taken in consultation between the applicant/student and supervisor as soon as possible in the light of what is appropriate for the discipline concerned. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure that delay in determining a topic is kept to a minimum and that the Head of School is kept informed.
  2. The choice of research topic may in practice be determined by the research in progress in the School or by an external funding body. Industrial needs may in appropriate circumstances influence the choice of research fields.
3. Supervisory Arrangements
  1. The Head of School is responsible for the co-ordination of supervision arrangements, including the allocation of supervisors to individual students. Whilst the Head at all times retains this responsibility, the Head may choose to delegate the operation of arrangements to another member of staff. In either case it should be made clear to all staff and research students who is undertaking these responsibilities.
  2. The Head of School shall allocate to each research student a member of staff to act as supervisor, who shall normally be expected to continue as supervisor throughout the student's full expected period of study.
  3. A primary factor in the allocation of supervisory responsibilities is the need to match the research interests of staff and supervisor. However, account will also need to be taken of the other teaching, research and supervisory responsibilities of the staff member

concerned. The normal maximum number of research students to be allocated to any one supervisor may vary according to the nature of the discipline and the size and commitments of the School concerned. However, such a maximum should be agreed at School level and should be exceeded only in exceptional circumstances.

4. The supervisor shall normally be an established member of the University teaching or research staff, who is experienced and actively engaged in research, who holds a research degree at the same level as, or higher than, the degree being supervised or who has appropriate equivalent experience or professional qualifications.
5. In the interests of staff training and development it may in some circumstances be appropriate for a probationary member of staff or one who is less experienced in research to be appointed as a joint supervisor.
6. In exceptional circumstances the Dean may approve the appointment as joint supervisor or, in approved circumstances, as sole supervisor, of persons with appropriate experience who hold Honorary University Titles.
7. It shall not normally be appropriate to appoint as sole supervisor a person who is not a member of the University staff. However, if it is considered appropriate to appoint such a person as joint supervisor, the Head of School must ensure that the University retains full control over the supervision and that the School remains able to ensure effective supervision for the student concerned.
8. If a supervisor ceases to be a member of the University staff during a student's programme of study, (s)he may continue to act in an advisory capacity, but the Head of School must ensure that control of, and responsibility for, supervision rests with the School normally by means of appointing a continuing member of staff as replacement supervisor.
9. Each prospective student shall be sent at or before initial registration a statement outlining the respective responsibilities of supervisor and student, and the procedures for representation to be followed if the student feels that work is not proceeding satisfactorily for reasons outside his or her control. The details of such statements may vary according to the circumstances and procedures of the School concerned but in all cases they shall embody the general principles stated in sections 4, 5 and 6 of this Code of Practice and shall be subject to approval by the Senate or delegated authority.
10. All new research supervisors will receive appropriate training in research supervision to include: nature and practice of research supervision, thesis writing, responsibilities of student and supervisor, selecting research students, monitoring and reporting on progress, project management skills.
11. Each student (full-time and part-time) will also be assigned a mentor or member(s) of staff with an equivalent role who will undertake duties similar to those of a personal tutor for undergraduates. As this role is pastoral and facilitatory, mentors or their equivalent need not be expert in their students' area of research and should not act as second supervisors. Discussions between the mentor/mentor equivalent and student will remain confidential if the student so wishes. Both parties should feel free to ask for meetings at any time but should meet, however briefly, at least once per semester.

4. Responsibilities of the Supervisor
    1. The direct responsibilities of the supervisor to the student include:
        i. giving guidance about the nature of research and the standards expected (including standards of presentation, eg in relation to referencing and presenting bibliographic information), about the planning of the research programme, about literature and sources, attendance at taught classes, about requisite techniques (including arranging for instruction where necessary), and about the problem of plagiarism;
        ii. maintaining contact through regular tutorial, supervision or seminar meetings, in accordance with School policy and in the light of discussion of arrangements with the student;
        The frequency of such meetings may vary (eg according to the student's ability, the stage of his or her studies, the progress being made and whether studies are undertaken on a full-time or part-time basis) but shall be at least once every two weeks in the case of full-time students (or four weeks in the case of part-time students) or at such frequency as is approved as appropriate by the Senate or delegated authority on the advice of the Dean concerned.

Note: In accordance with this paragraph of the Code of Practice, the Senate or delegated authority has approved the following variation, to apply in the Schools of Historical Studies, Humanities, Business, Public Policy, Social Sciences and Law:

The frequency of meetings between supervisors and full-time students should be EITHER not less than once every four weeks (eight weeks for part-time students), OR equivalent in circumstances approved by the Dean, where the stage or nature of the student's study makes some variation in frequency appropriate.

These meetings shall be additional to times at which the supervisor and student meet informally. It is recommended that a written record be kept of the content of these meetings where necessary (Form GR2 may be used for this purpose).

iii. being accessible at other appropriate times when to the student may need advice; this will normally be within one working week of a student's request unless the supervisor has informed the student that he or she will be absent from the University;

iv. giving detailed advice on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work so that the whole may be submitted within the scheduled time;

v. requesting written work as appropriate, and returning such work with constructive criticism and in reasonable time (in normal circumstances written work will be returned within three weeks);

vi. arranging as appropriate for the student to talk about his or her work to staff or graduate seminars, and to have practice in oral examinations;

vii. ensuring that the student is made aware of inadequacy of progress or of standards of work below that generally expected;

viii. giving guidance about the specialist research skills and the generic skills the student should acquire and how this might be done (see Section 7);

ix. identifying meetings, courses and training opportunities; and;

x. advising on funding.

2. The School shall be responsible for ensuring that the supervisor and the student are issued with safety instructions and for monitoring compliance with such instruction in accordance with legal requirements and such requirements as may be issued from time to time by the Safety Executive Committee of the University.

3. Where necessary the supervisor and the student shall jointly prepare a risk assessment for off-campus work required of the student and the supervisor shall ensure that the student has arranged appropriate insurance cover for the duration of such work.

4. The supervisor has a particular responsibility to establish with the student at an early stage an understanding about the nature of the supervisor's responsibilities in relation to written work submitted by the student. This understanding must be in accordance with any University regulations or policy and must cover the nature of the guidance the supervisor will offer, the proportion of the final work which he or she will read (which may include the whole), within the general principle that a thesis should be the student's own work.

5. The supervisor shall submit regular written reports on the student's progress in accordance with the monitoring procedures for the School concerned (see Section 9 of this Code of Practice). In addition to these regular reports, the supervisor shall submit a written report to the Head of School or other person or body responsible for monitoring progress at School level if there is cause for concern about the student's diligence, academic progress or ability to achieve the qualification for which (s)he is registered (form GRS3 may be used for this purpose).

6. Particular care needs to be taken with some students from overseas who may need in the early stages very frequent contact, and often advice, particularly in relation to 4.1(i) above, of a more basic kind than is necessary for some other students. The assistance needed may include help with language problems and advice about language training where necessary.

7. If a supervisor will be absent from the University for six weeks or more during a period when his/her students may require advice, it is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure that substitute supervision arrangements are made. Written details of these

arrangements must be lodged with the Head of School who shall countersign them to indicate acceptance and ensure that a copy is given to the student(s).

5. Responsibilities of the Student
   The responsibilities of the student include:
   i. discussing with the supervisor the type of guidance and comment the student finds most helpful, and agreeing a schedule of meetings;
   ii. initiating supervisory sessions where necessary and setting the agenda for supervisory sessions;
   iii. taking the initiative in raising problems or difficulties, however elementary they may seem (eg in relation to supervision, project work or facilities provided) with the supervisor or mentor/mentor equivalent as appropriate;
   iv. ensuring the progress of the work in accordance with the stages agreed with the supervisor, including in particular the presentation of written material as required in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussion before proceeding to the next stage;
   v. providing annually a brief formal report on progress to the Head of Department through the supervisor (see also paragraph 9.2 below);
   vi. deciding when to submit the thesis (after the minimum period of registration and within the time limits specified in regulations), taking due account of the supervisor's opinion which is, however, advisory only;
   vii. ensuring that (s)he understands the nature of the supervisor's responsibilities in relation to written work submitted (see 4.4 above).
6. Student Representations on Supervision Arrangements
   1. Each School shall provide the student with opportunities to comment on the standard of supervision received, through a variety of means which may include questionnaires.
   2. Each School shall have clearly defined procedures for students to make representation to the Head of School (or other designated member of staff) if they feel that their work is not proceeding satisfactorily for reasons outside their control, including the breakdown of relationships with their supervisor.
   3. It is important that the published statement of these procedures makes it clear to students that they provide a means for discussing the possibility of changing the supervisor.
   4. It is necessary that such procedures should operate expeditiously in order to avoid loss of time in relation to the research or its funding.
7. Induction and Training of Research Students
   1. Induction for all new research students (full-time and part-time) shall cover topics such as: introduction to the University; research at the University; life as a research student; the role of the Graduate Research School; supervision arrangements - rights and responsibilities of student and supervisor; the role of the mentor; research training opportunities.
   2. Training in research techniques and in appropriate generic skills is an integral part of the research programme and will be assessed within this context. The following are indicative of the range of generic skills in which most research students will be expected to acquire a basic competence:
      - Advanced study skills
      - Computing skills
      - Presentation skills
      - Legal/Ethical Issues
      - Personal Skills
      - Career Development
   3. Students involved in teaching will be required to attend appropriate training courses.
   4. The students' training needs and wishes shall be discussed by student and supervisor at the beginning of each year of registration and arrangements made for suitable training at appropriate times (form GRS1 may be used for this purpose)
   5. The ability to write for publication is one of the skills expected of a successful research student and evidence of this ability may be required before the degree is awarded. Supervisors should establish with their students well before the question of actual publication arises, what are the School conventions relating to authorship.

8. Facilities

1. Schools shall make clear to students at the time of application, or as soon afterwards as may be practicable before arrival, what personal research facilities (eg individual work space and supporting services) will be available to them and for how long.
2. The following provision shall be made for full-time students:

Access to a desk within designated, secure office space, which may be shared with other students or staff but sh teaching space;

Lockable storage for personal belongings;

Access to computing facilities (including appropriate software such as word processing and spreadsheets, statistic databases, and electronic mail) in rooms not normally bookable for classes or meetings;

Photocopying facilities for thesis related work;

Reasonable access to telephones (internal and external) for thesis related work;

Appropriate access to stationery, consumables for computing, postage; and

Some support to enable students to attend conferences.

3. Schools must make appropriate arrangements for access to facilities out of normal office hours taking into account the security and safety of the students and the facilities.

9. Monitoring Progress

1. The progress of all students shall be monitored regularly at School level. The arrangements for such monitoring may vary according to the subject discipline, the size of the School and the number of research students. However there is a minimum requirement that the progress of all students be reviewed at School level at least annually in the latter part of the academic year.
2. The monitoring process shall take into account written reports from the supervisor and from the student indicating whether they are content with progress (form GRS3 may be used for this purpose).
   For each postgraduate research qualification there shall be a defined period within which the thesis or other work should be submitted. The written reports from the supervisor and student should indicate whether or not submission is expected to be achieved (a) within this period, and (b) within the period of any award or grant received by the student in support of his or her studies.
3. The progress review towards the end of the academic year shall result in a recommendation concerning the student's progress to the following academic year. Such recommendations might be:

That the student continues his or her studies (with registration status changed or unchanged)

That the student continues his or her studies, subject to satisfying any specified conditions

That the student completes his or her period of registered study

That the student be advised or required to withdraw

Any recommendation that a student be required to withdraw must be taken in accordance with the relevant University Regulations and Codes of Practice.

4. The student shall be sent copies of any written statements submitted by the supervisor as part of the monitoring process (unless this is considered inappropriate for reasons relating to the student's welfare) and shall be informed in writing of the recommendation resulting from the progress review towards the end of the academic year.
5. The recommendation resulting from the progress review towards the end of the academic year may be subject to the result of the assessment of any Qualifying Thesis which the student is required to submit. Such Qualifying Theses are a valuable means of assessing progress but they do not over-ride the need for a regular review process as outlined above.
6. The body or person responsible for monitoring the progress of the individual research students in the School shall also be responsible for monitoring, and making recommendations as appropriate, concerning the School's provision of facilities for research students generally including the provision of appropriate equipment and space and of opportunities for training in research techniques.

Sections 10 and 11 have been superceded for all students by the Code of Practice: Assessment of Research Degree Theses

10. Examiners and Reports

1. The Internal Examiner shall be nominated by the Head of School and appointed by the Senate or delegated authority. The External Examiner shall be nominated by the Head of

School and appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the Dean, normally following notification by the student (on a Thesis Submission Form) of his/her intention to submit the thesis within a stipulated period. Following the appointment of examiners the supervisor should inform the student of their names.

2. The supervisor shall normally be consulted before the examiners are appointed but may only be appointed as an Internal Examiner in exceptional circumstances, eg the inability of any other member of staff within a School effectively to assess the work. In this context, Regulation 4.4.12 (3)(ii) of the University Regulations for Research Degree Programmes will apply.
3. A person not on the University payroll holding an honorary University title may be appointed as Internal Examiner but not as an External Examiner.
4. The Internal and External Examiners will be informed of the definition of the standard required of the thesis for the degree for which it is submitted and of the range of decisions available to them as defined in the regulations for the degree concerned.
5. The Internal and External Examiners shall be asked to submit, as soon as practicable and normally within eight weeks of its receipt, and before any oral examination, independent written reports on the thesis in such format as may have been approved by the Senate or delegated authority. Where an oral examination is required (either by Regulation or where the Examiners are exercising their discretion to require one) these reports should not contain a recommendation on the final result.
6. Copies of the original independent reports and of the final report(s) shall be sent to the Head of School and the supervisor as soon as is practicable. It is the responsibility of the Internal Examiner to ensure that there is adequate liaison between the supervisor and the examiners.
7. In order to avoid any undue delay in notifying results, agreed recommendations of the examiners may be approved by the Chairperson of the relevant Board of Examiners and reported to the next meeting of that body.

Sections 10 and 11 have been superceded for all students by the Code of Practice: Assessment of Research Degree Theses

11. The Oral Examination

1. An oral examination shall be held if required by the regulations for the programmes of study concerned. Where it is optional, any decision not to hold an oral examination shall only be taken with the explicit agreement of the Internal and External Examiners.
2. Notice of the oral examination shall be provided by the examiners to the candidate in good time, normally at least two weeks in advance, and shall include information on the date, time and place of the examination and the names of those to attend.
3. In addition to the candidate and Internal and External Examiners, a member of the academic staff shall be present at the oral examination to chair the proceedings. Exceptionally, the mentor or equivalent may be appointed as the Internal Examiner.
4. The supervisor shall be available for consultation by the Examiners before and after any oral examination, but shall not be present at that examination unless exceptionally appointed as Internal Examiner.
5. The Supervisor shall be informed of the outcome by the Internal Examiner. Alternatively the examiners may invite the supervisor to attend with the student to hear the examiners' recommendation.

APPENDIX

Proficiency in the English Language

1. University Regulation 5.1.7 requires that:

In addition to satisfying all other requirements for admission to first-degree or postgraduate courses, overseas candidates whose native language is not English must provide evidence satisfactory to the University that they have an adequate knowledge of written and spoken English of a standard sufficient to comprehend the teaching of a University course.

2. The following list of qualifications is considered to meet the University's requirements at the level shown. This is not an exhaustive list of qualifications and others of equivalent level may be accepted, subject to the provisions outlined below.

GCSE English	**Grade C or better**
Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English	**Grade B or better**
Cambridge University Certificate in Advanced English	**Grade A**
Graduate Management Admissions Test	**500 or above**

International Baccalaureate first or second language English, Higher or Subsidiary level	**Grade 5 or above**
NEAB (Northern Examinations & Assessment Board - formerly JMB) Test in English for Speakers of other Languages	**Pass**
TOEFL test (Test of English as a Foreign Language) Test	
Schools of Science and Engineering	**550/213 plus TWE 4.0**
Business, Social Sciences, Humanities, Historical Studies, Health Sciences	**580/237 plus TWE 4.0**
Law, Medicine, Dentistry	**600/250 plus TWE 4.0**
IELTS (International English Language Testing Service)	
Schools of Science and Engineering	**6.0 with no less than 5.5 in any band**
Business, Social Sciences, Humanities, Historical Studies, Health Sciences	**6.5 with no less than 6.0 in any band**
Law, Medicine, Dentistry	**7.0 with no less than 6.5 in any band**
Warwick English Language Test	**BBB**

3. Where a selector considers that a candidate is offering an equivalent qualification the decision on whether to make an offer on the basis of this qualification must be taken by the Dean or his or her deputy. The English for Overseas Students Unit and the Directorate of Admissions Liaison and International Affairs can either provide or seek advice on the suitability of that qualification.
4. Where a School or Department considers that there is a case for increasing the requirement for a particular course this may be done with the agreement of the Dean or his or her deputy. This information must subsequently be amended in course brochures and the appropriate prospectus and notified to the Directorate of Admissions Liaison and International Affairs so that enquirers may be informed.
5. Where applicants have narrowly missed the Requirement for Proficiency in the English Language, they may still be accepted for entry provided they attend a Pre-sessional English Course at the English for International Students Unit as follows and this may be included in a conditional offer.

IELTS Test	5.0	10 week course
TOEFL Test	~500	
Other marginal result		
IELTS Test	5.5	5 week course
TOEFL Test	between 500 and 550	
Other marginal result		

6. Where an applicant has been educated in English, for example by attending a University course in an English-speaking country or attending an International School where the International Baccalaureate or other curriculum is taught in English, they may be exempted from the Requirement for Proficiency in the English Language. Where a selector is unsure about this, advice should be sought from the English for International Students Unit or the Directorate of Admissions and International Affairs.
7. The requirement for IELTS may be reduced to 5.0 for research students if a selector requests it of a Dean or his or her deputy, and can confirm that the students case has been carefully considered and that measures are being taken to ensure that additional English Language support is obtained from the English for International Students Unit.

This document was last revised in October 2002