

**For the Academic Policy &  
Regulations Committee**

**University of Birmingham**

**Request for Exemption from Regulations Concerning the Requirements for the  
Award of PhD with Integrated Study and the Principle that only One Award may  
be made on any Programme for the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology**

**Topic and Purpose of the Paper**

1. To request exemption, for one year in the first instance, from specified regulations for the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology, which would enable students undertaking the programme to be awarded both an MSc and a PhD upon completion of the relevant award criteria and achieving the required standard at MSc for acceptance to the PhD phase of the programme.

**Consultation**

2. This exemption to regulations was requested by the Medical School after internal consultation.
3. Support for this exemption to regulations has been stated by International Relations, transmitting the opinions of the funding bodies for students on this course, in this case generally foreign governments, mainly in the Middle East, Pakistan and India.
4. Extensive consultation concerning the issues arising from this exemption to regulations has been undertaken within Academic Services, and this exemption has been approved by the Assistant Directors (Student Services and Systems and Academic Policy and Quality).

**Proposals/Recommendations**

5. That the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology should be granted an exemption from regulation 7.4.1 (k):

*A Registered Student may be awarded only one University qualification following completion of a programme. Where credit for research and generic skills, subject-focused or professional elements is required for the award of the research degree no additional qualification shall be awarded for satisfactory completion of these elements. Where credit in research and generic skills, subject-focused or professional elements is not required for the award of a research degree, Registered Students who achieve this credit may be awarded an appropriate additional qualification.*

6. That the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology should be granted a further exemption from regulation 6.1.3 (a) (vi), defining the degree of PhD with Integrated Study:

*A programme, normally of four years' duration, which integrates research with taught postgraduate work in a range of skills and subject focused courses, up to a maximum of 120 credits. Registered Students must produce a thesis which makes an original contribution to knowledge, worthy of publication in whole or in part in a learned journal.*

7. That students who successfully complete the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology and meet all the requirements of the award shall be awarded an MSc, and that students who subsequently produce a thesis of the required standard as specified under regulation 7.4.1 (k) shall be awarded a PhD.
8. That, in order to meet the requirements of the MSc (regulation 7.3.2 (a) (ii)), the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology shall consist of 120 taught credits and a research project equivalent to 60 credits.
9. That in order to progress from the first year of the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology to undertake work on the PhD thesis and be eligible for the award of PhD, a student must achieve at least merit in the MSc (as defined in regulation 7.3.2 (b)). As this requires students to pass all modules, the requirement of regulation 7.4.1 (b) that students on a postgraduate research programme must pass all taught modules undertaken in order to attain the award (in this case the PhD) will therefore be met.
10. That the advertising literature and any documents making offers of places for the PhD in Integrated Study will be required to make it clear that satisfactory completion of the MSc, to a standard worthy of merit or distinction rather than pass, is necessary for completion of the programme.
11. That this exemption be granted for one year in the first instance, to allow wider issues regarding the University's development of PhD with Integrated Study programmes to be discussed by the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee, after which it may be resubmitted if necessary.

### **Background**

12. The Department of Immunology within the Medical School is one of the leading centres worldwide in the study of immunology. It is the premier ranked establishment within the field of immunology within the United Kingdom and is an MRC Centre of Excellence.
13. The reputation of the department attracts students from an international market, including those from countries whose undergraduate and masters level education may not provide essential skills necessary in research.
14. In order to maintain the department's high standards, and in view of the state of the art technical nature of much of the department's research, the department has a clear policy of requiring candidates for entry to a PhD programme to demonstrate some experience of modern research methods. For home students this is generally not a difficulty as most will have gained laboratory skills during their undergraduate degrees. For overseas students this can present difficulties as their undergraduate degrees generally do not prepare them for laboratory based research.
15. Overseas students applying to the department are generally funded by their governments. In the case of the Middle East, Pakistan and India, these governments will generally not fund master's courses and favour four-year doctoral qualifications. Unfortunately, the undergraduate and master's education available within these countries also fails to provide the essential research skills required by the department as a prerequisite.
16. The department has therefore used the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology as a vehicle to attract overseas students, as it offers a four-year programme leading to a doctorate and can attract funding from the students' governments, whilst the first year provides the essential research training and

skills that is necessary for the students to undertake further research at a doctoral level.

### **Arguments to Support Proposals/Recommendations**

17. A student on the PhD with Integrated Study in Immunology undertakes exactly the same work as a student who takes the MSc in Immunology and then subsequently a PhD, including the 60 credit research project. It seems to be disadvantageous to the students on the PhD with Integrated Study that they should receive lesser qualification for the course of study.
18. Although the programme specifications for the PhD with Integrated Study state that it will integrate taught modules up to 120 credits, and therefore the use of these credits to achieve a master's qualification appears to be double-counting, the subsequent three years of study have a nominal value of 540 credits, the same as required to attain the award of PhD normally. Therefore, it is questionable whether these credits are being double-counted, since the final award of the PhD is dependent only upon the 540 credits-equivalent research.
19. There is no possibility of the 60 credit research project undertaken in year one of the programme being then used as part of the doctoral thesis. The department would not allow this practice, which would anyway be impractical as almost all students change supervisors and area of study between the 60 credit research project and undertaking doctoral research; furthermore, research at a master's level would not be sufficient to produce a successful PhD thesis.
20. The quality of the students recruited to the PhD with Integrated Study has been excellent, although all have needed the practical research training provided in the first year to bring their skills to the required level, and also to adapt to the requirements of the British education system that they take responsibility for finding their own projects and supervisors. No student on the programme has yet failed to attain merit, and some obtain distinctions at master's level.

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