

**w For the Academic Policy &  
Regulations Committee**

**University of Birmingham**

**Proposed Changes to Regulations Relating to Postgraduate Research  
Programmes in Order to Make Processes Clearer**

**Topic and Purpose of the Paper**

1. APRC is request to **approve** changes to Regulations relating to Postgraduate Research Programmes which are currently ambiguous or misleading, in order to ensure greater clarity within Regulations.

**Consultation**

2. These proposals originate from discussions within the Postgraduate Research Team within Student Records and the Curriculum Development Unit, and relate to areas where particular problems have been noticed in explaining appropriate procedures and norms to Schools. All proposals have been approved by the Postgraduate Research Student Services Manager.
3. The proposals have been further consulted upon within Academic and Student Administration.

**Proposals**

4. That APRC approve the changes to Regulations 6.1.3, 7.4.2, 7.4.8-9, and 7.8.3 attached as Appendix A, designed to clarify procedures relating to Postgraduate Research programmes and students.

**Arguments to Support Proposals**

5. Current Regulations 6.1.3 (a) (i-iii) are extremely misleading in that they suggest a master's by research programme consists of 180 credits. Credits are properly only used to measure taught elements of programmes, and therefore an MRes or MPhil (Mode A) properly consists of 30-70 credits and an MMus of 60 credits; the rest of the programme consists of the research element which is not measurable in credits as it does not have the required measurable outcomes through assessment. There have been several cases where MRes programmes in particular have, through reading this Regulation, been divided into more than 70 credits, and even where the thesis, the key element of a master's by research, has been assessed as a taught module and allocated a mark. The proposed changes to Regulation should clarify this issue and avoid the risk of mistakenly awarding a postgraduate research award through taught postgraduate assessment practices.
6. The table of maximum word limits for theses in Regulation 7.4.2 (d) currently does not allow for two-year MPhils in the Colleges of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Life and Environmental Sciences or Medical and Dental Sciences. However, two-year MPhils are currently run by the Schools of Biosciences, Chemistry, Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering and

Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, and therefore a word limit had been introduced to Regulation 7.4.2 (d) to cover these.

7. There is evidence that Regulation 7.4.8 is ambiguous in its current form.
  - a. A major problem is that whilst there are a variety of master's by research, in many cases the current Regulation 7.4.8 only refers to the MPhil, or to the MPhil and MRes. It is therefore proposed to change the wording of this section to speak of master's by research as a general term for all research postgraduate programmes leading to a master's award.
  - b. It is notable that under current Regulation 7.4.8 (b) (i) that upon being awarded a master's by research a student might then engage upon a PhD in a similar topic, using the work undertaken for the master's by research, and obtain the PhD, thus achieving two awards. Under the same regulation however it is clear that the time taken to attain the master's by research is deducted from the time available to complete the PhD, so therefore the work undertaken during the master's by research year is judged to be part of the PhD. In effect, the student is obtaining two awards for the same piece of work, which is a practice not countenanced by the University and directly forbidden in the required statement that prefaces any research thesis or project. This is not consistent with regulation 7.4.8 (b) (ii) where the student transfers from an MPhil to PhD before the degree is awarded. Therefore, it is suggested that in such cases a clarification is added to 7.4.8 (b) (i) stating the student must return their master's by research in order to be awarded their PhD.
  - c. Current Regulation 7.4.8 (d) and (e) allows a Head of School to transfer a Postgraduate Research Student from a master's by research to a taught master's programme and from a doctoral programme to a master's by research respectively, should it be felt that the student's progress is insufficient. It is suggested that the right to appeal these decisions should be explicitly stated in these cases.
  - d. Current Regulation 7.4.8 (e) also allowed for transfer between Professional Doctorates and PhDs, although only in one direction. It is felt that it would be preferable for Regulations to be flexible and to therefore allow transfer between doctoral programmes as appropriate; therefore a new Regulation 7.4.8 (f) has been proposed to allow such transfers.
8. The new Regulation 7.4.9 is required to clarify when Postgraduate Research Students might be required to leave a programme; it is based upon the procedure in the Regulations up to 2007-08. This replaces Regulation 7.8.3, which was confusingly placed in the Reasonable Diligence section (Regulation 7.8) but actually referred to withdrawal, and which also required an unnecessary referral to a Misconduct or Fitness to Practise Committee, which would be inappropriate in cases where an academic judgement was being taken that a student had no chance of finishing their research programme, and where the student had not conducted any misconduct.

Allan McKinley  
Curriculum Development Officer  
Academic and Student Administration

## Appendix A: Proposed Changes to Regulations

### 6.1.3 Research Degree Programmes

6.1.3 (a) The University defines its research degree programmes as follows:

(i) One-year Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

Either

(Mode A): A programme, normally of one year's duration, in which the key activity is undertaking research, combined with appropriate training. Registered Students must produce a thesis containing research work of merit. Any training is expected to involve no more than the equivalent of 10 to 30 credits from a notional 180 credits for the programme; or

(Mode B): A programme, normally of one year's duration, of training in research with an emphasis on the acquisition of research skills. The programme comprises between 30 and 70 credits of taught modules from a notional 180 credits for the programme, together with one or more research report(s) or a thesis.

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Deleted: between 110 and 150 credits in the form of

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Deleted: Any remaining credits may be allocated to research or taught modules.

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(ii) MMus

A programme, normally of one year's duration, of training in research with an emphasis on the acquisition of research skills. The programme comprises 60 credits of taught modules from a notional 180 credits for the programme and a research project.

(iii) One year Master of Research (MRes)

A programme, normally of one year's duration of training in research with an emphasis on the acquisition of research skills. The programme comprises between 30 and 70 credits of taught modules from a notional 180 credits for the programme, together with one or more research report(s) or a thesis.

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(iv) Two-year Master of Philosophy (MPhil)/Master of Letters (MLitt)

A programme, normally of two years' duration, in which the key activity is undertaking research, combined with appropriate training. Registered Students must produce a thesis containing original work of merit, worthy of publication. The training is expected to involve no more than the equivalent of 20 to 50 credits spread over the two years from a notional 360 credits for the programme.

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### 7.4.2 Format of theses or reports

7.4.2 (d) The maximum number of words in the thesis or report, excluding supplementary material such as tables, diagrams, appendices, references, the bibliography and any bound published material is as follows:

College	One-year	One-year MPhil	One-year MPhil	Two-year MPhil	Professional Doctorate	PhD	PhD with Integr-	Eng D DDS
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	MRes	(Mode B)	(Mode A)		rate		ated Study	MD
Arts and Law; Social Sciences	20,000	20,000	40,000	60,000	50,000	80,000	80,000	NA
Dentistry, Health Sciences and Medicine; Life and Environmental Sciences; Engineering and Physical Sciences	15,000	15,000	30,000	40,000	40,000	50,000	50,000	50,000

#### 7.4.8 Transfer between Research Degree Programmes

7.4.8 In the following Regulation, Masters by Research refers to any programme leading to the award of a Master's degree assessed and awarded as a research postgraduate degree, including but not exclusively MPhil, MRes and MMus (as defined in Regulations 6.1.3 (a) (i-iv)).

##### 7.4.8 (a) Transfer from one year Masters by Research to two-year MPhil/MLitt

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Transfer to the two-year MPhil/MLitt may be permitted by the Senate or under delegated authority, provided that the Registered Student has passed any taught elements and produced a satisfactory report or detailed research proposal in accordance with the requirements laid down by the Senate or under delegated authority. The time limits for the two-year MPhil/MLitt programme will be calculated from the initial date of registration for the one-year Masters by Research programme.

Deleted: Phil or MRes

##### 7.4.8 (b) Transfer from Masters by Research to PhD

Deleted: MPhil

Transfer to the PhD programme may be permitted:

##### (i) After the award of the Masters by Research degree.

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In such cases Registered Students may apply for admission to the PhD programme after being awarded the Masters by Research degree. If the proposed area of research for the PhD degree is deemed by the Senate or a delegated authority to be sufficiently closely related to the research done by the Registered Student for the Masters by Research degree, then the period of study taken for the degree of Masters by Research will be deducted from the time required for the PhD. In such cases, the Masters by Research degree must be returned to the University before the PhD may be awarded;

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##### (ii) After successful completion of the Masters by Research programme but before the degree has been awarded.

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Provided the Registered Student has passed any taught modules, the examiners, when recommending the award of the degree of Masters by Research, may also recommend that a Registered Student should have the option of proceeding to further work for the degree of PhD as

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specified in the Code of Practice on the Assessment of Research Degree Theses 6.5 and 6.7. If the Registered Student opts to transfer to the PhD programme, then the degree of Masters by Research will not be awarded. The time limit for the PhD programme will be calculated from the initial date of registration for the Masters by Research;

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- (iii) or after a minimum of nine months' full-time study on the Masters by Research programme:

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Transfer to the degree of PhD may be permitted, provided that the Registered Student has passed any taught elements and produced a satisfactory report or detailed research proposal in accordance with the School or College's requirements. The time limits for the PhD program will be calculated from the initial date of registration for the Masters by Research.

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- 7.4.8 (c) A Registered Student who has transferred to the PhD programme and subsequently withdraws or fails to reach the required standard for the Award of the PhD will be entitled to the Award of the degree of Masters by Research, provided that the Registered Student has satisfied the requirements for the Masters by Research degree.

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- 7.4.8 (d) Transfer from a Masters by Research to a Related Taught Masters programme

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- (i) Transfer from a Masters by Research programme to a related taught masters programme may be requested by the Registered Student or recommended by the Head of School at any time prior to the submission of the Masters by Research thesis.

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Deleted: MPhil

- (ii) The transfer is subject to approval by the Senate or a delegated authority. If the Registered Student does not agree with the recommendation of the Head of School, then the decision of the Senate or under delegated authority must take account of the views of both the Registered Student and the School. If the transfer is approved, and the Registered Student is in disagreement with this decision, the Registered Student shall be given the opportunity to submit an appeal in accordance with Regulation 7.9.

- 7.4.8 (e) Transfer from Doctoral to Masters Programmes

- (i) Transfer from a Doctoral programme of study to a Masters by Research in the case of Professional Doctorates or PhDs with Integrated Study, a related taught masters programme may be requested by the Registered Student or recommended by the Head of School at any time prior to the submission of the Doctoral thesis.

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- (ii) The transfer is subject to approval by the Senate or under delegated authority. If the Registered Student does not agree with the recommendation of the Head of School, then the decision of the Senate or a delegated authority must take account of the views of both the Registered Student and the School. If the transfer is approved, and the Registered Student is in disagreement with this decision, the Registered Student shall be given the opportunity to submit an appeal in accordance with Regulation 7.9

- 7.4.8 (f) Transfer from Professional Doctorate, MD, DDS or PhD with Integrated Study to a PhD or from a PhD to a Professional Doctorate, MD, DDS or PhD with

### Integrated Study

Transfer from Professional Doctorate, MD, DDS or PhD with Integrated Study to a PhD or from a PhD to a Professional Doctorate, MD, DDS or PhD with Integrated Study may be requested by the Registered Student or recommended by the Head of School at any time prior to the submission of the thesis provided the Registered Student has successfully passed any taught modules upon which he or she has been enrolled, and providing in the case of transfers to MD or DDS that the student meets the entry requirements.

### **7.4.9 Withdrawal**

- 7.4.9** (a) The Senate or delegated authority shall require a Registered Student to withdraw if:
- (i) there is no likelihood that the Registered Student will successfully complete the programme within the maximum period allowed for submission of a thesis, or
  - (ii) the Registered Student has failed to achieve credit in a taught module.
- 7.4.9** (b) A Registered student who is required to withdraw shall be given the opportunity to submit an appeal in accordance with the Code of Practice on Primary Appeals Procedure

**Deleted: 7.8.3**

**Deleted: Research Postgraduate Reasonable Diligence**

**Deleted: 7.8.3**

**Deleted:** A Registered Student on a research degree, where there is no likelihood that he or she will successfully complete the programme within the maximum period allowed for the submission of a thesis permitted by the relevant regulations, may be referred to the College Misconduct or Fitness to Practise Committee as appropriate on a recommendation of the Head of Principal Academic Unit that he or she be required to withdraw. Such a recommendation may be made only after a full review of the Registered Student's progress, including consultation with his or her supervisor.