Aston University

GENERAL REGULATIONS FOR POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT PROGRAMMES

Applicable to students in all Stages/years of programmes

These General Regulations, approved by the University Senate, set out the requirements for taught postgraduate awards. Programme regulations are published as part of the programme specification.

CONTENTS

1 Definitions 2
2 Entry Requirements 3
3 Changes to Programmes 4
4 Structure of Programme 5
5 Attendance 6
6 Conduct and Assessment of the Dissertation Module 6
7 Decisions of the Board of Examiners 7
8 Options in Case of Failure 8
9 Factors Affecting Performance/Exceptional Circumstances 9
10 Transfer between Programmes 10
11 Award of Degree 10
12 Publication of Results 11
13 Re-enrolment 11
14 Waivers of Regulations 11

1 DEFINITIONS

1.1 An **Aegrotat Degree** may be awarded to individual candidates who have enrolled for a Degree and who, in the judgement of the Examination Board, would have qualified for the award had he or she not been prevented by illness or incapacity from being fully examined. Information about the ability and standard of performance on the programme of the holder of an Aegrotat Degree may be obtained through references.

1.2 **Approved programme** means a set of modules leading to a formal qualification offered by the University, e.g. the MSc in Engineering Management, as prescribed by a programme specification approved by the Senate on the recommendation of the University Learning and Teaching Committee and the relevant School Learning and Teaching Committee.

1.3 An **Assessment** is the measurement of a student's performance in a module. This may comprise a number of elements, including written papers, oral tests, essays, laboratory or field studies or reports, or other forms of evaluation. Students should not normally be required to sit more than 24 hours of written papers per year. A recommendation that students be required to exceed this total must be approved by the relevant School Learning and Teaching Committee and reported to the University Learning and Teaching Committee.

1.4 **Associate Dean** means the person designated to co-ordinate all postgraduate programmes in a School and to monitor the quality and standards of these programmes, normally the Associate Dean Postgraduate Programmes or Associate Dean Learning and Teaching, or their nominee.

1.5 **Board of Examiners** means the Board of Examiners of the University for a particular programme. Boards of Examiners have responsibility for considering progression and conferment of awards, in accordance with the requirements of the individual programme, and in the light of all the separate module results and any exceptional circumstances, exercising powers of condonement as appropriate.

1.6 **Condonement** is the process by which a Board of Examiners, in consideration of a student's overall performance, recommends that credit be awarded for part of a programme in which the student has failed to achieve a pass mark, on the grounds that the positive aspects of the overall performance outweigh the area of failure. Marks below 40% may not normally be condoned. Condoned modules carry a credit value and the actual mark obtained by the student. The actual mark is used in calculating the overall mark for the programme. Programme specifications shall indicate whether any modules are not subject to condonement or where limits to condonement apply, having regard to the aims and learning outcomes of the programme concerned.

1.7 **Dissertation Module** is the term used in these Regulations for the 60-80 credit Level 7 module which is normally the final component of a full Master's programme. The module may be research or professionally focused, as appropriate for the programme, subject to overall consistency of the programme with the QAA descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7 (Master's degree). The module will normally be assessed by a dissertation (a substantial essay or formal professional report) and may also include a number of other assessed elements, including oral tests, laboratory or field studies, or

other forms of evaluation. Precise requirements will be defined in the module specification.

1.8 **Exceptional Circumstances** are circumstances which cause the student to:

a perform less well in coursework or examinations than might have been expected on the basis of other work, or
b fail to meet submission deadlines.

In general, **exceptional circumstances** will be of a medical or personal nature affecting the student for any significant period of time and/or during the examination period and which can normally be corroborated by independent evidence.

1.9 **Qualifications.** The requirements for all Aston University Qualifications, including credits, and Levels of awards, are detailed in Aston University Qualifications Frameworks, REG/12/377 and subsequent versions.

1.10 A **Referred Assessment** is a new assessment following initial failure in an assessment, of such form as the Board of Examiners may determine, taken without any further tuition. Referred assessments other than for the Dissertation Module take place prior to the start of the next academic year.

1.11 **School Learning and Teaching Committee**(s) is responsible for the maintenance and enhancement of the academic standards and quality of the taught programmes of a School. School Learning and Teaching Committees may formally delegate all or some of the responsibilities assigned in these General Regulations to appropriate bodies or individuals. Any such delegation of authority should be recorded in the minutes of the Committee.

1.12 **Transcript.** Students, except those in debt to the University, will be supplied by their School with an official transcript recording the modules for which the candidate registered, the Level, the credits awarded and the percentage marks awarded. The transcript should indicate any module passed by condonement or in a referred assessment.

2 ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

2.1 An applicant for an approved postgraduate programme must produce evidence of having been awarded either a first degree from a recognised University or Institute of Higher Education or a qualification deemed by the appropriate School Learning and Teaching Committee to be at least of equivalent standing.

2.2 Approval for the purposes of admission of any academic award of any University or College or National Council or professional body shall be determined by the School Learning and Teaching Committee responsible for the programme, in consultation with the Registry.

2.3 Applicants must provide evidence of proficiency in the English language as demonstrated by a pass at GCSE grades A*, A, B or C, or a qualification recognised by the Senate as being equivalent.

2.4 Applicants must produce evidence of having fulfilled the entry requirements as prescribed by the programme specification relating to the particular programme.

2.5 In certain cases, the Associate Dean may require an applicant to undertake a specified course or courses and/or pass an assessment before enrolling on the programme.

2.6 In accordance with 2.7, the Associate Dean may, in respect of APL/APEL, award credit to a maximum of one half of the total credit required for the taught element of a programme (excluding the Dissertation Module) i.e. a maximum of 30 credits for a Postgraduate Certificate, 60 credits for a Postgraduate Diploma and 60 credits for a full Master's programme. The extent of the credit awarded must be recorded by the Board of Examiners.

2.7 The following basic principles have been drawn up to assist Schools in developing procedures for the Assessment of Prior Learning, in cases where this is accepted by the School. Assessment of Prior Learning includes certificated learning (APL) and experiential learning (APEL).

a the responsibility rests with the student for making a claim and supporting the claim with appropriate evidence, although advice and assistance on the nature of the evidence required should be provided by the responsible member of School staff approved by the School Learning and Teaching Committee. The School should determine appropriate fees for this service;
b the experience of the student is significant only in so far as it can be identified as a source of learning;
c academic assessment of certificated and experiential prior learning is the responsibility solely of academic staff;
d attention should be paid to the matching of a student's stated achievements and competencies against the module learning outcomes for each module for which exemption on the basis of APL and APEL is sought;
e in making offers for admission with exemption the authorised member of staff should be sure that the student has already gained the required knowledge/skills for which exemption is awarded and that their ability to follow the rest of the programme will not be jeopardised;
f any exemptions on the basis of APL and APEL should be approved by the appropriate Associate Dean

Where a proposal for exemptions involving Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) applies to a group of students, the University recognises that whilst the experience of the group might be similar, the students' learning from it, and therefore the exemptions to which they may individually be entitled, might differ.

3 CHANGES TO PROGRAMMES

The University reserves the right to make variations to the contents or methods of delivery of programmes, if such action is reasonably considered to be necessary by the University. If the University discontinues any programme, it will use its reasonable endeavours to provide a suitable alternative programme.

4 STRUCTURE OF PROGRAMME

4.1 Definitions of Master's Awards

MSc/MA shall include a taught component (normally 100 - 120 credits) which is mainly focused on subject content, and a Dissertation Module. The greater subject knowledge component of the MSc/MA distinguishes it from the MRes. Where the Dissertation Module carries more than 60 credits, alternative module(s) allowing the completion of a 120 credit Postgraduate Diploma programme should normally be available.

MRes shall include a significant number of taught modules (normally around 90 credits) which are largely focused on research skills, and a major research component. The greater research component of the MRes distinguishes it from the taught MSc/MA.

MBA shall be awarded for successful completion of a Master of Business Administration programme as defined by the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement. Where the Dissertation Module carries more than 60 credits, alternative module(s) allowing the completion of a 120 credit Postgraduate Diploma programme should normally be available.

Any Master's award may be approved for offer as an extended programme in line with these Regulations.

Four year integrated master's programmes, e.g. MEng and MPharm, are covered by the General Regulations for Undergraduate Taught Programmes.

4.2 Level

The overall outcomes for programmes leading to a Master's award shall be at Master's Level as defined by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

4.3 Duration

Normal duration of programmes shall be as follows:

Programme	Part-time	Full-time
Postgraduate Certificate	12 months	6 months
Postgraduate Diploma	12 – 24 months	6 – 12 months
Master's	24 – 36 months	9 – 12 months
Extended Master's	24 – 60 months	18 – 24 months

A flexible credit accumulation programme will not normally be more than five years' duration.

4.4 Where a programme of the same title is offered on a full-time, part-time and/or flexible credit accumulation basis, the various versions of the programme must cover equivalent elements regardless of mode of attendance.

4.5 The University will continue to provide modules to students enrolled on a programme by flexible credit accumulation in the event that the programme is suspended or withdrawn, normally for one full academic year.

4.6 The specification for a programme offered by flexible credit accumulation will include regulations detailing how the Examination Board will manage student progression.

5 ATTENDANCE

5.1 School Learning and Teaching Committee, or its nominee, may approve a maximum of 24 months leave of absence.

5.2 A student whose attendance has not met the requirements of the programme specification may be required by the Associate Dean to withdraw from the programme. It is the responsibility of each student to advise the Associate Dean in writing of any factors which may have affected their attendance.

6 CONDUCT AND ASSESSMENT OF THE DISSERTATION MODULE

6.1 Supervision

a Each student taking a Dissertation Module must be supervised by a designated supervisor nominated by the Associate Dean from a list of supervisors approved by the School Learning and Teaching Committee.
b Where appropriate, a second supervisor may be designated.

6.2 Collaboration

a If the Associate Dean has decided that collaboration may be permitted in a Dissertation Module (either for an individual student, or for all students on the approved programme), then the student must clearly acknowledge the extent of collaboration in a statement incorporated into the dissertation when it is submitted.
b In such a case the student may be requested to provide his/her working notes on the Dissertation Module.

6.3 Format of the dissertation

Students are required to conform to guidelines from Schools concerning the content, length and presentation of the dissertation.

6.4 Submission of dissertation

a The dissertation should be submitted by a date set by the School, not later than the formal end-date of the programme. Submissions after the set date may be subject to mark penalties, which may be waived in exceptional circumstances. Where there are sufficient exceptional circumstances, the time allowed for submission may be extended by up to six months (12 months in the case of a part-time student), subject to the approval of the Associate Dean.

b Students may be required to submit up to three printed copies of the dissertation. Electronic submission may also be required. One printed copy shall be retained by the School for a minimum of three years from the date of award.

6.5 **Restriction of access**

a Where a dissertation contains particularly sensitive material, arrangements may be made to restrict the circulation of the School or University copy and limit the number of persons who may have access to it for up to three years.
b The decision is taken by the Associate Dean on the recommendation of the supervisor.

6.6 **Copyright**

The copyright of the dissertation rests with the author.

7 DECISIONS OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS

7.1 Subject to the Qualifications Frameworks, REG/12/377 and subsequent versions, the Board of Examiners for each programme shall have the discretion to decide whether the student:

a following award of the specified number of credits shall be recommended for an award, or
b following award of the specified number of credits in the taught modules studied so far may continue with the dissertation module, or
c following award of credits for all modules studied so far in a part-time or flexible credit accumulation programme, may continue with the programme, or
d should be required to take one or more referred assessments, or
e should be required to withdraw from the programme.

7.2 The Board of Examiners shall have the discretion to decide the period of validity for credit, which will not normally be more than five years.

7.3 The Board of Examiners shall have the discretion to condone failure in a maximum of one third of the taught credits, provided there is evidence of adequate performance from the student concerned.

7.4 Before implementing a decision that a student should withdraw from a programme, the Board of Examiners shall give the student concerned, aided by another member of the University (as defined in paragraph 1 of the Charter and Section II of the Statutes) if so desired, an opportunity to make representations, in writing or in person or both, of any circumstances which may have affected his/her performance, that were unknown to the Board when the first decision was made.

7.5 A student may make a representation to the Board of Examiners if the Board has recommended the award of a lesser qualification, following the student's failure to achieve the standard required for the qualification for which the student was first registered.

7.6 A student wishing to request a formal review of the decision of the Board of Examiners may appeal on the grounds set out in the University's Academic Appeals Procedure. The Academic Appeals Committee may consider allegations of procedural irregularity in the conduct and administration of assessments; the decisions of the Board of Examiners in all matters relating to academic judgement shall be final.

8 OPTIONS IN CASE OF FAILURE

8.1 Principles

8.1.1 Students may not be reassessed in any module for which they have already obtained credit.

8.1.2 For each referred module passed the Board of Examiners shall record a percentage mark equivalent to the minimum pass mark for the module.

8.1.3 The Board of Examiners may allow a student to be assessed in a new module as a substitute for a failed module. Substitute module(s) will be treated as referred assessment with the minimum pass mark recorded for modules passed.

8.1.4 The Board of Examiners may allow a student to begin the dissertation module trailing a maximum of 30 taught credits.

8.2 Failure in Assessments

8.2.1 A student who fails to satisfy the Board of Examiners in normally not more than one half of the credits in an approved programme (excluding the Dissertation Module) i.e. a maximum of 30 credits for a Postgraduate Certificate, 60 credits for a Postgraduate Diploma and 60 credits for a full Master's programme has the right either

to take referred assessments in the failed modules, or

to choose to accept the award of a lesser qualification than that for which the student was registered, if permitted under the programme specification, provided the student has satisfied all the requirements for that award.

8.2.2 In the case of a student who fails in more than one half of the credits in an approved programme (excluding the Dissertation Module) i.e. a maximum of 30 credits for a Postgraduate Certificate, 60 credits for a Postgraduate Diploma and 60 credits for a full Master's programme or who fails referred assessments, the Board of Examiners may either

recommend the award of a lesser qualification than that for which the student was registered, if permitted under the programme specification and provided the student has satisfied all the requirements for that award, or

require the student to withdraw from the programme.

8.3 Failure in Dissertation Module

8.3.1 A student who fails to submit a dissertation within the permitted time may be required to withdraw from the programme or may be recommended for a lesser award if permitted under the programme specification and if the Board of Examiners considers that the student has satisfied all the requirements for that award.

8.3.2 If the student has failed to obtain a pass mark for the Dissertation Module, the Board may

a permit the student to submit a revised dissertation (possibly after further research and/or professional work), and/or
b require the student to undertake again any other assessment element associated with the Dissertation Module, or
c recommend the award of a lesser qualification, if permitted under the programme specification, provided the student has satisfied all the requirements for that award, or
d require the student to withdraw from the programme.

(a and b above should be completed within a maximum of six months of the date of the Board's decision.)

8.3.3 A student who fails to submit a satisfactory revised dissertation or undertake any other required assessment element within the permitted time may be required to withdraw from the programme or may be recommended for the award of a lesser qualification, if permitted under the programme specification and if the Board of Examiners considers that the student has satisfied all the requirements for that award.

8.4 Postgraduate Certificate and Postgraduate Diploma

8.4.1 A student who has gained the requisite number of credits but who is unable, for whatever reason, to complete their Master's programme shall be awarded the appropriate Postgraduate Certificate or a Postgraduate Diploma. If a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma is not available this should be stated in the programme specification.

9 FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE/EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

9.1 The Board of Examiners will consider any evidence of exceptional circumstances. Decisions relating to adequate performance and the allocation of marks are at the discretion of the Board, and such evidence will inform, but not determine, its decision.

9.2 It is the student's responsibility to inform the Chair of the Board of Examiners in writing, normally prior to the meeting of the Board, of any factors that occurred either during or prior to any of their assessments which they feel may have affected their performance. Students should supply any relevant evidence and must comply with any procedures published by the relevant Associate Dean.

9.3 A student who is prevented from taking all or part of an assessment, or whose performance has been significantly affected, by illness or other sufficient cause may be allowed to sit the assessment at the next opportunity as if for the first time. Sufficient

cause should be taken as circumstances genuinely beyond the student's control which prevented his or her attendance.

9.4 Evidence of exceptional circumstances taken into consideration by Boards of Examiners should be carried forward to meetings of Boards of Examiners considering the student's subsequent performance.

10 TRANSFER BETWEEN PROGRAMMES

10.1 Between Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master's Programmes

10.1.1 A student may apply for transfer between Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master's programmes, subject to any constraints specified by the programme specification.

10.1.2 Such transfers must be approved by the Associate Dean.

10.2 Between Modes of Attendance

10.2.1 A student may apply for transfer between full-time, part-time, flexible credit accumulation and distance learning variants of a programme, subject to any constraints specified by the programme specification.

10.2.2 Such transfers must be approved by the Associate Dean.

11 AWARD OF DEGREE

11.1 A student who has gained the appropriate number of credits at the appropriate Levels shall be recommended to the Senate for award.

11.2 A Master's qualification may be awarded 'with Distinction' or 'with Merit'.

a To achieve the award of distinction students must achieve a mark of at least 70% in the Dissertation Module and an average mark of at least 70% over the other Modules (120 credits).
b To achieve the award of merit students must achieve a mark of at least 60% in the Dissertation Module and an average mark of at least 60% over the other modules (120 credits).

11.3 Postgraduate Certificates and Postgraduate Diplomas may be awarded 'with Distinction' or 'with Merit'.

a To achieve the award of distinction students must achieve an average mark of 70% over all modules.
b To achieve the award of merit students must achieve an average mark of 60% over all modules.

12 PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

12.1 The results achieved in all assessments, both by module and overall, should be released to individual students in the form of a transcript detailing his or her own assessment results in the form of a percentage mark per module.

12.2 Percentage marks awarded for each module will be provisional until confirmed by the relevant Board of Examiners; provisional marks may be released to students as soon as they are available.

12.3 The final award is regarded as public information and may be published by the University in any form and released to enquirers on request. The results of students who have been recommended for an award shall be published in a list drawn up in alphabetical order by student name.

13 RE-ENROLMENT

13.1 A student who has been required to withdraw from a programme because of academic failure will not be allowed to re-enrol on that programme.

13.2 A student who has been awarded a lesser qualification than that for which he/she was first registered because of academic failure will not be allowed to re-enrol on the relevant Postgraduate Diploma/Master's programme.

14 WAIVERS OF REGULATIONS

14.1 Where there have been substantial circumstances affecting a student after admission to the programme which could not reasonably have been foreseen at the time of admission and which operate to the detriment of the student, the School Learning and Teaching Committee may:

a waive any part of the programme specification on such conditions as it may deem fit to the benefit of the student, or

b recommend that the University Learning and Teaching Committee waive any relevant part of the General Regulations on such conditions as it may deem fit to the benefit of the student.