This handbook has been prepared as a convenient summary of information you may need at the start of your degree programme. The School has endeavoured to ensure that it is correct at the time of preparation. However, if there are discrepancies, University Regulations always take precedence over the Handbook.

This handbook is prepared well in advance and there may be alterations to modules or facilities. You are strongly advised to consult the School’s WWW server for the latest information.
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About this Handbook

This handbook is intended to provide you with some basic information about the School of Computer Science, about teaching and learning at university level, about help facilities that we provide, and a few other things. Please read through this document carefully, as we will expect you to have read and understood its contents.
# Important Dates

## Academic Year 2014/15

### Welcome Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</table>
| 25<sup>th</sup> September 2014 | 10:00-12:00, Registration, Atrium  
12:00-14:00, Computer account setup (UG40)  
14:00-14:20 Introduction to all MSc and ICY Students (R124, Chem Eng)  
14:00-17:00, Presentations on Modules (R124, Chem Eng) |
| 26<sup>th</sup> September 2014 | 10:00-12:00 Introduction to all MSc and ICY Students (R124, Chem Eng)  
12:30-13:30 Individual Meetings with Programme Directors (see timetable)  
13:30-15:30 Lab Sessions for Setting up Accounts |
| 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 | 18:00 Evening Reception, Atrium, Computer Science School |

### Academic Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29th September 2014</td>
<td>Autumn Term starts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd October 2014</td>
<td>International students meeting, 16:00-17:00, Learning Centre UG14</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd October 2014</td>
<td>Last date for changing first term modules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; October 2014*</td>
<td>Declaration of 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; semester mini-project, by 12.00 noon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th December 2014</td>
<td>Autumn Term ends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th January 2015</td>
<td>Spring Term starts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January 2015*</td>
<td>Hand in two copies of 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; semester mini-project report to the Teaching Support Office, by 12.00 noon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January 2015</td>
<td>Last date for changing second term modules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>w/c 26&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; January 2015*</td>
<td>Meeting with academic advisor – 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; semester mini-project review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th March 2015</td>
<td>Spring Term ends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th April 2015</td>
<td>Summer Term starts; Revision Period starts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5th May 2015</td>
<td>Examinations start</td>
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<tr>
<td>5th June 2015</td>
<td>Examinations end</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19th June 2015</td>
<td>Summer Term ends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th August 2015</td>
<td>Supplementary (resit) Examinations start</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th August 2015</td>
<td>Supplementary (resit) Examinations end</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These dates are provisional and will be confirmed during the academic year.
Key Staff

Head of School
Professor Jon Rowe

Head of Education
Dr Dan Ghica

Deputy Head of School and Head of Student Development and Support
Dr Mark Lee

Research Students Tutor
Dr David Parker
Room 107
Email: d.a.parker@bham.ac.uk

Programme Director
Dr Shan He
Room UG36
Availability: www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~szh/timetable.html
Email: S.He@cs.bham.ac.uk

Teaching Support Office

The teaching Support Office is located on the Upper Ground Floor (Atrium - UG44) of the Computer Science building.

Contact Details:
☎ 0121 414 3744 (Ext. 43744)
✉️ office@cs.bham.ac.uk

Office Opening Times:
Term-Time
Monday to Thursday 08:45-16:30; Friday: 08:45-16:00
During vacation periods only:
Monday to Friday: 10:30-04:00
Vital and Useful Sources of Information and URLs

Assessment Criteria
General guidance on assessment criteria can be found in the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment: www.as.bham.ac.uk/code/tpma.pdf

Programme Descriptions
The Programme Description for your programme includes a list of all modules, core and optional, and any conditions on progression, for instance any module you may have to pass before progressing to the summer project. The Programme Description can be found on the School Intranet page here: http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/programmes/

Registration
The University requires you to register online. You can access the web registration pages via the student portal at: www.my.bham.ac.uk
Also see: www.birmingham.ac.uk/welcome/registration/

Regulations
Your Degree Programme is governed by regulations that specify the requirements to pass, to pass with Merit and to pass with Distinction, amongst other things. You should read section 7.3.2 of the regulations so that you know what is required of you.

School of Computer Science Research Student Handbook
www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/research_students/

The University Graduate School
The University Graduate School works on behalf of research students at the University to ensure the best possible research and educational environment.
www.graduateschool.bham.ac.uk/index.shtml

Timetables
The School’s timetables are at:
www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/timetables/

Academic Services Enquiry Services
These web pages include help on registration, ID cards, visas and council tax:
http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/faq/
University Policies

University Student Charter
www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/birmingham/student-charter.aspx

Harassment and bullying policy
intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/studentservices/conduct/harassment/index.aspx

Equality and diversity policies
www.equality.bham.ac.uk/policy/

Students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties support information
www.as.bham.ac.uk/studentlife/disability/

Health and safety policy and guidance
https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/wellbeing/worksafe/index.aspx

Data Protection Act
https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/legal-services/index.aspx
Your Degree Programme

Natural computation is the study of computational systems that use ideas and get inspirations from natural systems, including biological, ecological and physical systems. It is an emerging interdisciplinary area in which techniques and methods are studied for dealing with large, complex, and dynamic problems. This exciting programme will cover a number of topics, such as evolutionary algorithms, co-evolution, evolutionary design, nature-inspired optimisation techniques, evolutionary games, novel learning algorithms, artificial neural networks, theory of natural computation, molecular computation and quantum computation. The primary aim of this research-orientated master degree is to provide a solid foundation in natural computation for graduates to pursue a research and/or development career in industry or to pursue further studies (e.g., PhD).

You will be part of the research student community of the School, and as such have an allocated desk and access to research student facilities such as photocopying.

The MRes in Natural Computation is an advanced degree programme which aims to allow you to both broaden and deepen your knowledge in natural computation. You can broaden your knowledge by studying advanced topics not studied as part of your first degree. The programme includes a substantial amount of independent research work that ensures that you deepen your knowledge of specific topics.

We have designed this advanced degree programme for students who have completed an undergraduate degree in computer science/engineering or a closely related subject (with significant computing components). Graduates from this course are expected to work on advanced project development and in research sections of companies, or move into research for a doctorate. This course’s mixture of individual in-depth study and taught modules is an ideal preparation for these kinds of advanced work.

This Masters degree by research means you are taught core principles and then you develop these skills by doing interesting, innovative research, supported by academic staff and peers. It is structured so that you learn how to plan, organise and manage your time; you learn what it is to be a scientific researcher; you help contribute to the development of new knowledge; you learn intellectual skills such as argumentation, exposition, and reasoning; and develop as an individual by improving your communication skills, writing, collaborative working and creativity.

The programme has a strong emphasis on research and research skills in comparison with taught Masters programmes. However, you will also complete some taught modules as part of your degree. There are two compulsory modules in the first semester which comprise of 40 credits, and you will choose an additional 20 credits from a list of optional modules.

The compulsory research project (MRes thesis project), consists of solving a substantial problem using natural computation techniques (including hybrid techniques). Industrial co-supervisors will be used whenever appropriate. The research project requires students to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired in the programme to solve a difficult problem.

The programme specification and the programme requirements contain further information on your degree programme and can be found on the intranet site.
The Taught Part of your Programme

Modules

As part of your degree programme, you will study two compulsory modules:

1. *Research Skills* (06 06991, 10 credits): This module provides the student with the basis of transferable knowledge and skills necessary for a successful research-oriented career in industry or academia, with a particular orientation to computing-based disciplines.

2. *First semester mini-project* (06 07953, 30 credits): This module consists of a research project on the in-depth investigation of a chosen topic coming from industry (strongly encouraged) or academe.

In addition to the two compulsory modules, students take another 20 credits of optional modules over Semesters 1 and 2, to an overall total of 60 credits. There is an examination period after the end of the second semester.

1. *Introduction to Neural Computation* (06 12412, 10 credits): This module provides the first introduction to the most common topics in neural computation, including biological neural networks, artificial neuron models, feed-forward artificial neural networks, learning and generalisation, back-propagation, radial basis function networks, self-organising maps, and committee machines.

2. *Nature-Inspired Optimisation (Extended)* (06 26948, 20 credits): Natural Computation is the study of computational systems that use ideas and get inspiration from a variety of natural systems. Its powerful techniques can be applied not only to optimisation but also to learning and design. Example topics covered include variants of local search, evolutionary computation, swarm intelligence, and artificial immune systems. While the focus is on the applications of such techniques, theoretical foundations are also studied.

3. *Intelligent Data Analysis (Extended)* (06 20233, 10 credits): The module introduces a range of state-of-the-art techniques in the fields of statistical pattern analysis and data mining. The 'information revolution' has generated large amounts of data, but valuable information is often hidden and hence unusable. Pattern analysis and data mining techniques seek to unveil hidden patterns in the data that can help us to refine web search, construct more robust spam filters, or uncover principal trends in the evolution of a variety of stock indexes.

4. *Intelligent Robotics (Extended)* (06 15267, 20 credits): Artificial Intelligence is concerned with mechanisms for generating intelligent behaviour. When this behaviour occurs in the everyday physical world, with its uncertainty and rapid change, we find that all kinds of new problems and opportunities arise. We will try to understand some of these in the context of robotics. In a series of lectures we will look at some theories of how to sense the real world, and act intelligently in it. In a series of labs you will build your own robots to see how well (or badly) these theories actually work.

Assessment

Your degree programme is governed by regulations that specify the requirements to be awarded a degree, amongst other things. You should read the Regulations so that you know what is required of you.


It is a part of the requirements of your degree that you attain a satisfactory standard (achieve credit) in all your taught modules (Regulation 7.4.1 (b)).

General guidance on the assessment of taught modules can be found in the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment:

[www.as.bham.ac.uk/code/tpma.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/code/tpma.pdf)
Student Support and Guidance

Welfare Team

We use the term `welfare matters' to cover all extenuating circumstances of a non-academic nature that interfere with your academic work, for example, illness, bereavement, family crises or financial problems. The School has a team of trained Welfare Tutors to give advice in such cases. It is important to note that only very rarely will they be able to address the cause of a welfare problem (they are not medical doctors, for example); instead their role is to recommend professional help services and, most importantly, to limit the damage that the problem could have on your studies. Thus they can arrange for a deadline to be extended for you, or for a particularly serious issue to be brought to the attention of the examination board.

It is your responsibility to inform the Welfare Team in a timely fashion of any welfare matter that might affect your studies. The Welfare Tutors will generally not be able to help you if informed too late.

The Senior Welfare Officer is Dr Iain Styles, and the Deputy Welfare Officers are Dr Shan He and Dr Ata Kaban.

To contact the Welfare Team begin by sending an e-mail to welfare@cs.bham.ac.uk. Alternatively, attend the Welfare Hour of a member of the Welfare Team, which you will find on their office door. Up-to-date information is available at http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/welfare/


Absences from the University must be reported to the Teaching Support Office. We do need to know where you are, whether you are unwell, and so forth. If you are not able to attend the University due to illness, you must inform us as soon as possible. We are required to monitor your attendance and so we need to know if you are absent for good reason.

The School’s International Student Tutor (currently Dr Hamid Dehghani) acts on a more informal basis as an additional Academic Advisor to international students in relation to academic and related issues. Students from Overseas have further support within the School, see http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~dehghanh/overseas.php

The English For International Students Unit (EISU) provides free English Language support to all registered students and staff at the University of Birmingham whose first language is not English, see http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/students/eisu/index.aspx

A detailed summary of the student support services offered by the University can be found at: http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/support/index.shtml

Requesting a deadline extension

This has to be authorised by a member of the Welfare Team. Inform the Welfare Team either by email or by seeing one of the Welfare Tutors. In general, to be granted a deadline extension you need to present contemporaneous supporting evidence from an independent third party, such as a note by a GP, a letter from a counsellor, or a death certificate. However, we allow for one self-certified illness per term, provided the illness only lasts up to 5 consecutive days and no major assessment is affected. You need to fill in and submit a medical self-certification. Please see the University guidelines for medical certificates. Please see: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/extcircs/extcircs2014-15.aspx

The Welfare Team will advise relevant members of staff whether or not your claim can be accepted. The final decision on what action to take - whether to grant an extension up to a specified length of time or whether to take some other action - will be taken by the module lecturer, since it depends on further factors such as whether solutions have already been published.
All required supporting evidence or medical self-certification has to be received within 2 working days of a given extension, unless otherwise specified by a Welfare Tutor. We will not issue a reminder if no evidence has been submitted in time. We can also not make enquiries to obtain evidence on your behalf.

Some circumstances that will not normally be considered as Extenuating Circumstances and are therefore not welfare matters include:

3. minor illnesses (such as coughs and colds);
4. computer problems (we expect you to make adequate provisions for backing up your work) or inadequate planning preventing completion or submission of coursework;
5. stress and panic attacks caused by examinations that are not diagnosed as an illness or documented in a Student Support Agreement;
6. assessments or examinations scheduled close together;
7. personal or domestic events, such as moving house or attending a wedding;
8. holidays or travel arrangements;
9. consequences of paid employment;
10. sports activities.

See also the University's code of practice for more detail: http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/extenuating-circumstances.pdf

Important: There is a different process for extensions to your research thesis. Please refer to the section on the Research Project below.

Extensions or deferral of projects

Final year or summer projects can only be extended or deferred in very exceptional circumstances. Your project plan should be flexible enough to allow for short periods that keep you from working due to welfare matters. Should you nevertheless have a welfare matter that seriously interferes with your project, it is your responsibility to inform the Welfare Team as soon as possible and provide appropriate evidence. The Welfare Team will generally not extend or defer a project if informed retrospectively only.

Serious conditions that may interfere with your exam performance

In serious cases you may ask before the exams take place to postpone exams to the next possible resit opportunity. These requests have to be received by a nominated member of the Welfare Team either in person or in writing before the exams take place together with contemporaneous supporting evidence from an independent third party. The School's welfare tutor will then make a decision whether to accept or reject your application, or if additional evidence is required.

If your preparations for an examination have been affected by extenuating circumstances then you may apply for an “exceptional deferral”. If a circumstance arises during an examination that affects your performance then you should immediately inform the invigilator.

Only in exceptional circumstances can you submit a case for consideration by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. You must then provide an explanation and evidence as to why you did not apply for an extension during the term or for an exceptional deferral of your examination at the appropriate time. The submission must be made known to the School in writing. Further information about the process you should follow can be found in the code of practice on extenuating circumstances: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/extcircs/extcircs2014-15.aspx
Note that it is not enough to have spoken to someone (be it your academic advisor or a member of the Welfare Team). The deadline for the submission to Extenuating Circumstances Panel will be announced via email and on the School’s welfare pages: [http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/welfare/](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/welfare/)

The Extenuating Circumstances Panel will decide whether your application can be accepted. If accepted the panel will make a suggestion to the exam board how to handle your application and it is at the discretion of the exam board whether or not to follow this suggestion. It is also at the discretion of the exam board to allow you to take an examination again but as a `first sit’ (rather than a resit). For deriving the degree classification it is at the discretion of the exam board to disregard some results. However, please note that marks themselves will not be adjusted on the basis of extenuating circumstances.

After the examiners meeting has taken place, the School cannot take into consideration any additional new evidence that you may have. The only possibility then is to appeal against a decision: [http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook/current/#appeal](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook/current/#appeal)

However, be advised that the regulations only allow truly exceptional circumstances to be admitted in an appeal. The message is that if you think that extenuating circumstances apply to you, you must not wait until the exam results are out, but have to submit them to the School before the examiners meeting.

More information on the University's extenuating circumstances can be found at: [https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/extcircs/extcircs2014-15.aspx](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/extcircs/extcircs2014-15.aspx)
Plagiarism

Plagiarism is taking someone else’s thoughts or words and presenting them as your own. Weaker students are often tempted to copy one or more sentences from books or web pages into their project reports and essays. Occasionally students will use an author’s words and change them to disguise that they have copied the author’s ideas. Very occasionally, students try to copy programs from books and the web and pretend they have written the programs themselves.

Plagiarism – the copying of other people’s ideas or words and pretending they are your own – is unacceptable. You must always reference your sources and place quotation marks when you copy other people’s words. The key rule is: the reader should always be able to see what are your ideas and what are other people’s ideas.

The School of Computer Science and the University take plagiarism very seriously. In previous years, a small number of students have attempted to deceive by copying from books or the web without referencing the source. When a student has plagiarised a small amount of text (for instance less than 50 words), they have had their mark reduced for the module. Where a student has copied larger amounts, the range of discipline measures have been from the failure of a whole module (with the student paying to repeat the module in the next academic year and receiving their degree late) to the student being required to leave the course with no degree and no return of fees. The simple message is: if it is not your idea, add a reference; if they are not your words, use quotation marks and add the reference.

The University’s rules on plagiarism and cheating in exams can be found at: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/student services/conduct/plagiarism/index.aspx and www.as.bham.ac.uk/code/exams.pdf

Attendance

The University has a Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence: http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/code/rd.pdf

If you do not show reasonable diligence as outlined in the Code of Practice, we will initiate the procedures set out in the Code of Practice, which might result in your being required to withdraw from your programme.

The School has mechanisms in place to monitor your attendance. In particular, we will monitor your attendance at 10 contact points over the academic year, as part of the University’s obligations to monitor the attendance of non-EEA students in accordance with the Points-Based System.

For international students, the UK Border Agency stipulates that all educational institutions who are licensed to sponsor students that require a visa must monitor their students’ engagement with their programmes of study. As such, the University has a legal duty to report international students with a visa who do not fully engage with their programme of study. Being reported to the UK Border Agency would have serious implications for a student’s immigration status and their ability to remain in the UK. It is therefore essential that regular attendance and active engagement (as outlined above) is maintained throughout your programme of study.

If you are an international student, you are strongly advised to contact the International Students Advisory Service (ISAS) in the Aston Webb Building if you have any concerns about your visa or your immigration status. ISAS can be contacted at +44 (0)121 414 8464, or by email to isas@contacts.bham.ac.uk.
**Student Representation**

At the beginning of each year you will be invited to vote for the student representatives of your degree programme. Please consider standing yourself and definitely take part in the elections. Many School committees have statutory student representation, and the opinion of students is taken very seriously in the decision process. If you have forgotten who your representative is, you can check the page [http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Posts.html#Heading9](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Posts.html#Heading9)

All student representatives meet twice a term with members of staff in the Student-Staff Consultative Committee (SSCC). It is a forum where we can discuss all matters that affect you as a group of students. Discussions are minuted and at the next meeting there is an opportunity to review the progress that has been made on the issues raised. Note, though, that going via the SSCC would usually be too slow and roundabout a process for resolving issues with individual modules. For these you should seek a discussion with the member of staff responsible as soon as the issue becomes apparent.

Your student rep will also be a member of the Staff/Research Student Consultative Committee (SRSCC). SRSCC provides a forum for consultation and discussion between student representatives and staff responsible for programme provision on all relevant matters affecting research students within the School. Further information, including current membership, can be found at:

[http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Management.php#srscc](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Management.php#srscc) and [http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Posts.php#Heading10](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Posts.php#Heading10)

On each taught module you will be asked to complete, anonymously, a standard questionnaire twice in each semester. The primary purpose of these is to enable the School to monitor the quality of module delivery. The questionnaire responses will be displayed on the web at: [http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/courses/questionnaires](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/courses/questionnaires)

**Communication**

It is important that you stay informed. For this you must check your School email account at least once every day. If we send out an announcement via email, we assume that all students concerned have been informed. For last-minute announcements we use a notice board in the lobby of the Computer Science building. From time to time, the University will also contact you via your University email account, but all messages sent there are automatically forwarded to the School account.

Note also that members of staff will not send messages to a private email account that you may also have; make sure, therefore, that you only use the School account to contact staff, so that they know who you are and how to reply to your message. Please provide your University ID number if you are enquiring about any aspect of your academic record.

Not all communications from the University or the School are sent out electronically. To make sure such crucial letters reach you, update your changes of address (term time and permanent) on the student portal without delay.
Mini-Project

What is a mini-project?

As its name suggests, the mini-project is a smaller version of the research project. Precisely, the research project is comprised of a notional 120 credits, whereas a mini-project has 30 credits. Essentially, a mini-project functions as a full project, but on a smaller scale.

The first semester mini-project is an essential part of the degree programme. Its purpose is to give you the opportunity to develop a number of skills and techniques:

- definition of aims, objectives and feasible working plans
- project management and time management skills
- systematic literature searching skills
- communication skills both in written reports and in verbal presentations to supervisors.

As an MRes student, your mini-project will be closely related to your MRes thesis project. It can be the literature review and feasibility study parts of your MRes thesis project. In these cases, you should still think of your mini-project as a self-contained project. In any case, you are expected to discuss and agree the exact topic and scope of the mini-project with your academic supervisor.

Defining your mini-project

Whatever the reason or reasons for choosing a particular topic, you need to negotiate a topic with your supervisor. You need to address the following points:

Aim

Each mini-project must have a clearly articulated aim or aims. One way of thinking about aims is to think about why you are doing the project. For instance, your aim might be “to study neural networks in greater depth” or “to develop a knowledge of pragmatics in natural language processing”. Alternatively, the aim might be firmer: for instance “to develop a constraint logic programming-based parser for a unification grammar”.

In brief, your aims should be devised in such a way that you and your examiners are able to evaluate, in broad terms at least, whether you have met you aims.

Objectives

Whatever your aim or aims, you should be able to define a number of things you will achieve on the way to completing your mini-project. Objectives differ from aims. At the end of the mini-project, it may be possible to argue about whether or not you have satisfied your aims: you may or may not have succeeded in, for instance, achieving learning in depth when studying neural networks. However, it should be absolutely clear whether or not you have achieved each objective.

So, objectives should be activities that have a beginning and an end; for instance writing a particular piece of program code, to review a set of papers, or to install and use a piece of software. It follows from the setting down of clear objectives that you have the basis of a plan of work for the mini-project.

Project management skills

As part of the supervision process, you will be expected to devise a management plan and evaluate your progress against that plan.

Systematic literature skills

All mini-projects should include a substantial element of literature search. The amount of literature searching required will vary from project to project. For instance, if the aim is to gain a deep knowledge of a particular topic, then there is likely to be very extensive literature research. For mini-projects focused on a piece of software, there may be less.

The aim, of course, is not to build a collection of references. You should ensure that you can demonstrate that you have undertaken a thorough review of the relevant literature (or software etc.). Typically, this is through presenting a detailed analysis of this previous work which will then stand as a foundation for your own contribution.
Communication skills
A basic level of practice in these skills comes with the normal process of supervisory meetings and report writing. Students and supervisors are encouraged to consider making mini-project work the basis of presentations in one of the School’s informal seminar series.

Declaring your mini-project
You will need to declare your mini-project 2-3 weeks into the corresponding semester (see the Important Dates section of this handbook for details). Instructions on declaring your projects will be issued by the mini-project co-ordinator. You must keep a copy of the form as it is required as an appendix in your mini-project report.

Writing-up your mini-project
Guidance on writing mini-project reports is given separately (see http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/resources/programmes/postgraduate-taught/msc-acs/msc_acs_nc_project_writing.pdf). You should also seek the advice of your supervisor.

Students are reminded that any form of plagiarism is taken extremely seriously and heavily penalised by the School. See the section on plagiarism of this handbook for more information.

See also the School’s online guidance notes on plagiarism, at:

http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook/current/- PLAG
http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/plagiarism.htm
http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/plag-policy.html

Assessing your mini-project
Your mini-project will be assessed by your supervisor and moderated by a member of the programme team. It will be assessed through both the inherent quality of your work and also the success you have had in meeting your aim and objectives, and displaying research skills of project management, literature review and communication skills. You will be given feedback in the form of a brief written report and a grade. See the project web page:

http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/programmes/postgraduate-taught/projects.php

for details of the criteria that will be used to assess your mini-project.

Late submissions
The submission deadlines for mini-projects are listed on page 1 of this handbook. Should you experience significant medical problems or personal problems, you may apply for an extension. Extensions can only be granted with authorisation from a member of the Welfare Team. For details see the appropriate section of the Student Handbook (http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook.html - mitigating). It is always a good idea to discuss any such application with your mini-project supervisor, Academic Advisor and/or the Programme Director.

If no extension has been granted, or there is not sufficiently good cause for work being submitted late, then a penalty of 5% on the mark actually achieved will be imposed for each day the assignment is late until 0% is reached.
The Research Project (MRes Thesis)

Introduction

It is because you do a research project that the MRes is a research degree and you count as a research student in the School. Much of what you need to know for your research is described in the on-line handbook at

http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/research_students/

(From the School home page click on Intranet, and then on Information for Research Students.)

In this section we shall try to emphasize the main differences for an MRes student.

Monitoring your progress

The School uses the method of Thesis Groups which report to a committee called the Research Students Monitoring Group - usually called the “RSMG” for short – to monitor your progress with your research project. You can find more information in the Research Students Handbook:

http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/research_students/monitoring.php

Note that you need to choose your thesis group within 6 weeks of starting your degree. Use form RSMG1 to report this.

The general monitoring scheme is slightly modified for MRes, with the mini project incorporated into the thesis group system. A guideline timetable is as follows.

- January: submit mini project, which is then marked.
- April: Report 2 is the thesis proposal. It is fairly brief, but written with reference to the mini project. The report and mini project are sent to the thesis group, and a thesis group meeting is held to discuss it. RSMG then considers progress in May.
- August: Report 3 is a progress report to check readiness to write up and progress in doing so. It is discussed in a thesis group meeting, and then progress is considered by RSMG in September.
- Reports 4 and 5, if necessary, report progress in writing up over the following year.

Problems impeding your research

Sometimes your work may be impeded for reasons beyond your own control. If this is happening to you, it is important to seek out the people who might be able to help you. If possible, discuss it with your supervisor and maybe your Thesis Group members (particularly your RSMG rep).

If it cannot be sorted out at that level, you should discuss the matter with the Research Students Tutor. You should certainly do this if you have a major illness, for instance, or if relationships between you and your supervisor (or Thesis Group members) look like breaking down. For personal issues such as illness you may prefer to consult the School’s welfare team, email welfare@cs.bham.ac.uk.

The Research Students Tutor will have to be involved if you need a leave of absence, or an extension to your thesis, or if you need to change your supervisor or Thesis Group.

If you feel the Research Students Tutor does not or cannot give a satisfactory response, you can take the matter to the Head of School. By this stage you may be wondering about how to make a complaint.

Remember that any discussion between you and members of staff on welfare issues can be kept confidential if you wish. The general rule is that if you disclose confidential details to a member of staff, they may make their own assessment of the impact on your studies, and report that assessment to others, but they will not pass on the confidential details.
Leave of absence and extensions

A leave of absence is for a period when you are not working, or cannot work, on your studies. A common reason is illness, but there are other situations where a leave of absence would be appropriate. It is assumed that during that period you do not need facilities or supervision, and you do not pay fees. Your submission deadline is delayed by the length of the leave of absence.

An extension is a recognition that you simply need a longer period of working in order to complete. Our aim is always to avoid extensions, since the School’s effectiveness in research student supervision is judged in part (by the University and public funding bodies) on the rate of on-time submission. One focus of thesis group meetings in the later stages is to look for ways to ensure that submission is on time. However, we will generally approve an extension if it is necessary.

Note that you cannot submit late without an extension.

The Graduate School website has guidance and request forms for Leave of Absence (including a whole Code of Practice) and Extensions. In both cases you download the form and fill it in, and then get it signed by your supervisor who will pass it on to the Research Students Tutor for School approval. It then goes to the University for central approval. Always download a fresh form. Do not use old paper forms - sometimes the forms are updated in important ways.

For most cases of extensions, the Research Students Tutor will expect to see that the extension has been discussed in a Thesis Group meeting and that the Thesis Group are explicitly recommending it. Important questions there are -

- Is it possible to scale back the ambitions of the thesis so that it can be finished by the deadline but still be passable?
- If not, how long an extension is needed?
- What is the workplan for finishing within the extension? (Any extension application has to include a workplan.)

Remember that while you are writing up you should still be producing regular progress reports and holding meetings if your Thesis Group have any doubts about your progress. So an extension application should naturally follow a Thesis Group meeting.

Also refer to the online Research Students Handbook:
http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/research_students/problems.php#LoAextn

Graduate School website on Leave of Absence:
http://www.graduateschool.bham.ac.uk/rsa/absence.shtml

Graduate School website on Extensions:
http://www.graduateschool.bham.ac.uk/rsa/extensions.shtml

Writing-up your research project

The research project report is to be written up in the form of a thesis. You should seek the advice of your supervisor.

The University's regulations require you to study for a minimum period of one year before submitting your thesis. You must submit within two years of when you first started the programme (before the end of your maximum registration period). To submit early or for an extension to the deadline you must make a special application to the University.

Students are reminded that any form of plagiarism is taken extremely seriously and heavily penalised by the School.

Also refer to the online Research Students Handbook:
http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/research_students/writing_up.php


**Submitting your thesis**

The regulations lay down word limits for theses - for example, 15,000 words for the MRes, and when you submit you must fill in a word length declaration form declaring the word length. Your thesis will not be accepted if your declared word length is greater than the limit.

Late submissions, even if only one day late, will not be accepted. You will have to apply for an extension (see above).

The University requires you to tell Student Services that you intend to submit a thesis. Guidance and downloadable forms are available online. Fill in the form and send it in three months before you intend to hand in your thesis. (In practice, the University will accept this form less than three months before you hand in your thesis but you may find that your examination will be delayed.) What is this form for? From your point of view, the main function of this form is that it starts the process of appointing your examiners. So, it is important to:

- complete this form in time;
- ensure your supervisor has your examiners selected.

When you submit your thesis before your examination, you will need to provide two copies in a "temporary" binding. This is simple. Take two copies of your thesis (and your forms) to the Bindery and they will bind your thesis for you for a modest charge.

When your thesis has been examined, and you have made any required modifications, you will have to provide two copies of your thesis in a permanent binding. (Otherwise you will not be able to graduate.) This is also simple. Take two copies of your thesis (and your forms) to the Bindery and they will bind your thesis for you for a less modest charge - but it will look beautiful.

Further sources of information:

Online Research Students Handbook:
http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/research_students/submitting_a_thesis.php

Graduate School website:
http://www.graduateschool.bham.ac.uk/rsa/

**Assessing your project**

There will be one internal and one external examiner. Your thesis will be assessed in accordance with the University Code of Practice on Assessment of Research Degree Theses:

A major difference from doctoral degrees is that for the MRes the examiners may agree to pass the thesis without holding a viva.

Also refer to Section 7 of the University Regulations: