School of Computer Science

MSc in Advanced Computer Science (0014)

Handbook
2014/15
This handbook has been prepared as a convenient summary of information you may need during 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

### Welcome Week

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

### Academic Calendar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29th September 2014</td>
<td>Autumn Term starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd October 2014</td>
<td>International students meeting, 16:00-17:00, Learning Centre UG14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd October 2014</td>
<td>Last date for changing first term modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th December 2014</td>
<td>Autumn Term ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th January 2015</td>
<td>Spring Term starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th January 2015</td>
<td>Last date for changing second term modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th March 2015*</td>
<td>Deadline for students to have found a supervisor and project title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th March 2015</td>
<td>Spring Term ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27th April 2015</td>
<td>Summer Term starts; Revision Period starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th May 2015</td>
<td>Examinations start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th June 2015</td>
<td>Examinations end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9th June 2015*</td>
<td>Project start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th June 2015*</td>
<td>June MSc Examination Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18th-19th June 2015*</td>
<td>Progress tutorials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19th June 2015</td>
<td>Summer Term ends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th – 11th July 2015*</td>
<td>Project inspections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13th July 2015*</td>
<td>Deadline to submit a request for deferring the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th August 2015</td>
<td>Supplementary (resit) Examinations start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17th-20th August 2015*</td>
<td>Project demonstrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28th August 2015</td>
<td>Supplementary (resit) Examinations end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2015*</td>
<td>Hand in two copies of summer project report and CDs to the Teaching Support Office, 12.00; end of programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2015*</td>
<td>Final cut-off date for MSc project reports, 12.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-October 2015*</td>
<td>Final MSc Examination Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid December 2015*</td>
<td>Degree Congregation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note: The dates for selecting the project and for the mid-term project inspections will be announced before the end of the first semester, together with information on how to select your project topics.

* 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

Director of Postgraduate Studies
Dr Tom Chothia

Room: 111
Email: T.P.Chothia@cs.bham.ac.uk

Programme Director: MSc in Advanced Computer Science
Dr Hayo Thielecke

Room: 208
Email: H.Thielecke@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
Quick Reference Guide 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/

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 (Postgraduate and Graduate Taught Programmes of Study) of the regulations so that you know what is required of you.


School of Computer Science Student Handbook
www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook.html

Student Guide on Protecting their Immigration Status as a Tier 4 Student

Timetables
The School’s timetables are at:

www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/timetables/

Transcripts
The University’s page for official and unofficial transcripts is at:

https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/studentservices/enquiries/transcripts.aspx
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
Vital and Useful Sources of Information and URLs

The Start of the Year

Registration
You need to register with the University before you start your studies. This is now online and you can (and should) register before the first day of term. See:

http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/registration/ and http://my.bham.ac.uk

You will need your username and password that has been sent with your registration details. If you do not have this information, you should contact the University’s Student Services:
www.birmingham.ac.uk/welcome/registration/contact.aspx

Academic English Assessments
If you had to provide an English language certificate during the admissions process you must also take the online academic English assessment (STAR) as part of the admissions process.

The test is designed to find out your strengths and weaknesses in using English for studying. If you have weaknesses that could be improved, you will be asked to take some free English classes. The results of the assessment should be available within a week of taking the test.

Induction
Induction will take place sometime during the week before the start of term. You should receive a letter from the school providing you with all the details. If you have not received anything please contact the Teaching Support Office.

Programme Induction Meeting
You should receive a letter from the School of Computer Science informing you of this information. If you have not received a letter (perhaps because you have changed addresses recently or have only very recently accepted the University’s offer of a place on a programme), you should arrive in the School of Computer Science by 9.00 on the first day of term. Information about induction meetings will be in the Atrium.

Username and Passwords (Computer Science)
The School has its own separate computing facilities and you need to have a username and password before you can use them. Usernames and passwords are distributed during induction on the first day. If you miss the induction meeting and do not have your username and password, you should visit the Computer Support office (room UG46).

Module Selection
Module sections are completed online using the module choice form via the below link:
http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/programmes/

To access the form select the ‘module’ link next to your programme of study – this will bring up a page of optional modules your programme.

Every student must fill in a module choice form for the academic year, check the credit sum for validity, print the form, and submit it to the designated pigeonhole (next to the Teaching
and Support Office) by the end of the induction week, that is, by Friday 26 September 2014. Before printing the form do not forget to fill in your name.

Many students attend the lectures for several modules in the first two weeks before deciding which modules they want to study for the rest of the term.

Don’t worry – If you decide you are unhappy with your module choices, it may be possible to change your choice: see a later entry in this FAQ.

**Some Key Considerations when Selecting Modules**

**Module Weighting throughout the Year**

Most students will find that it is best to have an equal weight of modules (60 credits) in the first and second terms. The School will allow you to choose to have an imbalance of 50 credits in one term and 70 credits in the other term. If you wish to have a greater imbalance, for instance 80:40, you will have to have the agreement, in writing (with a copy added to your student file), of your Programme Director.

**This section should only apply to students who have already studied in the School...**

If you have previously undertaken study with the Computer Science school you should consider the following when selecting modules.

You are not allowed to obtain credit for the same module twice so another module must be substituted.

You are not allowed to take an extended version of a module that you have already taken at a lower level. For example, if you have already taken Enterprise Systems in your third year as an Undergraduate, you will not be allowed to take Enterprise Systems (Extended) at Postgraduate level.

If you have previously studied one of the core modules on the programme (for example as an undergraduate), you will need to discuss this with your Programme Director because you must have their agreement, *in writing* (with a copy added to your student file), to vary your study plan.

There are some important considerations when substituting a core module:

1. A Level M module should be preferred.
2. The University’s regulations for postgraduate awards require you to gain a minimum amount of credit at Level M. You must check the regulations to ensure that your study plan includes at least the minimum number of Level M modules to gain sufficient credit. If you are already studying at least the minimum amount of Level M credit, you may want to study for more to ensure that you have a “cushion” should you fail a module.
3. The timetable must allow you take your chosen module
4. You cannot select a module that clashes in the timetable with another module that you are committed to.
5. Your module load over both terms should be even
6. See the earlier FAQ entry about having an equal weight of modules over the first and second terms.
7. Your module choice should be appropriate to your Degree Programme
8. It is sensible to select modules that will contribute to your chosen Degree Programme.

About your Programme

This Master’s degree is intended for graduates with a previous degree in Computer Science or a closely related discipline. It allows students to broaden their knowledge of cutting edge areas of Computing through the choice of options from a range of advanced taught modules. It also provides
the opportunity for students to deepen their knowledge of selected areas of Computing by individual project work. The final four months of the programme are spent on a summer project. This could either be a software development oriented project, or a research oriented-project, supervised by a member of staff who is active in that research area. Students undertaking research-oriented projects (typically those interested in a career in research and development, or the pursuit of further studies, such as a PhD) will also complete one or two research mini-projects in the first part of the programme and undertake a Research Skills course.

Students who want to do a mini-project (modules 07953 and/or 07954) and/or take the Project - Advanced MSc (module 02637) must take the Research Skills module (module 06991) and write a proposal on their research plan, which must be approved.

Throughout your Programme

Academic Meetings

You will have the opportunity to attend formal meetings to discuss your progress, for instance after the summer examinations. You are expected to attend these meetings; however, if you do not wish to attend, you are expected to notify your Academic Advisor or Programme Director by email of your decision not to attend.

You are welcome to meet with your Academic Advisor or Programme Director at other times. Each member of academic staff has one or more office hours each week when they are available to meet students on a drop-in basis. Office hours are given on the member of staff's personal timetable both on their door and on their WWW page.

Examinations

The main examination period is in the third term (May to June) of each year. This is followed by the Supplementary Examination period in the summer (September) of each year.

Examination Papers
Yes. The University maintains a database of examination papers from previous years. However, some care is needed in using this resource. Examination papers sometimes include more than one module so it is necessary to search carefully to find the correct examination paper for your module. If you have problems finding the examination paper for a module, you should contact the Module Examiner for advice.

You can access the examination paper via the student portal at: http://my.bham.ac.uk

Further information is available at: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/learning-spaces/exams/pastpapers.aspx
**Holiday/Vacation during the Summer**

Your project officially starts immediately after you finish your final exam in the May/June exam period. This gives you approximately 11 weeks until you must demonstrate your finished project. You are still expected to be present and working full time as a student on your project over the whole Summer period. Nevertheless, students often need to take a break and relax after finishing their exams. In general, there is no problem with taking a break of a week to 10 days after finishing your exams. If you take more time than that away from your project work then you are putting your entire project result in danger. Taking a break of three or more weeks in this period without extenuating circumstances accepted by the welfare team is unacceptable and may be cause for disciplinary action under the due diligence regulations.

**Module Information**

*The ‘Pass’ Mark*

The pass mark for all Level M modules is 50. The pass mark for Level 2/I and Level 3/H modules is 40. However, you should aim to achieve at least 50 in all modules.

You can find out if you have passed the first and second term modules after the June MSc Examination Board has met (see page ‘Key Dates’). Results are posted on the notice board in the student common room (lower ground floor). Results are also made available on the School’s WWW pages.

*Making Changes to your Module Choices*

It is possible to change modules but there are restrictions. In all cases you must discuss and get agreement from your programme director. You need to check the following:

1. *Is the module you want to give up one of your programme’s core modules?*

   You must take the core modules of your programme unless you have the agreement, *in writing* (with a copy added to your student file), of your Programme Director to vary your study plan. Your Programme Director may decide to ask the Director of Postgraduate Studies to approve your study plan.

2. *Is it worth the correct number of credits?*

   The module you wish to move to must be of the same credit value as the module you wish to leave. (If you wish to move to a 20 credit module, you will have to leave a 20 credit module or two 10 credit modules.)

3. *Is it at the correct level?*

   The module you wish to move to must be of the same level that does not contravene the rules limiting module levels in your programme. No MSc student can take more than 30 credits that are not at Level 4/M.
4. **Do you have the prerequisites and co-requisites?**

You should check the prerequisites and co-requisites of the module you wish to move to. You must be able to satisfy the requirements of the prerequisites and co-requisites (if any). There may also be restrictions placed on taking certain combinations of modules.

5. **Is the module you wish to join in the right term?**

The module you wish to leave and the module you that to move to should not cause unreasonable imbalance in your module load between Autumn and Spring terms.

6. **Is there room for you on the module?**

Some modules have restrictions on the number of students that can take them (usually because of limitations on tutorial size or room size). You need to check with the Module Examiner to ensure there is space for you in the module you wish to move to.

7. **Is it too late to change?**

It is possible to change modules within one week of the start of a term. After that, only in exceptional circumstances will permission be given to change modules.

**How to Change your Modules?**

You need to use a *Module Change Form* (available from the Teaching Support Office).

Up until the Friday of the first week of term, you can change by completing a *Module Change Form*, which needs to be signed by your Programme Director. After this time, only in exceptional circumstances will permission be given to change modules. Your Programme Director may decide to ask the Director of Postgraduate Studies to approve your change of module.

**Programme Transfers and Changes**

**Programme Transfer**

It is possible to change between some degree programmes, but there are restrictions. You need to check the following:

1. **Do you have the entry requirements for your chosen programme?**

   For instance, if you have a UK Lower Second Class degree (or its international equivalent) and you want to change to a degree that requires a UK Upper Second Class degree (or higher), then you will not be able to change. To find entry requirements, look on the WWW pages of the School’s postgraduate prospectus where they are listed.

2. **Does your chosen programme have any space for you?**

   It may not be possible to move to another degree programme if there is not enough space for you. For instance, if there are no more spaces available in your chosen programme’s workshop tutorials, then there will not be enough space for you. To find out if there is space, contact the Programme Director of the programme you want to transfer to.
3. Is it too late in the year to transfer?

It is not usually possible to move between degree programmes after the first week of the first term. However, a Programme Director may agree to a move to another programme if it is still possible for you to catch up on the work you have missed, for instance because your current study plan includes a substantial number of the modules to be studied in your new programme. The Programme Director must also be certain you can still satisfy the requirements of your new degree programme. (For instance, a summer project for a degree programme may require that you have completed a specific workshop module.) To find out if it is still possible to transfer, contact the Programme Director of the programme you want to transfer to.

4. Does your scholarship allow you to transfer?

Many scholarships have attached conditions that require the holders to study for a specific degree programme. You will have to check your scholarship offer letter to see what are its conditions and perhaps also contact your sponsor. (It may still be possible to transfer to another programme but you might have to give up your scholarship.)

If all the answers to the above questions are positive, then you can start the process of changing your degree programme.

How to Transfer Programmes

The process differs depending upon whether you want to transfer to a programme inside or outside the School of Computer Science.

If you want to transfer to another programme within the School of Computer Science, you need to use a Transfer of Programme form (available from the Teaching Support Office). You must get in writing (e.g. an email or a note on the Transfer of Programme form) evidence that the Programme Director of the programme you wish to move to is willing to accept you. You then need to see the Director of Postgraduate Studies bringing your evidence with you. The Director of Postgraduate Studies will agree to the transfer if you are able to satisfy the criteria set out above. Should the Director of Postgraduate Studies not be available, the School’s Head of Academic Programmes may act on his behalf.

If you want to transfer to another programme outside the School of Computer Science, you need to use the University Transfer of Degree Programme form for transfer between programmes (available from the URL below). Again, the signature of the Director of Postgraduate Studies is required. Should the Director of Postgraduate Studies not be available, the School’s Head of Academic Programmes may act on his behalf.

URL of University Transfer of Degree Programme form:

https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/studentservices/enquiries/programme-changes.aspx

Award Transfer - Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate.

Any student registered for a Master’s programme can choose not to undertake the dissertation/project element and to request either the PG Certificate or the PG Diploma (whichever is appropriate) as a
voluntary alternative qualification. (The difference between the Certificate and the Diploma is mainly
the number of credits that is required: for further information see regulations for your Programme.)

You need to write to the Chair of the MSc Examination Board and request the Board to consider you
for the alternative award. Your letter should be handed in to the School’s Teaching Support Office. If
the Examination Board decides to recommend the change of qualification, this is communicated to the
University’s Student Records as part of end-of-session processing.

**Award Transfer - Postgraduate Diploma to an MSc.**

Any student registered for a Postgraduate Diploma may decide to undertake the dissertation/project
element and to request to be transferred to the MSc as a voluntary alternative qualification.

You need to write to the Chair of the MSc Examination Board and request the Board to consider you
for the alternative award. Your letter should be handed in to the School’s Teaching Support Office. If
the Examination Board decides to recommend the change of qualification, this is communicated to the
University’s Student Records as part of end-of-session processing.

**Timetable Information**

Timetables are published on the School’s WWW site: [www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/timetables](http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/timetables)

**The End of your Programme**

The project hand-in date (see page 4) is the last date on which all students are formally required to be
present. After you have handed in your project, the programme is effectively finished. In the period
between your project submission and the final meeting of the Board of Examiners, you may be asked
to attend a viva or, should plagiarism be suspected, to attend some other investigatory hearing. You
should ensure that you can be contacted and can return, if required, during this time.

**Programme Outcome**

You can find out if you have passed the whole programme after the Autumn MSc Examination Board
has met (see page ‘Key Dates’). Results are posted on the notice board in the student common room
(lower ground floor). Results are also made available on the School’s WWW pages.

**Transcripts**

The University WWW pages allow you to order official and unofficial transcripts. Please see link
below for further details: [http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/faq/transcripts.shtml](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/faq/transcripts.shtml)

The School will also issue you with an unofficial transcript after the final MSc Examination Board in
the autumn after you have finished your project. Transcripts will be available for collection in person
from the Teaching Support Office at the earliest the day after the autumn meeting of the MSc
Examination Board. Transcripts that remain uncollected after a week will be posted on to students. It
is wise to ensure that the School and University have your up-to-date postal address.

**Employment Visa and JACS Code**

This code is needed for those applying for a visa for employment after the completion of the
programme. The JACS code is I100.
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:


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:

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

See also the University's code of practice for more detail:

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](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

**Special Needs**

Students with certain special needs such as a disability or a learning difficulty are able to access a variety of support within the school and within the wider University. For example, you may be entitled to extra time (or other special arrangements) for examinations, or extra support during your studies. If you believe you have special needs of any kind, then you should contact both the Reasonable Adjustments Coordinator, Dr Iain Styles, and the University's student support team: https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/studentservices/index.aspx

The normal process is that you will be assessed by student support, in conjunction with appropriate health professionals, and they will write a Student Support Agreement that describes what special measures should be taken to support you in your studies. The Reasonable Adjustments Coordinator is then responsible for implementing this, in conjunction with the staff in the school.

You should let us know of any special needs as soon as possible (and certainly well before the exams) so that we can make sure the appropriate measures are in place in good time. Ideally, you will inform us as soon as you arrive. This is particularly important if your situation means that you may need support during your studies as well as during the exam period. We are not able to help you if we do not know!

**Student Attendance**

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

The School must check that every single student shows reasonable diligence. You are obliged to:

- Submit all your coursework. (If you can't finish it, submit what you have finished by the deadline. If you have not finished anything, submit a note saying so.)
- Attend all compulsory tutorials and laboratory sessions, etc.
- Attend all meetings with your project supervisor (at least every second week in person, other meetings may be replaced by other forms of contact such as email or phone call).
- Attend all other compulsory events.
- Register with the School Teaching Support Office at the start of the autumn and the spring term. There will be a tight deadline for doing so. This will be specified at the Office and it will be only a few days after the first day of term.

The School has mechanisms in place to monitor your attendance. This includes taking registers of attendance at advisory sessions, meetings with your project supervisor, and certain modules. As part
of this, we will also monitor your attendance at 12 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.

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. For this reason, please:

- If you miss an assignment deadline or a compulsory event with good reason, then contact the school's welfare team for advice. If possible, please do this in advance so that alternative arrangements can be made for you. If you are ill, then please contact the welfare team as soon as you are able to do so. For more information, please refer to the information about student welfare on page 6.

- Read your email on a daily basis and make sure that your postal address details are up to date on the student portal (my.bham.ac.uk).

For international students, the UK Visas and Immigration 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 Visas and Immigration 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.

** Complaints **

If things go wrong, you have the right to complain. If possible this should be done at an informal level as early as possible before things create a big problem. For instance, if it is about a particular lecture, contact the lecturer; if about a module, then contact the Module Examiner. If your complaint is about the Programme in general, then you should complain to the Programme Director.

If you are not satisfied by the action taken or if the nature of the problem is broader, then you still have a number of options within the School. You can contact your representative on the Staff/Student Consultative Committee, discuss it with either your academic advisor or contact the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

If you remain unsatisfied, your next step should be to contact the Head of Education or the Head of School (please see Key Contacts)
If you still remain unsatisfied, then you have exhausted the complaints procedure within the School and you should follow the University’s formal complaints procedure. The full procedure as well as pointers to the forms to be filled in can be found at:

www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/complaints.shtml.

Please also see: Student Guide on Protecting their Immigration Status as a Tier 4 Student


**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/studentservices/conduct/plagiarism/index.aspx and www.as.bham.ac.uk/code/exams.pdf

**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.

**Student representation**
The Staff/Student Consultative Committee provides a forum for consultation and discussion between student representatives and staff responsible for programme provision on all relevant matters affecting taught students within the School. Further information, including current membership, can be found at:

http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Management.php#Heading25 and

http://www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/staff/handbook/Posts.php#sscc

On each 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

**External examiners**
An External Examiner is normally a senior academic from another university whose role it is to assist in monitoring the quality of the education we provide to you. They help to ensure that the awards you receive at Birmingham are comparable to similar awards at other universities.

The External Examiners for your programmes are listed below. You should note that External Examiners are required to remain impartial at all times and they do not participate in determining marks for individual students. Our School is required to publish their names, but students should not attempt to contact any External Examiner, and External Examiners are not permitted to respond to contacts made by students or anyone on behalf of a student.

**MSc Advanced Computer Science**

Dr Eerke Boiten, *University of Kent.*
Information about Projects

Project Supervision
All projects must have a supervisor. If you believe that you have not been paired with a supervisor, then it is your responsibility to bring this to the attention of the Project Co-ordinator for your programme.

Where possible, the School hopes students and staff come to mutually amicable agreements about supervisions, so there is the maximum possible choice. However, sometimes it is not possible for a student to have their preferred choice of supervisor perhaps because the supervisor already has enough supervisees (so don’t delay making your project choices) or because the potential supervisor is on study leave.

Project Inspections and Project Demonstrations
In the School, Master’s students have an early project inspection. One member of staff (who is not your supervisor) will meet with you to discuss the progress you have made with your project, trying to ensure that your interpretation of the topic is reasonable and that you are making adequate progress. The project inspection is not formally assessed, but if there is cause for concern about your project, this is brought to your attention.

The project demonstration takes place toward the end of the academic year. Two members of staff (one of whom may have also inspected your project) will spend about twenty minutes looking at the running of your program and discussing any background or theoretical work. There is likely to be another five minutes for further questions. The project demonstration is part of the formal assessment of your project. The probable dates of the inspections and demonstrations are given 4.

Does it matter if I miss my project inspection?
Yes. This is not a formal assessment but a student who does not attend may not be showing due diligence and may be required to leave. If your personal circumstances will not allow you to attend your project inspection, you must immediately contact the Welfare Team for advice.

Does it matter if I miss my project demonstration?
Yes: this is part of the assessment of your project. If you do not give a demonstration, you cannot have credit for this part of the assessment. If your personal circumstances will not allow you to attend your project demonstration, you must immediately contact the Welfare Team (see page 20) for advice.
**Project Topics**

Project topics must be approved by the Programme Director as being appropriate to the Aims and Learning Outcomes of the programme. Students’ individual programmes of study must be approved by the Programme Director (as the nominee of the Head of School), who will take into account topics students have previously studied at undergraduate level, ensuring that key subjects (e.g. databases) have been covered. Please consult your module pages and module co-ordinators for further details – all of this information can be found on the School WWW pages.

**Projects and Programming**

Usually, a project consists of writing a substantial piece of software, and the mark you are awarded is based both on the software you produce and the dissertation you write. Some projects are aimed at solving a problem that may require a significant amount of programming (e.g. the creation, execution and analysis of experiments) but not the delivery of a single large program. These can involve carrying out some research, or solving a problem in a way which does not result in an end-product derived from some part of the software life-cycle. It is harder to show tangible results in a dissertation-only project and thus harder to attract good marks.

These projects should not be thought of as a soft option for people who cannot program. Most supervisors are willing to take on a dissertation-only project only for students who have already demonstrated programming ability by gaining 60% or more in their workshop module or modules. You should also be aware that, should you later apply for membership of some professional body (such as the British Computer Society or the Institute of Engineering and Technology), a dissertation-only project may not meet the body’s requirements and the requirements for full or partial CEng accreditation.

**Project Submission**

The submission deadlines for projects will be provided to you by your module co-ordinator and can also be found on the School’s WWW site. The dates in this handbook are only provisional and are likely to change so do not take these as the official dates.

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. Please refer to the section on Welfare Matters in this handbook. It is always a good idea to discuss any application for an extension with your Supervisor, Academic Advisor and / or Programme Director.

There is a penalty system for late hand-ins, which works as follows: 5 marks are deducted for lateness of between 0 and 24 hours after the Dissertation Deadline time; thereafter, 5 additional marks are deducted for every additional working day of lateness or part thereof, until the final cut-off date (see page 1). This may mean that your mark will fall below the pass mark. After the cut-off date, no project will be accepted and a zero mark will be recorded.
Deferring your Project

Projects can only be deferred in very exceptional circumstances. You may apply to the School for permission to defer your project from the usual Summer period to either the Autumn term or the Summer of the following academic year. The most common reasons accepted for such deferrals are for welfare reasons (which must be verified by evidence submitted to the Welfare team), or because the student in question has a significant number of resit examinations to take in the supplementary examination period, or because the student is repeating some modules in the following academic year and wished to do his or her project at the same time. Requests to defer the project must be submitted in a signed letter to

the School and, if the request is for any reason other than on welfare grounds, must be received by the given deadline (4 weeks following the end of the Summer term). Requests that are not based on welfare reasons received after that deadline will be automatically rejected.
Frequently (and less-frequently) asked questions about…

…the Start of the Year

I have arrived after the induction meetings on the first day of term. What do I do?

Assuming you have already registered online, you need to report to the Teaching Support Office in Computer Science. You will be given some paperwork and asked to see your Programme Director.

I did not get my username and password to use the School’s computer facilities. What do I do?

The School has its own separate computing facilities and you need to have a username and password before you can use them. Usernames and passwords are distributed during induction on the first day. If you miss the induction meeting and do not have your username and password, you should visit the Computer Support office (room UG46).

What happens if I fail the online academic English assessment (STAR) for international students?

This is not an examination so you do not fail: it is a test designed to find out your strengths and weaknesses in using English for studying. If you have weaknesses that could be improved, you will be asked to take some free English classes. The results of the assessment should be available within a week of taking the test.
Glossary (Terms and Phrases)

**Academic Advisor**
Each member of a postgraduate course is assigned to an Academic Advisor. Your Advisor will review your academic progress and give you feedback at designated times during the year. Your Advisor is normally your programme director, but for programmes with a large number of students, an alternative member of staff may be assigned as your Advisor.

**Advisor**
Within the School, this usually means your Academic Advisor.

**Atrium**
In the School of Computer Science, not the central courtyard of a Roman house nor a covered portico, but the large open space inside the Computer Science building’s main doors.

**Corequisite**
A specification usually of another module that has to be taken at the same time. Corequisites are specified in Module Descriptions.

**Credit**
Each module has an associated “credit value” which is a measure of how much time and work is involved in studying for that module. Each MSc programme consists of 180 credits, of which the summer project is 60 credits and the autumn and spring terms are each of 60 credits. Credits are used to weight marks when calculating a student’s average for a programme, so a 20 credit module will contribute twice as much to a programme mark as a 10 credit module.

**Degree Programme**
A group of modules which, together, make a coherent study package with sufficient credit to be awarded a qualification. An MSc, a Postgraduate Diploma and a Postgraduate Certificate are all examples of programmes.

**Level**
Each module is designed to reach a certain intellectual level. For postgraduate programmes, modules will be mostly Level M with a minority at Level 3/H or Level 2/I. Levels are important because it is necessary to pass enough Level M modules to be awarded a postgraduate degree, diploma or certificate.

**Module**
The smallest unit from which a programme is constructed. Modules can be thought of as being about sub-parts of subjects, so Natural Language Processing is a sub-part of Artificial Intelligence or Cognitive Science.
Module Description

A standard description of a module. These are best accessed from your programme’s Programme Description.

Module Examiner

The person who is primarily responsible for a module. This is the person to contact if you need to find out about the content of a module, its availability etc. Module Descriptions give the name of module examiners.

Prerequisite

A specification of knowledge that is required before a module can be studied. Prerequisites are specified in Module Descriptions.

Programme

The better name for what is usually referred to as a Degree Programme (see above).

Programme Description

A description of a Degree Programme consisting mainly of the modules of which the programme consists. Programme Descriptions include essential information, such as special rules on progression, for instance by specifying that a particular module has to be passed before a project can be attempted.

Project Co-ordinator

The person responsible for the management of a project module. This is the person to contact to resolve problems about supervisor allocation and topic issues.

Restriction

A specification of some limitation on the study of a module, for instance that it cannot be studied together with another named module. Restrictions are specified in Module Descriptions.

Supervisor

A member of academic staff who supervises you during your summer project.