

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

School of Computer Science

**MSc in Computer Science
MSc in Computer Security**

**Handbook
2011/2012**

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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Important Dates

Academic Year 2011/12

26 th September 2011	Autumn Term starts
28 th September 2011	Induction meeting for international students, 16.30-17.30, UG40, Computer Science (campus map Y9)
29 th September 2011	Reception for postgraduate students, 17.00-19.00, Atrium
7 th October 2011	Last date for changing first term modules
9 th December 2011	Autumn Term ends
9 th January 2012	Spring Term starts
20 th January 2012	Last date for changing second term modules
23 rd March 2012	Spring Term ends
23 rd April 2012	Summer Term starts
8 th May 2012	Examinations start
1 st June 2012	Examinations end
15 th June 2012	Summer Term ends
28 th – 31 st August 2012*	Project demonstrations
13 th September 2012*	Hand in two copies of summer project report and CDs to the Back Office (UG45), 12.00; end of programme
21 st September 2012*	Final cut-off date for MSc project reports, 12.00
Mid November 2012*	Final MSc Examination Board
Mid December 2012*	Degree Congregation

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.

* Provisional date to be confirmed.

Vital and useful sources of information and URLs

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.

MSc in Computer Science

www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/programmes/2011/MScCS.html

MSc in Computer Security

www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/programmes/2011/MScCSec.html

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.

www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/regulations-part7.pdf

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

www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/taught-programme-module-assess.pdf

School of Computer Science Student Handbook

www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook.html

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:

<http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/faq/transcripts.shtml>

University Policies

University Student Charter

..... www.as.bham.ac.uk/faq/charter/

Harassment and bullying policy

..... www.as.bham.ac.uk/sca/harassment/

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://www.intranet.bham.ac.uk/university/hsu/>

Data Protection Act

<http://www.legalservices.bham.ac.uk/dppolicy/> **and**

<http://www.legalservices.bham.ac.uk/dpa/>

Key staff

Head of School

Professor Achim Jung

Head of Academic Programmes

Dr Manfred Kerber

Head of Student Development and Support

Dr Mark Lee

Director of Postgraduate Studies

Mr Alan Sexton

Room 239

Availability: www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~aps/timetable.html

Email: aps@cs.bham.ac.uk

Programme Director: MSc in Computer Science

Dr Jim Yandle

Room 108

Availability: www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~jry/timetable.htm

Email: J.R.Yandle@cs.bham.ac.uk

Programme Director: MSc in Computer Security

Dr Tom Chothia

Room 111

Availability: www.cs.bham.ac.uk/~tpc/timetable.html

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

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.

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/>

Our School's Welfare Team follows the University's Code of Practice on Extenuating Circumstances and Fit to Sit Procedure: <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/extenuating-circumstances.pdf>

Changes of address and absences from the University *must* be reported to the School Office. We do need to know where you are, whether you are unwell, and so forth.

The School's International Student Tutor (currently Dr Ata Kaban) 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 www.cs.bham.ac.uk/resources/studentinfo/overseas.html

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 www.eisu.bham.ac.uk/courses/insession/

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 which can be found at http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/sca/documents/ec_medical_form.pdf together with the University guidelines for medical certificates http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/sca/documents/ec_medical_guidelines.pdf.

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:

<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/extenuating-circumstances.pdf>.

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.

By being present at an examination you declare yourself 'Fit to Sit'. A subsequent request for deferral or other action by reason of Extenuating Circumstances will not normally be accepted.

Only in exceptional circumstances you can submit a case for consideration by the Extenuating Circumstances Panel. You must then provide reasoning for not applying for an extension during the term or a deferral of your exam at the appropriate time. The submission must be made known to the School **in writing**. A form for this purpose is available which you should submit to the School together with any supporting documentation:

http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/sca/documents/ec_student_form.pdf.

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.

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. 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 and fit to sit procedure can be found at

<http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/sca/extcirc/index.shtml>.

Complaints

If things go wrong, you have the right to complain. If possible this should be done on 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 Academic Programmes or the Head of School.

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

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. When a student has copied 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:

<http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/sca/plagiarism/index.shtml> **and**
http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Conduct_Centrally_Coordinated_Examinations.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, for example your examination schedule. To make sure such crucial letters reach you, report all changes of address (term time and permanent) to the School Office without delay.

Student Attendance

The University has a Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence:
http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Student_Attendance_Reasonable_Diligence.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 advisorial sessions (currently this mainly concerns first year students), likewise progress tutorials.
- Attend all meetings with your final year 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.

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

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:

- Inform the lecturer in charge if you miss a submission/compulsory event for good reason. Do this before the submission/event if at all possible. If the reason is illness, also inform the School office by getting a phone message to Sue Tippin on 0121 414 4782 or an email message to S.Tippin@cs.bham.ac.uk . Again, if at all possible, do this before the submission/event.
- 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 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

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>

Key words 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. Information about the allocation of students to Academic Advisors is given at: www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/students/handbook.html#PA

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.

Reception

The office at the west end of the Atrium in the Computer Science building. This is usually open from 8.30-12.30, 13.30-16.30, Mondays to Fridays.

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.

Frequently (and less-frequently) asked questions about the start of the year

How do I register?

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
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

When is the induction meeting for my programme?

You should receive an email 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.

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 Reception in Computer Science. You will be given some paperwork and asked to see your Programme Director.

How do I get my timetable?

Timetables are published on the School's WWW site:
www.cs.bham.ac.uk/internal/timetables.

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).

Do I have to take the English test for international students?

Briefly the answer is yes if you had to provide an English language certificate as part of your admissions process.

What happens if I fail the English test 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 advised to take some free English classes. The results of the test should be available within a week of taking the test.

Frequently (and less-frequently) asked questions about programmes

How do I get a transcript?

The University WWW pages allow you to order official and unofficial transcripts. See: <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 Reception *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.

Do I have to attend meetings with my Academic Advisor or Programme Director?

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.

When do I find out if I have passed a module or the whole programme?

You can find out if you have passed the first and second term modules after the June MSc Examination Board has met (see page 1). You can find out if you have passed the whole programme after the Autumn MSc Examination Board has met (see page 1). 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.

Can I transfer from my programme to another programme?

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 do I change my degree programme?

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 Reception). You must get in writing (eg 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:
www.as.bham.ac.uk/faq/forms/pgtprogrammtransfer.pdf

I am registered for an MSc but wish to be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma or Postgraduate Certificate. How do I apply for an alternative qualification?

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 Reception. 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.

I am registered for a Postgraduate Diploma but wish to register for an MSc. How do I apply for this alternative qualification?

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 Reception. 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.

When does the programme finish?

The project hand-in date (see page1) 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.

What is the JACS code?

This code is needed for those applying for a visa for employment after the completion of the programme. The JACS code is G400.

Frequently (and less-frequently) asked questions about modules

How do I choose modules?

You will be given a module choice form at the beginning of the first term. You will have up to two weeks to complete this form and return it to the pigeon holes next to Reception. 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.

If you arrive late and are not given a Module Choice form, you must collect one from Reception, complete and return it to the pigeon holes next to Reception by the end of the second week of the first term.

If, later, you decide you are unhappy with your module choice, it may be possible to change your choice: see a later entry in this FAQ.

Do I have to have an equal weight of modules over the first and second terms?

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.

Can I change modules?

It is possible to change modules but there are restrictions. 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 group as the module you wish to leave. So a level 4/M module must be substituted by another level 4/M module; level 3/H and 2/I modules must be substituted by level 3/H or 2/I modules.

4. *Do you have the prerequisites?*

You should check the prerequisites of the module you wish to move to. You must be able to satisfy the requirements of the prerequisites (if any).

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 be in the same term.

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 two weeks of the start of a term. After that, only in exceptional circumstances will permission be given to change modules.

How do I change modules?

You need to use a *Module Change Form* (available from Reception).

Up to until Reception closes on the Friday of the second week of term, you can change by completing a *Module Change Form* and no member of staff's counter signature is required. After this time, you will need the counter signature of your Programme Director as it is 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.

What happens if I have already studied one of the core modules of my programme (for instance when I was an undergraduate in the School)?

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

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.

2. *The timetable must allow you take your chosen module*

You cannot select a module that clashes in the timetable with another module that you are committed to.

3. *Your module load over both terms should be even*

See the earlier FAQ entry about having an equal weight of modules over the first and second terms.

4. *Your module choice should be appropriate to your Degree Programme*

It is sensible to select modules that will contribute to your chosen Degree Programme.

Can I take an extended version of a module that I have already taken at a lower level?

This should only apply to students who have already studied in the School. The answer is no.

Are examination papers from previous years available?

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:
my.bham.ac.uk

Further information is available at:
www.as.bham.ac.uk/exams/pastpapers.shtml

Frequently (and less-frequently) asked questions about projects

Will I be allocated a supervisor or do I have choice?

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.

Do I have to have a supervisor?

Yes: you 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.

What is the difference between a "project inspection" and a "project demonstration"?

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 on page 1.

Are there any restrictions on the project topic?

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.

Is it necessary for a project to include a program?

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. In some cases, it is possible to undertake "dissertation-only" or "research" projects. 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 meet the body's requirements and the requirements for full or partial CEng accreditation.

If I have failed one or more modules, can I still proceed to the summer project?

The answer is not quite straightforward and depends on what you have failed. The Programme Description for your programme will include any special conditions which are usually in the form of a requirement that you pass a workshop module before undertaking project work. In the last week of Summer term, progression tutorials will be arranged to provide you with your examination results and, should you have failed any modules, explain your options to you.

If you have failed a *substantial* number of modules (which is very rare), you may be best advised to concentrate on resitting those modules and deferring your project until the following year.

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 (see page 5) 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 5) for advice.

What happens if I hand in my project after the deadline?

The submission deadlines for projects are listed on pages 1 and 2 of this handbook. 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.