



**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM**

**GUIDANCE ON PROGRAMMES OF STUDY DELIVERED AND / OR ASSESSED IN A  
LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH**



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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This guidance has been devised to assist Colleges and Schools which may be considering working in collaboration with other organisations where a programme of study leading to an award of the University of Birmingham (the University) will be delivered and/or assessed in a language other than English.
- 1.2 While this guidance is primarily intended for taught programmes, they should also be taken into consideration when developing joint and dual PhD degree programmes, where some of the study may be in a language other than English.
- 1.3 All applicants for all programmes of study must meet the English Language requirements of the University, and specific programme requirements, as well as those of the UK Visa and Immigration (UKVI).
- 1.4 Those entering into discussions about programmes of study delivered and/or assessed in a language other than English should be aware that such arrangements will:
  - make significant demands on both the University and the collaborative partner organisation in ensuring the quality of provision and maintenance of academic standards leading to an award of the University;
  - require careful consideration of the potential costs and risks to all concerned.
  - need to ensure that the programme is designed to ensure the effective assessment of technical proficiency in the English Language in a manner which appropriately reflects the level and content of the programme.

## 2. Production and distribution of appropriate publicity, advertising and other material

- 2.1 The University must retain the right to see and agree in writing the proofs of such material prior to use.
- 2.2 The University must closely monitor the translation arrangements for such material to ensure its accuracy.

## 3. Delivery in a language other than English

- 3.1 Academic and administrative staff of the partner organisation must have sufficiently high levels of English language proficiency and the necessary subject knowledge if they are to liaise effectively with the University.
- 3.2 Relevant staff of the University must have sufficient proficiency in the language of delivery and/or assessment together with the necessary subject knowledge if they are to exercise adequate oversight over the quality of provision.
- 3.3 The University must ensure that students have the appropriate language skills on entry to the programme, and be able to provide further support, where appropriate, during the programme.

## 4. Assessment in a language other than English

The following issues involved in assessment processes should be explored before (and after) the development of a programme to be delivered and/or assessed in a language other than English:

### 4.1 Internal and External Examiners

- the internal and external examiners must be linguistically and academically competent to make judgements on the language other than English;
- the University must have control of academic standards in the assessment of students' work for the awards that it makes in its name.

#### 4.1.1 Internal Assessment

- the internal examiners from within the School providing the programme must be bilingually competent;
- where an internal appointment is not possible, consideration should be given to appointing a bilingual examiner in the appropriate specialism/discipline from outside the University. An associate internal examiner would work with the examination team, for example, in setting the assessments in English and the other language and marking together assessments in both English and the other language;
- how the bilingual competency of internal examiners and the appointment of associate internal examiners is determined should be included in examination regulations.

#### 4.1.2 External Assessment

- the external examiner must be fluent both in English and the language of assessment in order to be able to carry out the role effectively, as well as meeting the generic criteria for all external examiner appointments;
- the external examiner should be sufficiently familiar with UK higher education to reach reliable judgements on standards should they not be UK-based;
- clear guidelines should be provided for external examiners on how the assessment processes for programmes of study taught and assessed in languages other than English will operate;
- a sufficient pool of potential external examiners should be available to support the continuation of the programme;
- the establishment of a database of bilingually competent subject specialists should be considered;
- the bilingual competency of the external examiners must adhere to Appendix A a(ix) of the Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision):
  - *fluency in English, and where programmes are delivered and assessed in languages other than English, fluency in the relevant language(s) (unless other secure arrangements are in place to ensure that external examiners are provided with the information to make their judgements);*
- additional linguistic support may be provided through:
  - UK-based bilingual experts

- a non-UK specialist with appropriate language skills, paired with a second external examiner from a UK HEI

## 4.2 Dictionaries

- the use of dictionaries by students must conform to clause B.1.10 Dictionaries in the University's Code of Practice on Academic Integrity:
  - *Registered Students whose first language is not English will be permitted to use a standard, un-annotated and unmarked dictionary during their examinations unless the question paper rubric specifically prohibits their use. This may be either solely English-based or cover English and the student's first language. Technical, annotated or electronic dictionaries will not be permitted. Any student wishing to make use of this concession must obtain a letter of authorisation from the Registry and bring this to every examination attended. Failure to produce the letter during an examination sitting may constitute an Examination Irregularity.*

## 5. Joint or Dual PhD Degrees

Any proposal for the development of a Joint or Dual PhD degree programme, additionally, should take into consideration:

- Regulations 7.4.1 and 2 Award Requirements
  - *7.4.1 (j) A Registered Student should submit a synopsis (in English) of about 200 words of the work presented, to be included in the bound copies of the work submitted. The examiners shall be required to certify that the synopsis is an accurate summary.*
  - *7.4.2 (a) Format of theses or reports: The default language for all research degree theses is English. With the approval of the Senate or delegated authority, and on an exceptional basis, where there are demonstrable benefits, the thesis may be submitted in another language. The report of the examiner(s) will be submitted in English.*
- approval, on an exceptional basis, for the thesis to be written in a language other than English must be obtained prior to any proposal for the development of such arrangements being considered by the Apprenticeships and Partnerships Committee (APC), and be reflected in any over-arching institutional agreement and individual student learning agreements;
- where the University is not the lead university in such arrangements, a member of University staff, who is competent in the other language must be available to handle any queries which may arise.

## 6. Translation

Translation should be avoided wherever possible. The following issues involved in translation processes should be explored before (and after) the development of a programme to be delivered and/or assessed in a language other than English.

### 6.1 General

- the implications for the security of academic standards of introducing a process of translation between, for example, the original work of the student and the examiner.
- the high risk that reliance on translation carries for the purposes of setting assessments and grading completed assignments.



- the establishment of secure mechanisms for translation.
- the subjection of translations to quality assurance processes, including independent sampling for accuracy.
- the appointment of subject sensitive translators to ensure that the nuances of language codes associated with particular disciplines can be addressed in the translation process. Where this is not possible consideration should be given to commissioning a second translation for comparative purposes.
- the extent to which different levels of risk attach to different modes/styles of assessment and to different discipline areas should be considered, and students counselled accordingly.
- how the intervention between the examiner(s) and the work produced by the student, such as language translation, introduces another level of risk in making reliable and valid judgements about student achievement.
- the assurance that students are neither advantaged or disadvantaged by the use of translations in assessed work.

## 6.2 Planning

- at an early stage in each academic year clear timetables should be set and published to facilitate sound and timely translations of all relevant materials.

## 6.3 Ensuring comparability

- it is important that there should be comparability of expectations and standards where assessment is set initially in English and translated into another language, and undertaken in such a way that provides for equality and does not advantage or disadvantage the student.

## 6.4 Verification

- a method for the verification of translated examination papers/assignments should be considered, for example, the standard practice of 'back translation'.

## 6.5 Translators

- may be internal or external to the University. In all cases, steps should be taken to ensure that they are independent from teaching, examining, and marking processes, in respect of the students whose work is being translated.

## 6.6 Cost

- who will bear the cost of translation – the University or the collaborative partner organisation – must be determined before delivery and/or assessment of the programme commences.

## 7. Certificates and Transcripts

- should include the name and location of the collaborative partner organisation;



- should include the language of study and assessment recorded on transcript;
- should ensure that neither the certificate nor the transcript intentionally or unintentionally misleads.

## 8. References

Information contained in this document draws heavily on the following publications:

- Guidelines for higher education institutions in Wales for effective practice in examining and assessing in a language other than the language of tuition (2003)
- Equality Act 2010
- Office for Students: Condition B4: Assessment and Awards
- QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024)