

## **Extending the Writing-up Period for PGR students**

*A Paper by the AWO for the Business School – Simon Schillebeeckx*

*Seconded by Douglas Hunt – Deputy President (Education)*

Imperial College Union notes:

- 1) That the current writing-up stage for Postgraduate Research (PGR) students is 6 months.
  - a. The writing-up stage is a period after the official 3 year duration of the PhD during which students maintain student status to finish their dissertation.
  - b. This period is not funded by scholarships provided by the College, EPSRC or ESRC.
- 2) That some students complain that this period is too short to meet the academic quality expectations of the College.
- 3) That the strict limitation on the writing-up stage and thus the extension of student status is not in line with other universities in the UK, let alone the USA where a Business PhD averages between 5 to 7 years (see Appendix 1).
- 4) That the six months period does not reflect reality as (particularly Business School) PGR students regularly need 4 years to complete the degree, the last 6 months of which they currently cannot benefit from the student status.
- 5) That a PhD student faces other pressures when they need to write up their thesis in the last 6 months. These being the supervisor potentially wanting them to do more research, writing papers with the aim of them being published and supervising new PhD students or an undergraduate's final year project. The students may also be doing Graduate Teaching Assistant work due to financial pressures.

Imperial College Union Believes:

- 1) That the student status should be guaranteed for the period necessary for the student to complete the dissertation, with a maximum duration of 4 years.
- 2) That the current practice in the College of allowing for a 6 month writing-up phase in exchange for a single tuition fee of £100 need be extended to 12 months (see Appendix 2 for how it is likely to work).
- 3) That this extension will ease administrators' job because official "ex-students" who need time beyond the 6 month writing-up phase lose access to the College's facilities e.g. library, the gym, the printing facilities, their office etc.
- 4) That this extension will benefit the quality of the dissertations written by the PGR students and enhance their future job prospects.
- 5) That the consequences of losing student status (see Appendix 3) before the dissertation is actually finished have a negative impact on the quality of the work and the life quality of the student.
- 6) That the Union Council, represented by Imperial College Union President, Paul and the Deputy President (Education), Doug, should voice this issue and share our concerns at all appropriate levels of College.

Suggested Resolves:

- 1) To discuss with those directly involved, chiefly Director of the Graduate Schools, Professor Andrew George and Pro Rector (Education), Professor Debra Humphries, the best way of taking this issue forward.
- 2) To lobby the College for the writing-up period to be extended to 12 months.

## Appendix 1

College	Maximum duration of writing up status	Evidence
ICBS	6 months	6 months as a student, 6 months as a non-student
Kings College London	12 months	'It should be done after 2 or 3 FT years, and is a maximum of a year' <a href="http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/cmci/study/handbook/programmes/pgr/writingup.aspx">http://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/cmci/study/handbook/programmes/pgr/writingup.aspx</a>
UCL	12 months	Completing research status 'CRS is permitted for a maximum period of one calendar year (full-time) <a href="http://www.ucl.ac.uk/current-students/services/studyinformation/CRS">http://www.ucl.ac.uk/current-students/services/studyinformation/CRS</a> (pdf)
Birkbeck	12 months	'Students moving to write up status should normally be given a maximum of one year (full time) to move to submission'. <a href="http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules">http://www.bbk.ac.uk/mybirkbeck/services/rules</a> (pdf)
Royal Holloway	12 months	'An additional year is available for writing-up for both full and part-time students, if required' <a href="http://www.rhul.ac.uk/studyhere/researchdegrees/home.aspx">http://www.rhul.ac.uk/studyhere/researchdegrees/home.aspx</a>
Cambridge	12 months	Cambridge uses a 1 year Mres and a 3 year PhD
LBS	2 + 3 years + extension	LBS follows the US system of 2 years of courses and 3 years for research, with a possible extension to a 6 <sup>th</sup> year, all funded
Oxford	1 year	3 year DPhil programme + a 1 year extension for writing-up
LSE	1 year	PhD programme is considered to take 4 years

## Appendix 2

How the process is likely to work after an initial meeting with Professor Andrew George:

A PhD student carries out their research in the first 3 years of their PhD and signs a piece of paper at this point stating that they have a non-extendable 12 month period to write up their thesis. This 12 month period can only be extended for serious mitigating circumstances.

The PhD student also pays a £100 fee to keep their student status for 12 months. This student status will allow the PhD student to still access the College's facilities and receive student discounts.

At the end of the 12 month period Registry will deregister them as a student and after this time the College will charge the student a late entry fee of £500 for every 3 months they are late at submitting their thesis.

## Appendix 3

The loss of student status after the 6 month writing-up period has severe consequences for final year students:

- No more access to the university, the library, and the gym.

- This causes many administrative problems for those who need the extra 6 months, especially for those students who do not become a teaching fellow or research associate.
- Loss of student discount on public transport.
- Loss of student discount regarding Council Tax.
- Loss of student status also implies that those students who have taken out a student loan are forced to start paying back this loan during the additional 6 months of their writing-up stage.

These administrative and financial burdens are significant, not in the least because the fourth year is in its entirety not funded.