

The following information and Academic Regulations for the Exceptional Management of Taught Awards were approved by Academic Board via Chair's Action on 2 June 2020.

The guidance and regulations are an extract from the University's standard Assessment Regulations for taught awards and have been approved to be introduced on 2 June 2020 and will apply until the Vice-Chancellor rescinds their application.

Wherever possible, the provisions of the standard Assessment Regulations for taught awards will take precedence and every effort should be made to present fully moderated component and module marks to Assessment Boards.

3.21 Operation of Assessment Processes in Exceptional Circumstances

Exceptional circumstances are defined as those caused by external factors beyond the University's control that may impact adversely upon institutional-wide assessment processes. Whilst the University remains functional, exceptional and/or emergency circumstances could result in substantial disruption to learning and teaching, the submission of assessments, marking and moderation processes and the progression of students along with the determination of awards. The University does not hold a definitive list of exceptional circumstances, but examples would include disruptive natural disasters such as flooding, epidemics of infectious diseases and industrial action resulting in assessment boycott.

As part of the approval of Assessment Regulations, the Academic Board makes provision to determine awards and the progression of continuing students where the University is, because of exceptional circumstances beyond its reasonable control, unable to apply the standard Assessment Regulations, Assessment and Feedback Policy and External Examiner processes as approved for that academic year. In discharging its responsibilities, Academic Board may determine the following action:

- i) Allow modifications to be made to previously approved arrangements for the marking and moderation of assessments as detailed within the [Assessment and Feedback Policy](#).
- ii) Make alternative arrangements for [External Examiner processes](#).
- iii) Allow recommendations to be made to make reasonable adjustments to the progression of students between levels/years and the award of qualifications.

The Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) will approve the introduction of the application of the Academic Regulations for the Exceptional Management of Taught Awards and the anticipated duration of their application, if known. A further statement will be provided announcing when the regulation will be rescinded and will be supported by a transition plan, where appropriate.

The University will undertake preparations for an effective response to exceptional circumstances, ensuring that the academic standards of its modules and courses and the integrity of its awards are maintained, its reputation safeguarded and students treated fairly and equitably. As such, the University will undertake reasonable action to expedite the conferment of final awards and progression of continuing students. It is expected that the application of the Academic Regulations for the Exceptional Management of Taught Awards will be rare and reserved for extreme occasions.

The regulatory framework outlining the University's approach to learning and teaching practice, assessment and feedback (including moderation), External Examiner processes, progression of its students and the award of qualifications is set out under the Academic Regulations for the Exceptional Management of Taught Awards. [Link to be added once approved and published]

ACADEMIC REGULATIONS FOR THE EXCEPTIONAL MANAGEMENT OF TAUGHT AWARDS

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Academic Regulations for the Exceptional Management of Taught Awards

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The standard Assessment Regulations for taught modules and courses include a provision for Academic Board to approve the introduction of the Academic Regulations for the Exceptional Management of Taught Awards (hereafter referred to as the “Exceptional Academic Regulations”) because of factors beyond the University’s reasonable control. The Exceptional Academic Regulations set out modifications to, and/or general exceptions from, the approved standard taught Assessment Regulations, Assessment and Feedback Policy and expectations of External Examiners. This applies to students for whom the provisions of the standard Assessment Regulations are not able to be applied due to exceptional circumstances, and when their use has been invoked by the Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) (*see Section 3.21 of the standard taught Assessment Regulations*).
- 1.2 The Exceptional Academic Regulations have been approved by Academic Board to modify approved arrangements for learning, teaching and assessment strategies and marking and moderation processes. They provide a framework for Module and Progression/Award Assessment Boards to consider and approve module marks, progression of students between levels and the award of students during exceptional circumstances (hereafter referred to as the “affected students”). There is an expectation that the University and its Partners will work together to apply the principles of the Exceptional Academic Regulations.
- 1.3 **Wherever possible, the provisions of the standard Assessment Regulations for taught awards will take precedence and every effort should be made to present fully moderated component and module marks to Assessment Boards.**
- 1.4 Only where the Vice-Chancellor (or nominee) has invoked the use of the Exceptional Academic Regulations, should Assessment Boards apply these regulations in making decisions regarding progression and award or adopt the default position that progression cannot be considered or that no award may be conferred at that time.
- 1.5 General University communications with the student body about exceptional arrangements will be the responsibility of the Academic Registrar (or nominee). Every effort should be made to advise students as soon as possible of any alterations to learning, teaching and assessment practices. Students should assume that assessments are taking place as planned unless they receive a formal communication from the University and/or their School to the contrary.

2. Application of the Exceptional Academic Regulations

- 2.1 **Academic Misconduct, Extenuating Circumstances, Academic Appeal, Fitness to Practise, Student Disciplinary, Fitness to Study, Assessment Regulations for Professional Doctorate Award and Student Complaints:** Regulations and policies relating to these areas will normally remain in force during periods of disruption.

In applying the Exceptional Academic Regulations, there will be no reduction to a student's right of appeal under the University's Academic Appeal Regulations.

- 2.2 **Variance:** Existing variances to Assessment Regulations will apply wherever possible, however following the implementation of the Exceptional Academic Regulations by the Vice-Chancellor (or nominee), any process of applying for additional variance will be defined within the approach taken by the University in relation to the specific circumstances. This will ensure that Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Body (PSRB) assessment requirements can continue to be met.
- 2.3 **Maximum Periods of Registration:** It may be necessary for Assessment Boards to agree an exceptional extension to the University's Maximum Period of Registration in some instances, this should be recorded in Assessment Board minutes. For Higher National awards delivered under license from Pearson, the University would seek permission from Pearson to extend registration periods, where this was deemed appropriate.
- 2.4 **Intermediate, Aegrotat and Posthumous Awards:** Should be made in accordance with the requirements set out in the standard taught Assessment Regulations.

3. Key Principles

The Exceptional Academic Regulations are based on the following core principles:

- Maintaining academic standards and professional requirements will remain paramount.
- Students will be treated in a fair and equitable manner.
- Consideration will be given as to whether the learning outcomes for the course as a whole, or the specific level of the course have been met.

4. Impact on Learning, Teaching and Assessment

There may be circumstances when learning, teaching and assessment activity cannot take place as scheduled. The University will endeavour to organise alternative arrangements for students to minimise the impact to their scheduled learning, teaching and assessment.

If the Exceptional Academic Regulations have been invoked due to significant disruption to scheduled learning, teaching and assessment, Schools will consult with the Academic Registrar (or nominee) to agree what, if any, changes can be exceptionally applied to learning, teaching and assessment strategies, including alternative modes of attendance and adjustment of assessment and reassessment strategies. In addition, submission and feedback deadlines may need to be changed to mitigate the impact of the exceptional circumstances. The process for approving and recording these changes will be authorised by the Academic Registrar (or nominee).

When determining alternative arrangements, for the University and its Partners, the following principles will be applied:

- Focus on the delivery of content that allows affected students to meet the learning outcomes of the module(s), level and course.
- Consideration of the health and well-being of staff and students.
- Consistency of approach, as far as possible.
- Consideration of the available supplementary support needs for students.
- Fairness to students, in terms of the weighting and bunching of assessments.
- Prioritising guidance, support and supervision for students whose assessment methods/requirements have changed.
- Revised assessments will relate only to material that has been taught to students and, that where applicable, they will reflect limitations in access to resources.
- Revised assessments will adhere to Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Body requirements, where this is applicable.

Where possible, External Examiners should be informed of amendments made to examination papers/assessment briefs and module delivery and provided with an opportunity to comment. They will not necessarily be required to approve the amendments made, depending on the nature of the exceptional circumstances.

5. Marking and Moderation

Schools should make every effort to follow the standard procedures set out in the [Assessment and Feedback Policy](#) and present fully moderated component and module marks to Assessment Boards.

However where, due to the specified exceptional circumstances, it is not possible to complete standard marking and internal/external moderation arrangements as outlined in the Assessment and Feedback Policy, available unmoderated marks shall be submitted to the Module and Progression/Award Assessment Boards for consideration. An exception may need to be made to courses governed by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements or those that contain non-compensatable modules.

Where, under the provisions described in the above paragraph, unmoderated marks are presented to a Module Assessment Board, the Board should defer a decision until such point when the marks have been moderated (see also (6) below).

6. External Examiner Process

It is anticipated that in most instances an External Examiner would be available to undertake the external moderation of work as defined within standard processes.

If, in exceptional cases, a Module External Examiner is not available to moderate work for a module (a Level 4 module that leads to an award or any module at Level 5 or above) the following process should be adopted:

- a. Identify if an alternative existing External Examiner is available to undertake these duties on a temporary basis.
- b. If an alternative existing examiner is not available, Academic Registry will review the most recent Module External Examiner report in order to determine whether there have been any concerns about standards or quality associated with the module(s) under consideration.
 - i. Where no concerns are identified, the Module Assessment Board (MAB) will receive confirmation of this together with assurance that the University's internal moderation processes (as outlined in the Assessment and Feedback Policy) have been applied so that this can be explicitly recorded in the minutes of the MAB. The MAB will accept the exceptional circumstances and the assurances given and consider the marks as ratified. The agreed outcomes will be confirmed.
 - ii. If concerns in relation to the academic standards of the module(s) are identified or where there is no previous report available, Schools will appoint a new Module External Examiner to undertake the work and prepare feedback for the MAB. Provided no matters are raised, the MAB will then consider and agree the marks as normal. Where a concern was raised a decision would be made by the MAB as to the approach to be taken for consideration of the module.
 - iii. If it is not possible to secure a replacement Module External Examiner in time for the MAB, Schools, in consultation with the Academic Registrar (or nominee), will seek alternative independent oversight, for example by internal cross-University impartial scrutiny, a central record of this will be maintained. The MAB will then consider and agree the marks as normal.

7. Operation of Module/Progression/Award Assessment Boards

Where possible, Assessment Boards should convene at the scheduled times utilising the standard Terms of Reference for such Boards. In circumstances where this is not possible, the University will consider the best course of action based on the specific circumstances. Students, staff, Partners and External Examiners will be kept informed of any changes to the timescales for the notification of Assessment Boards and outcomes.

The Academic Board may grant authority to Schools to group Assessment Boards by course, subject and/or School areas either at module or progression/award levels. This will be co-ordinated in consultation with Academic Registry. Due consideration of the impartiality of the Assessment Board Chair will be given.

There may be circumstances that impact on members' ability to physically or remotely attend scheduled Assessment Boards. Whilst maintaining appropriate confidentiality, efforts will be made to provide opportunities for all available members to participate remotely. However, under the Exceptional Academic Regulations, Assessment Boards may be considered quorate when the Chair of the Board, Secretary, and Module External Examiner (or replacement Examiner) for MABs or the Award External Examiner (or replacement Award Examiner) for PABs, and an academic member of staff from the subject area is able to participate in the business of the Board either physically or remotely. If an External Examiner is not available to attend the Assessment Board, the standard process for notification of non-attendance of an external examiner should be followed.

Prior to the Board commencing, the scope of its decision-making powers based on the members who are available will be determined by the Chair of the Board. For example, it might be decided that a Board with minimal quoracy under the Exceptional Academic Regulations could not determine the impact of PSRB requirements on outcomes, or PSRB requirements may prohibit the MAB/PAB proceeding. This decision will be recorded in the minutes of the Board.

Assessment Boards will need to carefully consider the impact on students, and if a decision is difficult or complex, they should seek advice from the School Senior Management Team (or equivalent at a Partner institution), Academic Registry and/or the External Examiner. If, after seeking advice, an outcome cannot be determined, the decision should be deferred to the next available Assessment Board when the information becomes available, in line with the University's standard process as detailed in the Assessment Board Information Pack.

Where applicable, detailed records of all decisions to defer taken and the reasons for them will be recorded in the minutes of the Assessment Board.

8. Assessment Regulations

As detailed in 1.3, above, wherever possible the provisions of the standard Assessment Regulations for taught awards will take precedence.

The University recognises that this may not be possible in all circumstances and that during periods of significant disruption across the institution, the standard Assessment Regulations may be unable to be applied, either in part or in their entirety. In these circumstances, the University will reflect on the specific circumstances and the appropriateness of its standard Assessment Regulations.

When the Exceptional Academic Regulations have been invoked, it may be necessary to undertake a critical review of the standard Assessment Regulations to ensure that students will not be unduly disadvantaged/advantaged by the application of the standard Assessment Regulations. In these circumstances, the review will include consultation with the Students' Union and other key stakeholders, where possible. Where the particular exceptional circumstances are broader than the University, the review will be cognisant of the approaches already approved or being considered by the wider UK Higher Education sector. In addition and where

appropriate, the review will also consider guidance published by the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency.

The review may recommend what, if any, amendments, additions or alternative approaches can be exceptionally applied to the standard Assessment Regulations. The amendments to the Assessment Regulations will ensure that the specific circumstances of the disruption are recognised, that students' achievements can be reliably assessed via the achievement of their learning outcomes and that academic quality and standards remain secure when their results are considered by Module/Progression/Award Assessment Boards. In these circumstances, Academic Board will be asked to approve any amendment(s) or alternative approach(es).

Requirements of a PSRB may mean that it is not possible to implement amendments, additions and/or alternative approaches for specific courses, and this will be managed by the relevant School.

9. Treatment of Missing Marks that Subsequently Become Available

Where, after the consideration of affected students under the Exceptional Academic Regulations, missing module or component marks become available, the original Assessment Board decision should stand unless the newly available marks render an affected student eligible for a higher level/year average where this contributes to a classification/grading under the Regulations in place at the original point of consideration. In these circumstances, standard internal/external moderation practices would take place and the Assessment Board would reconsider the original decision and, if appropriate, award the higher classification/grading. The student would be issued with a new transcript and certificate.

10. Transcripts and Certificates

To avoid any disadvantage to affected students, through any delay in the conferment of an award or the production of associated certification, transcripts and certificates should be produced on the basis of decisions made in accordance with the Exceptional Academic Regulations.