Procedures and Actions to Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19: Examinations and Assessment

The Learning and Teaching COVID-19 Contingency Planning Group, which is chaired by the Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching) and comprises senior staff members and student representatives, has been meeting weekly since 24 February in order to manage the University's learning and teaching-related response to the Coronavirus.

The Group has maintained a focus on three key areas:

1. Supported Learning: Working at Distance and Supporting Students at a Distance
2. Assessment, including Examinations
3. Communications to Staff and Students

The Group's primary area of focus has been on examinations and assessment.

This paper is designed to provide a summary of the procedures and actions taken by the Group to date, including recommendations made to, and approved by, the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness (SCIBE) on 10 and 17 March 2020, and by the University Executive on 17 April 2020. The summary will function as a record of the University's decision-making in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on learning and teaching, particularly examinations and assessment. The summary focuses on the most significant decisions taken, and does not include details of more operational matters (available as a separate paper).

The paper is presented to the University Executive, the Senate and SCIBE for information.

Learning and Teaching 2020

The Learning and Teaching Academy has led the shift from face-to-face teaching through its Supporting Student Learning Online multi-campus initiative. Through an extensive series of resources, presented in the form of Rapid Response Toolkit and supported through weekly webinars, the LTA, the learning technologists, and the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Services have supported HWU staff in the additional planning and preparation required to maintain communication with students and support students in learning online. Further information: https://lta.hw.ac.uk/supporting-student-learning-online/

As part of the University's considerations regarding the start of academic year 2020/21, the LTA will lead preparations for online learning in the event that face-to-face teaching cannot be resumed in September.

Assessment and Examinations, Spring Diet 2020

This section summarises the key decisions taken in relation to assessment and the spring diet of examinations 2020. Where appropriate, sections have been separated by particular year groups; at the outset, a common section has been provided.

1 The Deputy Principal (Learning and Teaching); Vice-Provosts, Dubai and Malaysia; Associate Heads of School, Dubai Campus; Student Presidents, Scottish and Dubai Campuses; Directors of Learning and Teaching or nominees, including Head of School and Director of Academic Quality; Academic Registrar; Director Learning and Teaching Academy; Director of Information Services; Head of Academic and Learner Services; Heads of Division with Registry and Academic Support Services.
General Arrangements for all Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught Students

The following decisions were taken in relation to all taught provision:

1. All in-person examinations for all programmes (foundation, UG, PGT, PGT online) held at HWU campuses and British Council exam venues have been cancelled from March to July 2020.

2. Specific guidance for Boards of Examiners and tailored briefing sessions for Chairs of Boards of Examiners and Deans Reps will be provided, enabling the Boards to operate under the authority of Regulation 31: Authority of Heads of Schools and Examiners in Exceptional Circumstances. Deans Reps will be allocated to Boards as normal, with Directors of Learning and Teaching and Directors of Academic Quality who have been approved as Deans Reps being able to act in this capacity for some of their own School Boards.

3. All PSRBs and government accrediting authorities have been supportive of the cancellation of in-person exams, and where an exam is required for accreditation, this will be arranged for a later date.

4. The appeals process has been centralised and managed through the Academic Secretariat, Regulation & Policy Division within Registry and Academic Support Directorate.

5. A briefing note has been issued to External Examiners on the decisions taken by HWU and on their role. The standard report template has been modified to enable Externals to comment on how Boards operate in the context of COVID-19.

6. Student Guides on Assessment and Examinations, in the form of FAQs, were issued to all taught students on 13 March 2020. More detailed Guides have been issued to Y3/4/5 throughout March and April in relation to take-home exams (eg General Guide, Technical Guide) and the decision-making processes of Exam Boards https://www.hw.ac.uk/students/studies/examinations.htm

7. A general statement will be added to all Academic Transcripts to highlight the impact of COVID-19 on learning, teaching and assessment. A standard, sector-wide statement for use by all Scottish HEIs is being developed.

Year 1 and Year 2 Continuing Undergraduate Students

The following decisions in relation to Year 1 and Year 2 undergraduate students (Year 2 in Malaysia) were taken to enable the University to concentrate on mitigating the time critical impact of COVID-19 on graduating students (Years 3, 4 and 5) who will complete their degrees in April/May and graduate in June/July, and also reflect planning for staff absence, ensuring that enough staff would be available to manage the final assessments for graduating students.

1. All semester 2 examinations have been cancelled for Year 1 and Year 2 undergraduate students (Year 2 in Malaysia).

2. All coursework not issued prior to 13 March 2020 has been cancelled.

3. Any remaining coursework for Semester 2 courses is due to submitted by Thursday 16 April 2020, regardless of the originally published deadline. All such coursework will be formative, ie it will be to support learning, and will not contribute to the overall results for Semester 2 courses. Any group-based assessments will be submitted individually. Feedback on coursework will be provided at the start of the next academic year.

4. All Y1 and Y2 students will receive a “P” grade for all Semester 2 courses: this means a Pass is given and credits will be allocated to the course.

5. Students will have to retake Semester 1 assessments/exams if their results show a resit is required. There are no resits required for any Semester 2 courses because a “P” grade has been allocated to all courses.

6. A Guidance Note for Y1/2 Progression Boards was issued on Wednesday 15 April 2020, encouraging Schools to complete the Y1/2 process as soon as possible so that there is sufficient time, particularly in the context of potential staff absence, for Y3/4/5 examinations. Schools have been encouraged to merge y1/2 Boards to expedite the decision-making process, given that students with 4 pass alpha grades from Semester 1 can be automatically progressed.
7. Although the Y1/2 exam board processing might be concluded earlier, results will be issued on 3 July as originally advertised, so that Schools are not overwhelmed, while trying to manage the Y3/4/5 process, by queries from Y1/2 students. For the same reason, Y1/2 students will not be registered for 2020/21 earlier than usual; the other reason being that Semester 1 courses will change in response to approved modifications to the start of the academic year.

8. Arrangements for January start students have followed a similar model to that outlined above.

9. It is proposed that resit exams and resit assessments for Y1/2 students are replaced by take-home exams or alternative forms of assessment (see final section of this paper).

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**Years 3,4 and 5 Continuing and Graduating Undergraduate Students**

The following decisions were taken in relation to Years 3, 4 and 5 continuing and graduating undergraduate students (Year 2, 3 and 4 in Malaysia).

1. All in-person Semester 2 examinations for Year 3, 4 and 5 undergraduate students (Years 2, 3 and 4 in Malaysia) have been cancelled.

2. Schools were asked to review whether or not they wished to replace the cancelled in-person exam with a take-home version of the original exam paper. The School of Textiles and Design had no scheduled Semester 2 exams and the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences determined that take-home exams were not an appropriate alternative; both agreed to base their decisions on existing assessments and coursework due to be submitted. The three remaining Schools (Energy, Geoscience, Infrastructure and Society; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Social Sciences) cancelled a number of scheduled examinations, leaving 117 to run in April/May 2020.

3. The take home exam will be issued on Vision, the University’s VLE, and will be released on the date on which the exam was originally scheduled, as shown on the published timetable. Students will have 24 hours to complete the exam and will upload their completed script onto Vision. A statement on academic integrity has been added to the exams instructions and exams checklist for all students. Queries on exam day are being managed through AskHWU by Registry and Academic Support. Late submissions which are not due to technological problems nor to approved mitigating circumstances will be regarded as non-submission.

4. Any remaining coursework for Semester 2 courses is still required to be completed and will be submitted online. All coursework (including dissertations, projects and individual submissions for group-based assignments) is due to be submitted by Thursday 23 April 2020, regardless of the originally published deadline. All remaining class tests, including online class tests, and laboratory work have been cancelled.

5. If the Board of Examiners agrees that there is enough assessment information for making the usual decisions on courses, then a Grade of A-F will be allocated to Semester 2 courses. If there is not enough information, then a “P” grade will be allocated: this means a Pass is given and credits will be allocated to the course. If Y3/4/5 students are taking Level 7 and 8 courses, they will not be required to undertake an exam – all Level 7 and 8 exams have been cancelled – and a “P” grade will be allocated.

6. Schools are currently considering whether or not their Y3/4/5 Boards need to be deferred (due to extended deadlines for coursework and the additional time needed for marking and moderation online) and Registry and Academic Support is looking at the impact of such deferrals on the originally scheduled date of 5 June for return of graduating results and 12 June for publication of such results.

7. Boards of Examiners will be carefully considering the impact of the disruption and will be fair and equitable in deciding on degree awards. The Board will ensure that no students are academically disadvantaged.

8. The Graduation Ceremonies scheduled for June and July have been cancelled, but degree certificate will be sent to students (once the Print Room is operational on the Edinburgh Campus) so that students can still carry on with plans for employment or further study. Additional dates are being added to the winter Graduation Ceremonies to enable students to graduate in person at a later date.

9. For continuing students (who will progress to Y4 or Y5), students will have to retake Semester 1 and 2 assessments/exams if their results show a resit is required.
10. A centralised, adapted Mitigating Circumstances process has been introduced for students who are unable to complete the take-home exam (e.g., ill-health, family circumstances).

11. It is proposed that resit exams and resit assessments for continuing Y3/4 students are replaced by take-home exams or alternative forms of assessment (see final section of this paper). Graduating students will not be permitted to undertake a reassessment, as per the current, approved regulations.

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**Postgraduate Taught Students**

The following decisions were taken in relation to all postgraduate taught students, including PGT online students.

1. All in-person Semester 2 examinations for postgraduate taught students have been postponed until August, including resit and repeat courses due to be examined in April/May 2020. Students who have a Semester 1 resit will take the resit in August.

2. All exams for PGT online students and PGT students enrolled with an academic partner in April, May, and June have been deferred, with the next diet being held in August 2020. Students will be automatically enrolled for the next diet at no additional cost.

3. If PGT students are taking Level 7 and 8 courses, they will not be required to undertake an exam – all Level 7 and 8 exams have been cancelled – and a “P” grade will be allocated.

4. All students will still be able to complete their programme in the time period originally scheduled: all PGT students have been permitted to progress to their dissertation, enabling them to start their dissertation or project earlier than planned, leaving enough time to prepare for and take exams in August. Schools will advise on any arrangements for placements or labs.

5. For all students, the deadline for Semester 2 coursework submissions has been extended to Monday 3 August 2020 (including dissertations, projects and individual submissions for group-based assignments).

6. PGT students are not permitted to apply for a TSS as a means of deferring August examinations; mitigating circumstances should be used for students unable to take their August exams.

7. Results for PGT students will be published on 23 August (continuing) and 16 October (graduating), as originally planned.

8. It is proposed that all planned in-person exams for PGT students (on-campus and British Council) are replaced by take-home exams or alternative forms of assessment (see final section of this paper).

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**Foundation Programme Students**

The following decisions were taken in relation to the Degree Entry Programme in Dubai and the Foundation Programme in Malaysia and, where appropriate, the Academic English programme.

1. **DEP:** All further examination and assessment arrangements for September intake foundation programmes have been cancelled. January intake assessments have been postponed until Semester 2.

2. **HWUMFP:** for April-enrolled students, examinations have been cancelled and will be held in July 2020 (at the same time as July and September-enrolled students), with a resit in August 2020.

3. All coursework deadlines have been re-arranged, with group-based assignments being submitted individually.

4. All results will be processed in time to enable students to progress to designated undergraduate programmes.

5. Alpha grades can be used for foundation programme assessments, given that the completed programme is equivalent to an exit award. P grades will be used where there is insufficient information, e.g., for Semester 2 courses.
6. It is proposed that all planned in-person exams for foundation programme students are replaced by take-home exams or alternative forms of assessment (see final section of this paper).

**August Diet of Examinations (Resit Diet) 2020**

One of the early recommendations made by the Learning and Teaching Contingency Group, as endorsed by SCIBE on 10 March 2020, was that all PGT examinations should be deferred to the August Diet of Examinations and that the diet should be extended beyond its original week to accommodate both the deferred PGT exams and also the traditional resit exams.

In the period early March to mid-April, much has changed globally in terms of restrictions put in place by governments to reduce the impact of COVID-19, with many countries in lockdown and movement severely limited. It has become increasingly clear that there are likely still to be restrictions in place by the time of HWU’s August Diet of Examinations. Even if some governments have removed such restrictions, there could still be difficulties for many students in trying to get to their campus or to a British Council exam venue if outward travel is prohibited or limited in their home country.

At its meeting on Monday 6 April 2020, the Learning and Teaching Contingency Group recommended, following discussion over several weeks, that

1. the August Diet of Examinations (Resit Diet) 2020 should not consist of in-person examinations, and that all exams scheduled to be held on HWU campuses or in British Council exam venues should be cancelled as in-person exams. This applies to all undergraduate and taught programmes, including foundation programmes and online PGT programmes.

   The Group had discussed whether in-person exams could be held in some campuses, while remote exams offered in others. However, it was determined that a single, University-wide solution was more manageable to operate and more consistent and equitable for students. In addition, as highlighted above, even if in-person exams were held at some campuses, in-country travel restrictions could prevent some students returning to campus for exams.

2. Therefore, as a more efficient, equitable and consistent approach, it was agreed that all in-person exams scheduled for August should be replaced by alternative assessments. Such alternative assessments could be a take-home exam based on the standard unseen exam (as per the forthcoming April/May 2020 exam diet) or a replacement assessment, which is different from the planned unseen exam. For the latter, Schools would develop a new form of assessment and seek approval from External Examiners.

3. If Schools were considering replacements for the unseen exam, ie not a take home version, consideration should be given, particularly in the context of the current situation, to the extra workload required to design and approve such assessments. Schools would be supported by the Learning and Teaching Academy in reviewing and redesigning assessments, even smallscale adaptations to unseen exams, as appropriate.

The Group agreed that Schools should take time to consider arrangements for the August Diet and should provide a progress report at the meeting on 27 April, with final arrangements to be confirmed in May.

The University Executive approved the above arrangements regarding the August (Resit) Diet of Examinations at its meeting on 17 April 2020.