**Summary**

This summary is designed to provide Guidance for Boards of Examiners in mitigating the continuing impact of COVID-19 on assessment, progression and award in 2021/22.

Heriot-Watt University’s approach is encapsulated in its overall “Academic Safety Net”, which comprises a range of measures to ensure that both continuing and graduating students are not unfairly disadvantaged because of the extraordinary circumstances caused by the global pandemic.

Although there are no policy or regulatory changes required as a result of continuing to implement the Academic Safety Net, the overall approach was endorsed by the Learning and Teaching Academic Year Group (LTAYG) at its meeting on 20 October 2021 and it was agreed that it should remain in place for 2021/22. The overall approach was forwarded the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness (SCIBE) for information.

The Staff Versions of the Academic Safety Net approach is available on the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank ([Summary for Staff](#)) and there are two Student Versions ([Student Summary](#); [Student Guide to What Happens after Exams](#)).

Additionally, there is a key supplementary document, [Maintaining Academic Standards](#), which provides comprehensive guidance to all Boards of Examiners (Course, Progression, Award) on implementing the Academic Safety Net.

**Approaches to Assessment (Coursework and Exams) in 2021/22**

As part of assessment (coursework and exams) arrangements for AY 2021/22, through the Learning and Teaching Academic Year Group, Schools have continued to adapt assessment as part of Responsive Blended Learning (RBL), ensuring that all forms of assessment can be completed online. Thereafter, the Learning and Teaching Academic Year Group (LTAYG) endorsed an update and reissue of last year’s [Assessment 2021/22: Key Policy Information](#) can be accessed [here](#).

With these arrangements in place as well as the existing role of Boards of Examiners to take into account exceptional circumstances in making academic judgements and the fact that Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances remained in place, it has not been deemed necessary to reintroduce a specific approach to “No Detriment” ¹ for session 2021/22. The emergency response has been replaced by an integration and restatement of existing policies which would ensure no academic disadvantage.

As a means of differentiating these measures from the emergency response in spring/summer 2020, HWU’s approach in 2021/22 is referred to the University’s “Academic Safety Net” approach.

**Withdrawal of Emergency Measures**

Given the more planned and managed approach to assessment, the University’s existing policy framework and the existing powers available to Boards of Examiners to take into account exceptional circumstances in making academic judgements, the following emergency measures which were in place in for 2019/20 were withdrawn for 2020/21 and they remain discontinued in 2021/22. These are stated here so that Boards of Examiners are aware that these options are no longer available:

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¹ On 24 April 2020, the Quality Assurance Agency UK published an [Overview of No Detriment Policies](#). HWU’s measures to avoid students being disadvantaged by the changes in learning, teaching and assessment that have arisen due to the pandemic was entirely in line with the guidance issued by QAA Scotland.
- No wholesale cancellation of exams for specific year groups;
- No automatic progression for specific year groups;
- No use of P grade for individuals or for whole year groups (ie not to be used for courses or for overall progression);
- No postponement of exams to a later date for specific groups.

### Decision-Making by Boards of Examiners

Boards of Examiners should reach course grade decisions and decisions on progression and award, as per normal. Information is provided the [Guidelines on Examination and Assessment](#).

In addition, in reaching such decisions, Boards of Examiners should ensure that that no student, irrespective of programme, degree, location or mode of study, will be academically disadvantaged or penalised due to the circumstances under which assessments were taken and due to the disruption to studies caused by the pandemic.

The University’s policies and procedures have been devised to accommodate such considerations: a robust framework is in place for ensuring no academic disadvantage while simultaneously maintaining academic standards, retaining academic decision-making in full, assessing all learning outcomes and securing academic integrity.

### Key Information for Boards of Examiners

As well as the information provided the [Guidelines on Examination and Assessment](#), Boards of Examiners should be aware of the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mitigating the Impact of COVID-19 on Assessment, Progression and Award</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances is still in place, which permits Heads of School and Boards of Examiner to award grades and to make award and progression decisions in the absence of complete assessment information or in cases where there has been disruption across entire cohorts. Additionally, Boards of Examiners will continue, as in normal circumstances, to exercise academic judgement in decision-making. Deans Reps will continue to be allocated to Boards as normal, providing consistency and independence, 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.</td>
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<td>2. Boards of Examiners should use the following information to inform their academic judgements and their decision-making (see <a href="#">Maintaining Academic Standards</a> guide):</td>
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<td>- information regarding the overall outcomes and results profiles for the previous years of each course and the programme;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- the results for students on each course and the programme this academic year;</td>
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<tr>
<td>- information confirming the impact on learning, teaching or assessment on the relevant courses and the changes already made;</td>
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<td>- course and programme learning outcomes.</td>
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<td>3. P grade (Pass) cannot be used for entire cohorts/entire semesters (ie the blanket use of P grade for all Semester 2 2020 results has been discontinued), nor should it be used in individual circumstances or for individual courses. A grade in the range of A-E should be selected. If the student is exiting with an award, DC can be used if the Board does not have enough information (eg because of accepted mitigating circumstances) to select a grade in the range of A-E, but wishes credit points to be awarded.</td>
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<td>4. The University’s <a href="#">Assessment and Progression System (HAPS)</a> allows the use of Discretionary Award of Credits (DC) for progression and award in UG programmes (DC for up to 30 credits on UG programmes; up to 45 credits on Combined Studies programmes) and award only in PGT programmes (DC for up to 20 credits; DC cannot be used for the dissertation).</td>
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5. The revised Mitigating Circumstances Policy and related process enables the particular circumstances of individual students to be taken into account in addition to cohort-wide dispensation provided through Regulation A10: Authorities in Exceptional Circumstances.

6. Degree algorithms have not been altered, ensuring that awards made are comparable with preceding years and academic standards are maintained.

7. University's academic misconduct and disciplinary procedures remain in place, ensuring that academic standards and academic integrity are maintained.

8. University awards will not be made with fewer than the specified SCQF credits, enabling students to demonstrate, through their transcript, that they have achieved in their award the full complement of credits.

9. Where any scaling of marks or any non-standard mapping of marks to grades occurs (both are permitted by Boards of Examiners), these should be justified in the Minutes of the relevant Boards of Examiners.

10. Decisions on course results, on progression and award should be made with reference to the specified learning outcomes in order to ensure that quality and academic standards are maintained.

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**Guide for Boards of Examiners on Maintaining Academic Standards**

As well as the Academic Safety Net Approach document, a separate, detailed guide has been produced for Boards of Examiners on implementing the Academic Safety in the context of maintaining academic standards.

This is a core guidance document for Boards and it is highly recommended that all involved in Boards take the time to review the *Maintaining Academic Standards* Guide.

The *Maintaining Academic Standards* Guide is designed for Course Assessment, Progression and Award Boards.