HWU’s approach in 2021/22 to mitigating the continuing impact of COVID-19 on assessment, progression and award is referred to as the “Academic Safety Net”. The full Policy document is available on the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank [here](#).

The University’s Academic Safety Net is in line with this sector-wide advice issued by the Quality Assurance Agency UK.

The messages to all students prior to December 2021 Exams highlighted the [University’s Academic Safety Net](#), with its focus on no academic disadvantage. This summary is designed to provide students with further detail on the Academic Safety Net. It is also available on the Personal Tutoring and Supporting Students site [here](#).

### Three-Stage Approach

Whatever the circumstances, all students (campus, partner, online) are always treated fairly in assessment; this was true of HWU practices before the pandemic. In academic year 2021/22, due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19, there continues to be an additional three stage academic ‘safety net’ in place support those students who might otherwise be disadvantaged in their studies for reasons beyond their control.

#### Stage One: No Academic Disadvantage

The key principle of the Academic Safety Net is that no student, irrespective of programme, degree, location or mode of study, will be academically disadvantaged or penalised under the University’s assessment (coursework and examination) arrangements due to circumstances outwith their control.

#### Stage Two: Supportive Arrangements

Across the University, supportive arrangements are in place in relation to assessment:

- Assessments (both coursework and take-home open exams) have been specifically redesigned for 2021/22, as part of Responsive Blended Learning, taking account of the different and changing environments in which students are continue to learn this academic year.

  - Academic staff are taking into account the impact of COVID on all students when marking assessments. Additionally, if any specific issues have affected students individually, these can be reported quickly through the streamlined [mitigating circumstances](#) process.

  - [Student General and Technical Guides on Take-Home Exams](#) include information on preparing for exams, support and guidance, and on the decision-making processes of Exam Boards. There are versions for each exam diet and for tailored groups of students.

  - With the exception of a very small number of exams for accreditation by professional bodies, all take-home open book exams in Semester 1 are open for 24 hours to accommodate different student circumstances and environments. From Semester 2, the University will return to timed exams, but these will continue to be in the take-home open book format.

  - Guidance has been provided to Schools on communicating assessment changes, types of assessment, assessment scheduling to students.

  - Several assessment policies have been adapted to take account of the impact of COVID-19, ensuring that students are not academically disadvantaged:
Stage Three: Decisions by Boards of Examiners

Boards of Examiners are responsible for making decisions on progression and award based on assessments, and include an External Examiner and a representative from another School to confirm that decision-making is fair, reliable and transparent. Boards of Examiners also make sure that the quality and academic standards of all awards are maintained.

Boards of Examiners will take into account the circumstances under which assessments were taken and any disruption to students’ studies. They will not simply look at individual marks or even just the average, but will use all available information to reach fair decisions on grades, progression and final degree classification. The Board will then act to remove negative impacts on students and ensure degrees are awarded fairly, while maintaining academic standards and the value of Heriot-Watt qualifications.

Boards of Examiners will use the following information to help them make their academic judgements and confirm assessment results, progression decisions and awards:

- information regarding the overall outcome and results profiles for the previous years, including pre-pandemic, of each course and the programme;
- the results for students on each course and the programme this academic year;
- information confirming the impact of the pandemic on learning, teaching or assessment on the relevant courses and information on changes already made in response to the pandemic.

This information enables the Board to reach decisions which are fair, consistent and reliable and which ensure the value, quality and academic standards of all qualifications over time.

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**Stage Three: Decisions by Boards of Examiners**

- **Clarification on types of assessment:** take-home open book exams and coursework
- **Submission of Coursework Policy**, including clarification of process for individual circumstances
- **Return of Feedback on Assessment Policy** and extension to include feedback on take-home open book exams/online exams
- **Continuation of Global Consolidation Week** in Week 6 in Semester 1 and Semester 2, with no new material introduced and no assessment submissions

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Academic Safety Net 2020/21: Student Guide (produced in collaboration with the three Student Representative Bodies)
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