HWU’s approach in 2020/21 to mitigating the continuing impact of COVID-19 on assessment, progression and award is referred to as the “Academic Safety Net”. The approach was endorsed by the Senate Committee for Interim Business and Effectiveness (SCIBE) on 18 January 2021. The full Policy document is available on the Learning and Teaching Policy Bank [here](#).


The “We are here for you” message to all students on 11 January 2021 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. In the current extraordinary situation, there is an additional three stage academic ‘safety net’ in place to 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.

#### Stage Two: Supportive Arrangements

Across the University, a wide range of supportive arrangements are in place in relation to assessment:

- Assessments (both coursework and take-home exams) have been specifically redesigned for 2020/21, as part of Responsive Blended Learning, taking account of the very different environments in which students are learning 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 mitigating circumstances and on the decision-making processes of Exam Boards, and are being produced 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 exams are open for 24 hours to accommodate different student circumstances and environments.
- 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:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarification on types of assessment: take-home exams and coursework</th>
<th>Submission of Coursework Policy, including clarification of process for individual circumstances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard approach to take-home exams</td>
<td>Return of Feedback on Assessment Policy and extension to include feedback on take-home exams/online exams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for students in preparing for take-home exams</td>
<td>Introduction of Global Consolidation Week in Week 6 in Semester 1 and Semester 2, with no new material introduced and no assessment submissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-ordinated approach to assessment scheduling</td>
<td>Where practical, reduction in volume of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Integrity policy updated to include take-home exams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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 the 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 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 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.

Academic Safety Net 2020/21: Student Briefing (produced in collaboration with the three Student Representative Bodies)
26 January 2021