

## **Managing the impact of Covid-19 on Learning and Teaching, May 2020**

### **1. Introduction**

This paper sets out the approach that has been taken to managing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning, teaching and assessment and summarises key decisions. Senate Learning and Teaching Committee has discussed and endorsed the approach, which is now recommended to Senate.

### **2. Oversight and Management**

In order to manage the University's response to the pandemic in a coherent and agile way a University Covid-19 Management Group, together with the following sub-groups was established:

- Learning and teaching
- Research and innovation
- Student Support
- Prospective students
- Human Resources

The Covid-19 Learning and Teaching sub-group was co-chaired by Professor Mary Vincent, Deputy Vice President for Education and Jamie Butler, Deputy Director APSE and included members drawn from the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. Professor Vincent regularly reported to the Vice President for Education who is the Chair of Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. The Covid-19 Learning and Teaching sub-group worked alongside the Learning and Teaching Strategy Group and has met frequently to discuss emerging issues relating to learning and teaching, to co-ordinate responses and to feed into decision making at the University Covid-19 Management Group.

### **3. Guiding Principles**

Throughout the work to manage the impact of Covid-19 on learning, teaching and assessment the University's decisions have been underpinned by key principles:

- (i) Pragmatic approaches that maintain quality and standards of our provision and awards
- (ii) Retaining application of existing regulations and degree algorithm
- (iii) Protecting the wellbeing and safety of students
- (iv) In line with guidance from the Office for Students and the Quality Assurance Agency.

No changes have been made to the General Regulations governing students, under the purview of Senate and they continue to apply.

Consideration has been given to these requirements set out by the Office for Students which are cross-referenced in the relevant section of this document:

- A. alternative teaching arrangements and support for students that are broadly equivalent (including particular consideration to whether and how online delivery can replace placement learning, studio, laboratory, practical or other specialist elements of courses).
- B. provision for students unable or less able to access remote learning for whatever reason (together with care leavers, those estranged from their families, and students with disabilities.)

- C. how we have arranged for achievement to be reliably assessed, and for qualifications to be awarded securely,
- D. with an increased reliance on online learning, that there is clear guidance in place for their students on what represents cheating and the consequences of this,
- E. how we have given appropriate consideration to the requirements or guidance of any professional, regulatory or statutory bodies (PSRBs) that accredit our courses,
- F. actions are taken to take to support postgraduate research students,
- G. what additional support is being offered to maintain good student continuation and completion rates,
- H. appropriate alternative arrangements for assessment and awards, including for marking, moderation, external examining, and the operation of examination boards.

#### **4. Learning and Teaching Delivery (OfS Requirement A and B,G)**

Senate recommended the decision, which was agreed by Council, to suspend all face to face teaching from 16 March and to bring the Easter vacation forward by two weeks to give staff the time to move their teaching content online to ensure continuity of learning outcomes.

A range of resources and support were provided by Academic Programmes and Student Engagement (APSE) to assist academic departments in providing alternative teaching arrangements and support for students that are broadly equivalent, including:

- [Quick guide to teaching online](#)
- [Quick guide to digital tools for delivering teaching](#)
- [Training and support for staff](#)
- [Creating accessible content](#)
- [Online resources to enhance your teaching](#)

A wide range of on-line student support services have been provided, with a specific sub-group focussed on this area.

#### **5. Assessment (OfS Requirement B,C,D,E)**

An approach governing final assessments during the 2019/2020 spring semester and summer period was recommended by the Covid-19 Learning and Teaching sub-group as follows:

1. There will be **no formal invigilated examinations** in this session. All assessments, including examinations that take place, will be delivered on-line. We recognise that there will be equality, diversity and inclusion issues in particular cases, which should be dealt with on an individual basis (*OfS Requirement B*). The DDSS is ready to advise on this.
2. We are not in a position to deliver synchronous online exams. Departments must instead plan to use asynchronous online assessments in order to reduce risk and ensure delivery.
3. All online exams must be managed and delivered at institutional level, using University managed software and systems in all cases.

4. It is imperative that we reduce the volume of assessment across the University. Departments must reduce the number of final assessments **at every level** in order to minimise workload and so reduce risk.
5. Thought should be given to the size and breadth of marking teams in order that, so far as possible, some markers are available when others are off sick.
6. All assessments should be simple to mark.
7. Academic judgements should be made as to which assessments are essential and deliverable. These decisions should be governed by Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and accreditation LOs and Programme External Examiners should be kept informed.
8. Particularly for continuing students, it may not be necessary to assess at module level.
9. At Level 1 only, the starting point should be a default position of a pass/fail threshold and programme level assessment should replace modular level assessment.<sup>1</sup> If there are specific reasons to deviate from the default position, this must be agreed with the FDLT.
10. All changes to planned assessments must be agreed, approved by a Faculty Officer and entered on the Exams Office spreadsheet.
11. Students must be notified about changes to assessments.
12. Governance procedures have been put in place to ensure institutional oversight and management.

Departments therefore reviewed Semester 2 teaching and assessments to establish where adjustments were required and to ensure that learning outcomes are met. All adjustments to assessment required Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching approval and central records have been kept to evidence approved alternatives to invigilated examinations and to record the other changes made. Departments provided updates on these changes to their External Examiners and accrediting bodies.

The existing policy, advice and procedures around unfair means remains in place. However, with an increased reliance on online learning and assessments, supplementary guidance has been produced on avoiding unfair means to support departments and students (*OfS Requirement D*).

#### **6. Student Outcomes - Safety Net Policy** (*OfS Requirement C,E,G and H*)

The VP for Education, under Chair's action for Senate Learning and Teaching Committee approved the introduction of an institutional safety net policy to ensure fairness and more equal results for students taking assessments during this unexpected and challenging period. The safety net is not an alternative to students engaging with their studies and planned assessments, and it is not anticipated that it will be needed by the majority of our students. Normal marking and moderation practices apply. Full details of the safety net are available [here](#).

The policy has been discussed with Quality and Scrutiny Committee, communicated to students and will apply to all students except where a Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) determines otherwise. We are currently seeking agreement from individual PSRBs that the policy can also be applied to students on accredited programmes.

The policy has also been communicated by the Academic Programmes Office to External Examiners for taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> In practice there has not been replacement of modular assessment by a programme level assessment.

## **7. Exam Boards** (*OfS Requirement C, H*)

As recommended by the Covid-19 Learning and Teaching sub-group, the timing of Exam boards has been moved back by two weeks to extend the period for all academic departments to finalise and submit their spring semester results and award recommendations. Guidance has been produced by the Academic Programmes Office to support academic departments with appropriate alternative arrangements for [virtual Exam Boards](#) and for [Exam Board secretaries](#).

## **8. Role of External Examiner** (*OfS Requirement C, H*)

The key role that the external examiner should fulfill at the virtual Exam Board is to provide assurance that:

1. Student performance and degrees awarded are of an appropriate standard nationally and are comparable to those delivered by other institutions in the UK;
2. Exam Boards are fairly conducted and recommendations for the award of degrees are appropriate and confirmed.

All external examiners have been [contacted](#) to confirm that attendance at Boards and review of materials will take place remotely. All other key aspects of their role will continue as normal.

## **9. Results**

As recommended by the Covid-19 Learning and Teaching sub-group, the formal release of results has also been moved accordingly, with implications for the August resit period.

The new key dates are:

- Examination period 25 May - 13 June 2020 (unchanged but the expectation is that this period will be slightly more fluid and departments may have assessments scheduled outside this period)
- Deadline for departments to submit results to Student Administration Services for both final year and continuing students - Tuesday 14 July 2020
- Faculty approval of results under delegated powers by Tuesday 21 July 2020
- Results published to students - Tuesday 21 July 2020 (2pm)
- Issue Higher Education Achievement Records (HEARS) - From Monday 27 July 2020

## **10. Resits**

The dates of the August resit exam and assessment period remain unchanged:

- August resit exam and assessment period 10 - 28 August 2020 (overseas examinations and other related services overseas are paused pending further developments/decisions)
- Deadline for the confirmation of resit results - 4 September 2020

Academic departments will ensure that the first week of the August resit period is used to schedule assessments carried over from the Autumn semester. Spring semester resits should be scheduled from the second week, beginning 17 August, to ensure candidates have the expected revision time.

## **11. Graduation**

Final year students will graduate i.e. receive their award as normal. However, as decided by the University Covid-19 Management Group, physical graduation ceremonies will not take place in July 2020. Graduation is an important part of the university experience, and these

ceremonies will be rescheduled. All students will be given the opportunity to graduate in person at a future date. Students from the class of 2020 will be informed of the new dates for our graduation ceremonies when they become available.

## **12. Transcripts**

Consideration has been given to whether or not to include a statement on transcripts for 2019-20 results. Having considered the reflective questions published by the Quality Assurance Agency, the VP for Education, under Chair's action for Senate Learning and Teaching Committee has endorsed the decision not to change the transcript. The approach to awarding credit and the standards required have not changed and there is therefore no reason to refer to the pandemic.

## **13. Planning for 2020-21 Session (*OfS Requirements - all*)**

Following on from ensuring the continuity of learning outcomes with appropriate assessment for the 2019-20 session, we are now looking at how we can continue to provide high quality programmes for 2020-21 and engage students in a learning community. This will include making use of online learning, reorganising the curriculum to deliver lab-based learning at different times should face-to-face teaching not resume in September, or to support mixed-mode study for cohorts not able to attend physically, or to enable social distancing.

This work will be overseen by the Learning and Teaching Strategy Group, supported by a reconfigured Covid-19 Learning and Teaching Group with updated membership from relevant operational areas. The recommendations from this work will be considered by Senate Learning and Teaching Committee, with any out of cycle decisions being taken under delegated authority by the Chair of Senate Learning and Teaching Committee and reported to Senate.

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