Fair Assessments and Fair Outcomes

A Package of Measures and Mitigations for <u>Undergraduate Students</u> to Address Covid-related Disruption in 2020-21

Date of this document: 15th January, 2021

As noted in our recent <u>communication</u>, the most effective way to approach the next few months is for staff and students to continue to work together so we can assess, progress and graduate students in fair and appropriate ways. Furthermore, as noted in the recent Russell Group Universities' <u>joint statement</u>, we are required to balance two things in every decision we take: the ambition to ensure students are not disadvantaged despite the Covid challenges you have faced, and the imperative to ensure the value of your degree can never be questioned by an employer or professional accrediting body in the future. This is a difficult balancing act under the current circumstances, but staff will be doing everything possible to help you to secure the best possible outcome.

What follows is a package of measures to mitigate for the Covid disruption in 2020-21. This package constitutes the University's Policy for Fair Assessment and Fair Outcomes for Undergraduate Students for this academic year. Please note, these measures apply specifically to this academic year and if disruption continues into the next academic year, we will need to devise a new package of measures appropriate to the circumstances and to recognise the cumulative impacts. There is separate information available for PGT, Study Abroad and Year in Industry students.

This policy is in three parts: measures and mitigations applying to all undergraduate students, and mitigations specific to graduating cohorts and continuing students. We have consulted with the Guild on this package and we would like to thank them for their input to the decision-making process. We also note the constructive comments made by the joint Russell Group Student Union response and can confirm that our policy supports much of what they have requested.

NB: please remember in your communications with staff that they, like you, are facing personal and professional disruption as a result of the pandemic. Many (like some of you) will be home-schooling. Staff will nonetheless do everything possible to return marks and assessed work as planned. Obviously if there are significant numbers of extensions, this will also have an impact on the time set aside for marking and therefore the return of marks. Schools will communicate with you if there are likely to be any delays but it's important that we recognise the additional pressures on both students and staff.

1. Measures and mitigations applying to all undergraduate students

 All assessments were already designed and scheduled to be taken online in anticipation of the potential for Covid-related disruption. Mitigations are, therefore, already in place in terms of the structure and content of assessments and the forms of/deadlines for submission. These mitigations vary depending on the subject, type of programme and whether there are specific professional body requirements.

- Given the additional challenges this year, it is confirmed that students are not required to produce external evidence to support their requests for extensions or extenuating circumstances if it is impossible to obtain that evidence. Instead, students are asked to provide sufficient information about their circumstances in order to self-certify the request they are making. This allows us to consider each case at Exam Boards. This policy has been in place since the beginning of the Semester One assessment period, as noted in our communication sent out on Friday 8th January. Note also that an online form is being developed to make it easier for students to submit requests, and we will communicate again next week as soon as this form is live.
- For any students who are expecting to take a major project or dissertation that would normally require lab access or in-person data collection, Covid-adapted project pathways have already been put in place where required to ensure you can still complete an appropriate project and graduate successfully.
- Although the Government is seeking to dramatically reduce the number of people on campus, they have made an exemption for students who need access to study spaces, WiFi or specialist equipment in order to complete assessments. NB: as noted in the first comms last week, it is essential this exemption is reserved for those students who really need it because if students are on campus unnecessarily, this exemption is likely to come under pressure. You can read the latest Government guidance here.
- Regular (usually weekly) online group tutorials were introduced for all taught students for the first time this academic year in anticipation of further Covid disruption. The aim was to ensure each student had quick and regular access to a tutor and a small group of peers. This is a forum in which you can discuss any concerns you might have and these will then be raised with your Department or School.
- Your Student Reps continue to work closely with your Schools and
 Departments to ensure that any issues raised are addressed and you should
 ensure that you know your local Reps. Remember, your Reps are also able to
 escalate issues to the Guild who have a remit to work with the University on
 your behalf. In addition, we introduced wider Student Reference Groups in
 Schools and Departments to help us to work collaboratively in navigating the
 challenges we are all facing this year.

In addition to these general measures, there are specific mitigations that apply to different cohorts of students.

2. Mitigations applying to Undergraduate Graduating Cohorts (2020-21 only)

Graduating cohorts this year are in a different position to those of last year. In particular, whereas last year's students had a full set of first and second year marks (and third year marks for those on a 4 year degree) this cohort has marks missing from the second year profile of students on 3 year degrees and the third year profile of students on 4 year degrees. This makes it essential that final year marks are available to support fair decisions about graduation and degree classification. As long as work is submitted and marks are accrued, we have a number of mitigations

to be used in the summer 2021 examination boards. NB: mitigations may need to be tailored to ensure students meet the requirements of their degree accrediting bodies, but these adaptations will be communicated locally.

Mitigations already in place for the final examination boards in the summer:

- The total marks profile of each individual student will be considered. This
 mitigation was introduced last year. Under normal circumstances this is only
 required in borderline cases or EC considerations. NB: As was the case last
 year, we must be able to demonstrate that each student has met their
 programme learning outcomes and gained any core competencies required
 for professional accreditation.
- If it adds positive information about a student, we will consider first year marks as part of the overall picture of a student's potential. We cannot retrospectively add the first year marks into the degree classification algorithm because that would be unfair to students, but we can consider them in a positive way as evidence of potential or the impact of disruption.
- In a three year degree, second year marks are usually worth 25% of a final degree classification but this year they will only be counted towards the degree classification if they confirm or improve a student's classification.
- Note: where this mitigation is invoked and to ensure it is fair to all students, it was agreed that the full 25% can be counted if students have marks for at least 60 credits from second year (2019-20) based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules. For students with <60 credits, their formal progression mark from second year (2019-20) will be weighted at 12.5% of their overall mark for degree classification. Students who have <20 credits from their second year (2019/20) will have received a formal progression mark, and although it can't be used to influence the final degree classification because it would have undue weight compared to other students, it can be used in a positive way as evidence of potential or the impact of disruption.</p>
- In a four year UG Master's degree, the marks for the credits achieved in the 3rd year (i.e. in 2019-20) will be combined with the 4th year (2020-21) to contribute 80% (as normal) to the final degree classification. Year 2 (2018-19) counts for 20% (as normal). NOTE, however, that the credits taken in year 3 (2019-20) will be based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules, and these marks will only be used if they improve the overall mark for degree classification.

The impact of extenuating circumstances (ECs) will be considered as usual at Exam Boards but note whereas students *are required* to submit their reasons for requesting ECs and extensions as usual, and as much evidence as possible should be supplied, we have put in place a *process of self-certification so external supporting evidence is not required if it cannot be obtained.*

NOTE: If students wish to request a deferral of any assessments, they are also required to submit their reasons and supporting evidence if possible. Deferred assessments will be scheduled for the Supplementary Period in August and they will take the same format as the original assessments.

New mitigations for 2020-21

- For individual students: we will extend the zone of discretion for each degree classification boundary to ensure that more students are automatically considered for an uplift. For example, currently, all students who achieve an overall mark of 68 or 69 are considered for a first class degree. We will extend this range to include students with a mark of 67. This mitigation applies to the boundaries in all degree classifications (57-59 for a 2.1; 47-49 for a 2.2; 37-39 for a 3rd).
- As is usual in such cases, in order to qualify for the uplift in degree classification, students will need to have at least 50% (60 credits) of their modules in the final year in the higher classification. This means the following:
 - For graduating cohorts on a 3 year degree (BSc, BA, BEng), in order to profile up to a first class degree, at least 60 credits (50% of the module marks) in the final year must normally be in the 1st class category and, of the remainder, at least 40 credits must be in the 2.1 category.
 - For graduating cohorts on a 4 year degree (MSci, M.Eng etc) in order to profile up to a first class degree, at least 50% of the module marks at Stage 3 (i.e. year 3 and 4) must normally be in the 1st class category and a majority of the remainder of the module marks at Stage 2 and 3 must be in the 2.1 category.

There might be situations in which a student has an overall mark of <70%, but is not awarded a 1st class degree because the above criteria are not fulfilled. In such cases, if the Board of Examiners decides that a student with <70% should be awarded a 1st Class Honours, based on the full profile of marks across all years of study, an award can be made 'Notwithstanding Regulations' as long as the External Examiner is supportive.

• For the whole cohort: We will compare the marks achieved by this year's graduating cohort with that of last year's cohort to ensure you are not disadvantaged. If we find a variation beyond the normal variation between years, we are able to scale marks accordingly at the summer exam boards. In order to do this we would need the support of our External Examiners and in each programme we have to be certain we are in alignment with the requirements of individual professional bodies.

3. Mitigations applying to Continuing Undergraduate Cohorts (2020-21)

Continuing students are in different positions depending on their year of study, although all the general mitigations in Section 1 of this document do apply. For example, current year 2/3 students are likely to have different numbers of marks available from their previous year of study depending on the timing of assessments in relation to the first lockdown.

Many current 1st year students will have missed taking their A levels (or equivalent) so although year 1 marks don't count towards your final degree classification, these assessments are particularly important in helping you to understand the requirements of degree level study and for developing your academic skillset and expertise in the application and communication of your learning. This will support you to enter your second year of study.

For all continuing students, the main advice is to submit as many assessments as possible. We cannot know at this moment whether next year will be further disrupted, or whether we will be required to make further adjustments and mitigations as you approach graduation in the future. It's important, therefore, that as many students as possible are able to build profiles of marks over time so we are able to consider them for progression and eventually graduation. This will ensure we are able to deliver fair outcomes for all students.

Currently we are working on the basis that continuing UG students will progress to the next year of study based on the usual requirement for 100 credits passed; however, in order to ensure students are not disadvantaged, this will be reviewed after the summer Exam Boards when results are compared with performance of the cohort in previous (non-Covid) years.

NOTE: we will issue any further guidance required on the operation of the summer boards in April 2021. Our priority will be to organise the extended boards for graduating cohorts in the first instance and, of course, this will also benefit you in the future when you are in a graduating cohort.

Fair Assessments and Fair Outcomes

A Package of Measures and Mitigations for <u>Postgraduate Taught</u> <u>Students</u> to Address Covid-related Disruption in 2020-21

Date of this document: 15th January, 2021

As noted in our recent <u>communication</u>, the most effective way to approach the next few months is for staff and students to continue to work together so we can assess, progress and graduate students in fair and appropriate ways. Furthermore, as noted in the recent Russell Group Universities' <u>joint statement</u>, we are required to balance two things in every decision we take: the ambition to ensure students are not disadvantaged despite the Covid challenges you have faced, and the imperative to ensure the value of your degree can never be questioned by an employer or professional accrediting body in the future. This is a difficult balancing act under the current circumstances, but staff will be doing everything possible to help you to secure the best possible outcome.

What follows is a package of measures to mitigate for the Covid disruption in 2020-21. This package constitutes the University's Policy for Fair Assessment and Fair Outcomes for Postgraduate Students for this academic year. Please note, these measures apply specifically to this academic year and if disruption continues into the next academic year, we will need to devise a new package of measures appropriate to the circumstances and to recognise the cumulative impacts. There is separate information available for UG, Study Abroad and Year in Industry students.

This policy is in three parts: measures and mitigations applying to all postgraduate taught students, and mitigations specific to graduating cohorts and continuing students. We have consulted with the Guild on this package and we would like to thank them for their input to the decision-making process. We also note the constructive comments made by the joint Russell Group Student Union response and can confirm that our policy supports much of what they have requested.

NB: please remember that your tutors are also facing personal and professional disruption as a result of the pandemic. Many (like some of you) will be homeschooling. Staff will nonetheless do everything possible to return marks and assessed work as planned. Obviously if there are significant numbers of extensions, this will also have an impact on the time set aside for marking and therefore the return of marks. Schools will communicate with you if there are likely to be any delays but it's important that we recognise the additional pressures on both students and staff.

1. Measures and mitigations applying to all postgraduate taught students

 All assessments were already designed and scheduled to be taken online, in anticipation of the potential for Covid-related disruption. Mitigations are, therefore, already in place in terms of the structure and content of assessments and the forms of/deadlines for submission. These mitigations

- vary depending on the subject, type of programme and whether there are specific professional body requirements.
- Given the additional challenges this year, it is confirmed that students are not required to produce external evidence to support their requests for extensions or extenuating circumstances if it is impossible to provide that evidence. Instead, students are asked to provide sufficient information about their circumstances in order to self-certify the request they are making. This allows us to consider each case at Exam Boards. This policy has been in place since the beginning of the Semester One assessment period, as noted in our communication sent out on Friday 8th January. Note also that an online form is being developed to make it easier for students to submit requests, and we will communicate again next week as soon as this form is live.
- For any students who are expecting to take a major project or dissertation that would normally require lab access or in-person data collection, Covid-adapted project pathways have already been put in place (where required) to ensure you can still complete an appropriate project and graduate successfully.
- Although the Government is seeking to dramatically reduce the number of people on campus, they have made an exemption for students who need access to study spaces, WiFi or specialist equipment in order to complete assessments. NB: as noted in the first comms last week, it is essential this exemption is reserved for those students who really need it because if students are on campus unnecessarily, this exemption is likely to come under pressure. You can read the latest Government guidance here.
- Regular (usually weekly) online group tutorials were introduced for all taught students for the first time this academic year in anticipation of further Covid disruption. The aim was to ensure each student had quick and regular access to a tutor and a small group of peers. This is a forum in which you can discuss any concerns you might have and these will then be raised with your Department or School.
- Your Student Reps continue to work closely with your Schools and
 Departments to ensure that any issues raised are addressed and you should
 ensure that you know your local Reps. Remember, your Reps are also able to
 escalate issues to the Guild who have a remit to work with the University on
 your behalf. In addition, we introduced wider Student Reference Groups in
 Schools and Departments to help us to work collaboratively in navigating the
 challenges we are all facing this year.

NOTE: If students wish to request a deferral of any assessments, they are required to submit their reasons. Deferred assessments will be scheduled for the Supplementary Period in August and they will take the same format as the original assessments. Note also that mitigations may need to be tailored to ensure students meet the requirements of their degree accrediting bodies, but these adaptations will be communicated locally.

In addition to these general measures, there are specific mitigations that apply to different cohorts of students.

2. Mitigations applying to PGT Graduating Cohorts 2020-21

Mitigations already in place for the final examination boards at the end of this academic year:

- The total marks profile of each individual student will be considered. This
 mitigation was introduced last year. Under normal circumstances this is only
 required in borderline cases or EC considerations. NB: We must be able to
 demonstrate that each student has met their programme learning outcomes
 and gained any core competencies required for professional accreditation.
- The impact of mitigating circumstances will be considered as usual, but whereas students are required to submit a case, external evidence is not required to support that case if it is unavailable; instead, students are asked to 'self-certify'.
- Part-time PGT students now in their final year will have their degrees calculated as follows:
 - In 2019/20, PT PGT students were permitted to progress if they had achieved two thirds of their taught credits for that year of study. Where students did not have the opportunity to achieve two thirds of their taught credits, they were able to do so by taking additional assessments during 2020/21.
 - The number of credits taken by PT PGT students each year varies. In 2019/20, the majority of PGT students will have had the opportunity to attempt at least 40 out of the 60 credits normally attempted by a PT student during a single academic session. Students who attempted fewer than 40 credits in 2019/20 will normally have gained additional credits in previous academic sessions, or will be doing so during 2020/21. By the time they complete their programme in 2020/21, the majority of students will therefore have attempted at least 100 credits out of a total of 120 taught credits.
 - In recognition of this, the degree classification for PT PGT students graduating in 2020/21 will be calculated using the total number of credits students have attempted, subject to a minimum of 160 credits (100 taught credits plus the 60 credit dissertation/project).
 - If students have attempted fewer than 100 taught credits, the degree may still be awarded 'Notwithstanding Regulations', if appropriate.

 These credit requirements will be pro-rated for PGCerts and PGDips.

The impact of extenuating circumstances (ECs) will be considered as usual at Exam Boards but note whereas students *are required* to submit their reasons for requesting ECs and extensions as usual, and as much evidence as possible should be supplied, we have put in place a *process of self-certification so external supporting evidence is not required if it cannot be obtained.*

NOTE: If students wish to request a deferral of any assessments, they are also required to submit their reasons and supporting evidence if possible. Deferred assessments will be scheduled for the Supplementary Period in August and they will take the same format as the original assessments.

New mitigations for 2020-21

- For the whole cohort: We will compare the marks achieved by this year's graduating cohort with that of last year's cohort to ensure you are not disadvantaged. If we find a variation beyond the normal variation between years, we are able to scale marks accordingly at the summer exam boards. In order to do this we would need the support of our External Examiners and in each programme we have to be certain we are in alignment with the requirements of individual professional bodies.
- We will make the following mitigations where possible but please note this
 cannot apply to specific professional requirements that are determined by
 the University of Birmingham and/or professional bodies.
- For the whole cohort:
 - For PG Certificate students: we will remove the requirement to have achieved a mark of 40 or more in at least 60 credits
 - For PG Diploma students: we will remove the requirement to have achieved a mark of 40 or more in at least 120 credits
 - For Taught PG Degree students: we will remove the requirement to have achieved a mark of 40 or more in all taught modules
- For the whole cohort: we will remove the requirement to pass all taught modules to be awarded a degree with Merit or Distinction. This means that Registered Students shall be eligible for the Award of Postgraduate Certificates, Postgraduate Diplomas and Taught Postgraduate Degrees with Merit or Distinction subject to meeting the following requirements:

Pass	Merit	Distinction
Postgraduate Certificate A Registered Student must: have gained at least 40 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the programme and have gained a weighted mean mark of at least 50 in the 60 credits considered for the award.	Postgraduate Certificate A Registered Student must: have gained at least 40 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the programme and achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 60 in the 60 credits considered for the award.	Postgraduate Certificate A Registered Student must: have gained at least 40 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the programme and achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 70 in the 60 credits considered for the award.
Postgraduate Diploma A Registered Student must: have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the programme and have gained a weighted mean mark of at least 50 in the 120 credits considered for the award.	Postgraduate Diploma A Registered Student must: have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the programme and achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 60 in the 120 credits considered for the award.	Postgraduate Diploma A Registered Student must: have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the programme and achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 70 in the 120 credits considered for the award.

Postgraduate Masters degree A Registered Student must:

- have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the taught component of the programme,
- have gained credit in dissertation components with a total credit value of 60 credits at level M taken during the course of the programme and
- have gained a weighted mean mark of at least 50 in the taught component of the programme.

Postgraduate Masters degree A Registered Student must:

- have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the taught component of the programme, and
- achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 55 in the taught components; and
- achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 55 in the dissertation component at level M; and
- achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 60 calculated across all modules.

Postgraduate Masters degree A Registered Student must:

- have gained at least 80 credits at Level M in modules taken as part of the taught component of the programme, and
- achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 65 in the taught components; and
- achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 65 in the dissertation component at level M; and
- achieve a weighted mean mark of at least 70 calculated across all modules.

3. Mitigations for Continuing (i.e. part time) PGT students

For continuing part time PGT students, the advice remains to submit as many assessments as possible. We cannot predict the future trajectory of the pandemic so, for those in the first year of a part time programme, it is important to build up your profile of marks over time so that we are able to consider you for your award in the future. For part-time students in 'intermediate' years of a part time programme (for example year two of a three year programme), the marks you take forward from each year relate to the regulations in place at the time. We will ensure the regulations in place in each year of your study will be taken into account at final award boards when calculating your degree. Your School/programme team will be able to advise you of your position in light of the current regulations.

Note, we will issue further guidance on examination boards relevant to your year of graduation in future years. In each case, we will take account of the circumstances in which you have completed modules in previous years.

Policy on Fair Assessment 2020-21

Frequently Asked Questions

What should students do right now?

Complete and submit as many assessments as possible. Remember, assessments for this Semester One assessment period were designed to be taken wholly online, so this has not changed since the lockdown. Please continue to complete assessments as planned and to the best of your ability.

How have my assessments been adapted to be taken online?

- Exams organised by the School and its departments have switched to a take home paper format.
- Students with exams for module in other departments will have had access to their mitigations.

What if I need access to campus to complete my assessments?

Current Government guidance (as of 14th January 2021) allows for students to come to campus to access things like WiFi and study spaces *if they are unable to access these in any other way.* You can read the latest Government guidance here. Clearly the aim of a national lockdown is to reduce the number of people who travel or gather, but the Government has identified student access to campus as a legitimate reason to travel under specific circumstances. Please read the guidance carefully to find out whether this might apply to you and we will let you know if this guidance changes.

What if I can't meet my original assessment deadlines?

The more assessments you are able to submit on time, the better because this will help staff to get marks back to you in good time and will leave you in the best possible position to engage in your modules from the beginning of Semester Two (which we now know will be online initially for many students).

If you need an extension you can apply using your School's usual processes but please do check as some Schools have already made plans for these eventualities and have set assessments/exams that can be submitted at different times or with long submission windows. If you need an extension, please ensure you are able to provide the reason. If you encounter one-off short delays (up to 24 hours) in submitting a piece of work (for example due to technical issues) please contact your School who can advise.

Why do I have to submit Extenuating Circumstances information?

We have made the Extenuating Circumstances (EC) process as light touch as possible and we know that students can't provide evidence for all types of disruption. Submitting the EC information is important because it helps us to take decisions in your best interests at exam boards later in the year. Please follow the guidance available locally from your School/Department because in some programmes there are specific professional body requirements to be considered. For this academic year, students are able to 'self-certify' and this constitutes the required 'Evidence'.

- As ever please contact the wellbeing team for any support and for EC applications: sospwelfare@contacts.bham.ac.uk
- In order to facilitate the processing of Extension requests and Extenuating
 Circumstances a revised form will be published to students via Canvas on the
 18th January. The College Wellbeing Team will write to you with the details
 once they are finalised.

Where can I find some additional assessment support?

You can refer back to the Assessment Support Week (before Christmas) and consider using the <u>resources there</u>. To date, we have had over 60,000 visits to these online resource pages and students have reported that the information is very useful. In addition, many modules have live discussion boards.

What if I have a Reasonable Adjustment Plan?

If you have an existing Reasonable Adjustment Plan, here is some information about adjustments made to assessments and support available: http://www.intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/your-wellbeing/disability/reasonable-adjustments.aspx. In many cases, online assessments have been designed to be inclusive.

What if I need to defer any assessments?

You will need to make a request as usual and supply as much information as you can to support your request. Note that deferred assessments will be scheduled for the Supplementary Period in August and they will take the same format as the original assessments.

What happens after the Semester One assessment period?

The inter-semester week (25th-29th January) is the time for staff to focus on marking and students to engage in the <u>UoBe Festival</u> which has been designed with students for students. Obviously we have had to adapt all the plans to ensure we can deliver the Festival virtually.

For HSMC and Social Work and Social Care students you will have already restarted lectures/seminars. For Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology students semester two begins on the 1st February.

What will Semester Two look like?

At this stage, it remains unclear. The latest Government guidance suggests that we will be able to bring another tranche of students back to campus from mid-February, but there are also suggestions that this might change. For the moment, what we do know is that semester two teaching will begin wholly online and, under our resilience framework, staff have prepared for that.

This guidance also applies to HSMC and SWSC students who operate on the "term" rather than "semester" teaching pattern.

What about final projects dissertations for UG finalists and PGT students?

For all final year UG and PGT students, be reassured that you will be able to undertake your final year project/dissertation because adapted pathways have already been designed (where required) to ensure that you can complete academically rigorous projects in lockdown circumstances. Further details will be provided locally from your School/Department.

How can my personal academic tutor help me?

Keep in close contact with your Personal Academic Tutor (i.e. in your weekly group meetings) who can help with general academic queries and who can set up a meeting if you need it.

How can my Student Reps and the Guild help me?

Each tutor group should have a tutor group rep, so please contact them for with any issues you feel they should represent on your behalf.

Your <u>Student Reps</u> and <u>Guild Officers</u> have the remit to represent students, and to raise the issues that you bring to them in School and College Student Reference Groups and other meetings. Ensure that you know who the student reps for your programme are, and raise any concerns or queries that you have with them. You will also find it helpful to look out for communications from the Guild.