

CRITICAL FRIEND

UWS External Examiner Newsletter



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UWS RESPONSE TO COVID - 19

Dear colleagues,

We've created this newsletter to keep you abreast of the current priorities at UWS. We want to extend our good wishes and trust that you are all managing to stay safe in this current international uncertainty. It is heartening to have had so many messages of support from you and we thank you for your kindness and understanding. In solidarity, UWS.

SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS

Following the postponement of face-to-face teaching for the remaining two weeks of the current term, our module teams are providing alternative activity to attendance at lectures, tutorials, seminars laboratories and workshops.

ASSESSMENT

In line with other Scottish HEI institutions, and as approved by Senate on Tuesday 24th March, the following arrangements have been made (subject to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body Requirements):

For the Majority of Students at level 7/8

- There will be no term 2 examinations for students at level 7 or 8.
- Students will be assessed on the basis of work already submitted or due to be submitted by end of term 2 (2nd May 2020)
- Resit opportunities for Term 1 and 2 will be offered at usual timescales.
- For Term 1 resits (Resit exam decision - RE), alternatives to examination will be developed.
- Progression and award decisions will be based on existing regulations and credit requirement

For the Majority of Students at levels 9, 10 and 11

- There will be no examinations at the end of term 2.
- Alternative assessments are being developed - either coursework or open book examination.
- All resit assessments from earlier terms will be coursework based.

PROFESSIONAL, STATUTORY AND REGULATORY BODY (PSRB) REQUIREMENTS WILL BE ADDRESSED ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS (REGULATION 3.11).

Progression with Credit Deficit

Senate approval was given to enable progression with credit deficit to SCQF level 10 (Regulation 3.14) where students are unable to complete or undertake assessments due to the current emergency situation. In such circumstances students will be given an ONGOING decision.

Approval was also given to relax regulations for progression (Regulation 3.13) between levels during the current emergency situation. This would include use of ONGOING where assessments cannot be undertaken or completed.



Changes to Extensions and Extenuating Circumstances

To account for campus closure and the exceptional circumstances of COVID-19, students are now able to apply for extensions of up to **10 working days** by emailing their lecturer or to defer to the next assessment opportunity by submitting an Extenuating Circumstances Submission (ECS). Students will also be able to apply for ECS after an approved extension. Further information is available here:

<https://www.uws.ac.uk/current-students/supporting-your-studies/exams-assessment-appeals/academic-appeals-extenuating-circumstances/>

These changes has been facilitated by the approval at Senate of an amendment to Regulations in the event of extraordinary circumstances.

YOUR ROLE

We understand that you will also be involved in making rapid adjustments within your own institution. In cognisance of this, whilst Schools will of course continue to inform you of any changes to assessment, we will not ask for formal approval unless you specifically request it. This may be retrospective, given the time constraints facing us at this time. All changes to assessment will be reviewed and formally recorded by the School Divisional Boards for approval with oversight by the Deputy Deans and we trust that this will furnish you with the confidence that the University has robust arrangements in place to ensure that the quality of our learning, teaching and assessment remains academically sound. Our colleagues in UWS Academy have produced guidance to assist colleagues in creating alternative assessments and QuEST are on hand to ensure that colleagues are cognisant of regulatory and quality requirements and the recently published [QAA Guidance](#).





School Assessment Boards

With regards to School Assessment Boards, there will be some changes to these and whilst they will still take place, it is envisaged that the majority of these can be facilitated online using WebEx or Microsoft Teams.

School Boards of Examiners

With regards to School Boards of Examiners, we have been making some major advancements in improving efficiencies and reducing our carbon footprint and this means that these can now all be facilitated electronically. We will no longer produce the large amount of paperwork and this means that physical attendance is no longer a necessity for the external examiner role.

Your School contact will be able to give you further details of these meetings and you should use liaise with them to establish appropriate methods of oversight and approval.

OTHER NEWS

Change of Decision Process Streamlined

As an external examiner, you will from time to time have been requested to endorse a change of decision to a student's marks or progression / award decision. These usually occur after a School Assessment Board (previously Subject Panel) or School Board of Examiners (previously Progression and Awards Board) and usually result from an error in the original result, missing mark or deferred information unavailable at the time of the panel.

In order to streamline the process, it was recommended that SAB External Examiners would no longer be required to sign off on simple errors and provided that the change did not impact on a student's progression or award, SBE External Examiners would not be required to sign off individual changes.

There are times when we will still ask for your oversight and to endorse changes to student marks, for example, where a whole cohort is affected or where the resulting change will have a significant impact on a student's future studies or award and schools will work with you to ensure that you are consulted as appropriate.

In addition most changes will now be done by named contacts within the School, and we envisage that this should expedite the process for students, external examiners and staff.

The updated Change of Decision process was implemented on 14th February 2020 so we thank you in advance for your patience whilst we adjust to this new approach.

Review of Extenuating Circumstances

Feedback on Extenuating Circumstances Statements (ECS), via external examiner reports and the University's quality assurance processes, had highlighted a need to explore the impact of ECS on the student experience.

The Education Advisory Committee had request that a review be conducted by Academic Quality Committee in partnership with the Students' Union.

Students and staff were surveyed in order to understand their knowledge and experience of the ECS system. It was recognised that ECS was, on the whole, regarded positively by both students and staff. ECS is also considered across the Scottish HE sector as pioneering. The process had, however, also highlighted a number of areas for development or further exploration, in order to ensure the system was operating effectively and allowing students to manage their academic journey successfully.

A short life working group including representatives from the Students' Union, QuEST, Schools, Student Administration and ITDS made a series of recommendations that have been approved for implementation by Senate. These include:

- A change to the title of the system. 'Extenuating Circumstances Statement' was causing some confusion for students, with many looking to submit an actual statement in support of their claim, which was not required. The amended title 'Extenuating Circumstances Submission' has been implemented.
- Enhanced guidance for students on what to consider before putting in a claim for EC to ensure that they understand the implications in terms of their academic journey.

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Review of Extenuating Circumstances cont.

- Enhanced guidance for students on what to consider before putting in a claim for EC to ensure that they understand the implications in terms of their academic journey.
- Introduction of students being able to apply for ECS following an approved extension (rather than having to appeal).
- Streamlined appeals system for students who miss the 48 hour deadline.
- ECS claims to be made clearer on Gradebook, to help prevent academics marking assessments which ECS had been submitted for.
- Better access to the information on student ECS for administrative staff involved in supporting assessment boards.

The supporting procedure, guidelines and guidance can be accessed here: <https://www.uws.ac.uk/current-students/supporting-your-studies/exams-assessment-appeals/academic-appeals-extenuating-circumstances/>

Enhancement - led Institutional Review Outcomes

Following the event in November 2019, UWS are delighted to announce the publication of their ELIR 4 Technical Report. ELIR is the approach taken in Scotland to reviewing Universities. An independent panel of staff and students from other institutions visited UWS to evaluate the quality of our academic standards and student experience. The University received the highest judgement on the University's arrangements for managing academic standards and the student learning experience. This judgement confirms there can be public confidence in the University of the West of Scotland's awards and in the quality of the learning experience it provides for its students.

Enhancement - led Institutional Review Outcomes cont.

The outcomes report also highlighted a number of commendations and recommendations for UWS to address moving forward. In particular the student-centred culture at the University was recognised, along with the University's strategic approach to widening access, recruitment and support for a diverse range of students, and the strategic intention to transform learning and teaching through changes to infrastructure and teaching practices.

Other commendations included well designed, effective and flexible quality assurance and enhancement processes and the sophisticated, integrated, transparent and widely understood approach to using an extensive range of internal and external data for enhancement and decision making. There was also a commendation for the strategic and focused approach to the management of collaborative provision, which was particularly welcomed given that this had been highlighted as an area for development at the previous ELIR in 2014.

THANK YOU!

Thank you for your continued support in what are unprecedented times.

Should you have any questions, concerns or indeed positive practice to share, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

QuEST@uws.ac.uk