Coronavirus Response Education Support Sub Group:
Principles for Award, Progression and Assessment

(For all students completing assessments in the academic year 2019/20)

The principles and policies included in this document were arrived at after careful consideration, paying due regard to Queen Mary’s academic quality and standards, the student experience, and the need for institutional consistency. The principles align with external expectations and have been approved on the delegated authority of the Senate. All schools and institutes are expected to follow the procedures set out in this document. If for any reason you do not feel able to do so, please contact eo-setl@qmul.ac.uk in the first instance before taking any action.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

(1) A mark (and corresponding grade) should be produced for each module that a student has completed. All modules and assessments must pay due regard to the relevant subject benchmark statements and to any Professional, Statutory & Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements.

(2) Where at least some of a module’s assessments have been completed and the Module Organiser is satisfied that the learning outcomes have been sufficiently tested by those elements of assessment that have been completed, there is no requirement to conduct additional assessment. In most cases, evaluating whether students have demonstrated achievement of the intended learning outcomes will require that they have completed at least 50% of the assessment as originally intended, but there is scope for academic judgement here. In proposing this principle, it is recognised that a single, low-weighted element of assessment may not be reflective of a student’s overall ability: they may have put in less effort precisely because of the original weighting, or may have performed much more strongly in an individual element of coursework than in an examination. In arriving at a final module mark that reflects a student’s academic ability, it may be appropriate to reweight the completed elements by discounting the non-completed elements.

(3) In the event that the Module Organiser cannot be satisfied that any assessed elements provide a reliable evaluation of whether students have met the intended learning outcome, an additional assessment will be required. If there are existing elements due for submission shortly then these may suffice if the requirements of point (2) can be met. In all other cases, Module Organisers should set an alternative assessment that can be completed and submitted online (see below for further guidance on alternative assessments). In this event, the module mark will be the weighted average of all assessed elements including the alternative assessment (having determined that the latter was required for the assessors to evaluate whether students on the module could demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes).

(4) All alternative assessments should be considered and approved by one central person/group in each School / Institute, with academic oversight from the relevant Dean for Education. The School / Institute group considering any proposals for alternative assessments should comprise one or all of (i) the Chair of the relevant Subject Exam Board (SEB), (ii) the Director
of Education (DoE) / Education Lead, and/or (iii) the Head of School / Director of Institute (though this work can be delegated up until the approval stage).

(5) For each year of study, the ‘year average’ for 2019/20 should be calculated excluding the lowest 30 credits. Hence for undergraduate programmes, this would normally mean calculating based on the best 90 credits (out of 120) and for a postgraduate Masters degree (MA/MSc/MRes/MBA/MPA) would normally be calculated based on the best 150 credits (out of 180). The PgCert (60 credits) is an exception, and only the weakest 15 credits will be discounted. Where a module has the lowest mark due to an assessment offence penalty, that module will not be excluded and we will look at the next lowest module. Where the lowest 30 credits do not fit within two 15 or one 30 credit modules (e.g. a 15 credit is lowest, then a 30 credit second lowest), the weighting of modules will be amended for the purpose of classification only (e.g. in that case, the 30 credit module would count only 15 credits towards classification). There are more details on degree algorithms below.

(6) All provisions apply equally to students in attendance for the first time this year, and to students resitting out of attendance, in recognition of the fact that all students being assessed in 2020 have been impacted. In some cases, this will mean that students who narrowly failed to meet the progression/award requirements last year will now meet them without additional work, though they have the opportunity to complete them to improve their profiles and are recommended to do so where they can.

UNDERGRADUATE AWARD RULES – STUDENTS SCHEDULED TO COMPLETE IN 2019/20

The mark for classification will be derived using all marks available from preceding years of study plus the best 90 credits from the final year of study (Year 3 for Bachelor’s degrees; Year 4 for undergraduate Masters programmes). The standard weighting will apply of 1:3:6 or 1:3:6:6 (for 3 and 4 year degrees, respectively) but the mark recorded for the final year will be the average of those 90 credits with the highest mark.

In some cases, students with high grades for modules sat in the Semester A exams in January and from a final year research project will already have 90 credits with grades on the basis of which they can be recommended for a ‘good degree’ (first or upper second class honours). Such students may elect not to complete the alternative assessments for the remaining 30 credits in Semester B modules. To ensure that students are able to make informed decisions, finalists should be advised where the School / Institute is already in a position to recommend a degree classification based on 90 credits of assessed modules. (This should hopefully reduce avoidable stress and anxiety among the maximum number of students.) Given the commitment to discount marks from the lowest 30 credits, completing all available assessments will always give students the best chance at the best possible outcomes, and it is recommended that students be reminded of this; completing the minimum available assessments may allow the student to achieve an award but the classification will be badly impacted as all but 30 credits of marks (15 for PgCert) will still be used in calculating the College Mark\(^1\).

To be eligible for a Foundation Certificate or a Graduate Diploma, a student must take 120 credits and pass a minimum 90 credits (including a minimum 30 at the level of the award).

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\(^1\) Throughout this document, the term College Mark is as defined and applied in the University’s Academic Regulations (e.g. regulations 2.15 and 2.16 in the 2019-20 Academic Regulations). The university was granted Degree Awarding Powers by the Privy Council in 2008 and all references in this document to College Mark relate to the Academic Regulations and the former, federal structure of the University of London.
To be eligible for a Bachelors degree, a student is required to have studied 360 credits, and to have passed a minimum of 270 credits in total with at least 30 credits passed at level 6*. For an intercalated Bachelors award, a student must take 120 credits and pass a minimum 90 including at least 30 at level 6.

To be eligible for an undergraduate Masters degree, a student is required to have studied at least 480 credits, and to have passed a minimum 360 credits in total with at least 30 credits passed at level 7*.

In both cases, note that the final year still counts for a high proportion of the degree even with 30 credits discounted. While it is mathematically possible for a student who passed 240 credits across years one and two to pass just 30 credits in the final year in order to receive a Bachelors award, the low marks for the other, uncompleted, final year modules would have a severe negative impact on classification. Again, students are encouraged to complete alternative assessments where they can, to give themselves the greatest number of opportunities for success.

We do not yet know whether there will be travel restrictions in place for the late summer resit period. Resits will go ahead (slightly later than usual) and colleagues considering those assessments are encouraged to use formats that can be delivered remotely for that sitting, too. Where possible, please use the same format as the original attempt, so that students are familiar with the scheme.

(*Requirements for professional accreditation of an award may be higher).

**POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT AWARD RULES**

For postgraduate taught (PGT) awards the standard regulations for award will apply, except that (a) failed modules can be condoned from zero rather than 40.0 (where condoned failure is permitted), and (b) the College Mark will be calculated excluding the weakest 30 credits-worth of marks (15 credits, for PgCert). For part-time PGT students not due to graduate in 2020 but impacted by the covid-19 pandemic, the principles described herein will be applied in their year of graduation. PSRB requirements may mean that certain programmes are obliged to follow the original rules to qualify for accreditation.

**CORE MODULES**

Core modules (those that must be taken and passed – distinct from compulsory modules which must be taken but can be failed and/or condoned) must still be passed, as they are, by nature, fundamental to their respective programmes. However, the marks can still be excluded for the purpose of classification (see above) where core modules are among those with the lowest marks.

**PROGRESSION RULES (Excludes LLB, MBBS and BDS)**

Non-finalists will be assessed as described above. **All non-final year** students (including students on an integrated “with foundation” degree programme) will be permitted to progress, irrespective of the number of credits passed. However, students will be advised that they may have passed insufficient credits to receive an award and should be advised to take resit assessments in the ‘late summer’ period. (This will not be the first two weeks of August, but exact timings will be dependent on the duration of the current pandemic).
Schools/institutes may be aware that some students were on track not to progress irrespective of the impact of the coronavirus (e.g. they had failed more than 30 credits in the Semester A exams). We should avoid setting these students up to fail, and schools/institutes are advised to discuss these students’ situations with them individually, noting issues such as the additional costs they will accrue in 2020/21 with potentially little realistic chance of ultimately completing the degree. Where possible, please record that in writing and retain that written record. If such a student nonetheless wishes to continue, they can do so.

When continuing students complete (i.e. no earlier than the summer of 2021), their final marks will be calculated both including and excluding 2019-20, and, consistent with the ‘no detriment’ principle, the student will receive the higher of those two marks.

For a Bachelors student currently in Year 1, this would mean calculating their final mark based on a weighting of 1:3:6 and of 0:3:6, and taking the better of the two outcomes. For a Bachelors student currently in Year 2, this would mean calculating their final mark based on a weight of 1:3:6 and of 1:0:6, and taking the better of the two outcomes. (For students on undergraduate Masters degrees, we would use the best outcome from 1:3:6:6 and 0:3:6:6 or 1:0:6:6 or 1:3:0:6, depending on which developmental year corresponds to the academic year 2019/20).

This is, in effect, a double no-detriment approach. The marks for the weakest credits from the year will be excluded in all cases; where the recalculated year average would still bring the College Mark down, the whole year will be excluded from classification. Note that this only applies to UG programmes, not part-time/multi-year PGT programmes.

**EXTRAMURAL YEARS**

Students on extramural years (abroad, in industry, on placement) in 2019/20 will suffer no detriment in progression and award. Excepting cases where professional accreditation requirements are attached to the year, these students will:

- be deemed to have met the progression requirements to the subsequent year of study and remain registered on the ‘with year abroad/placement (etc.)’ route; and,
- **Either:**
  - Where the year has not been completed, or where it has been completed but including it would bring down the student’s eventual College Mark, the student will receive a pass (on a pass/fail basis) with credit awarded for the year, treating it as experiential learning. The year will not count towards classification even where it would normally have done so.
  - Where the year has been successfully completed with results that would increase the student’s eventual College Mark and where the year would normally count towards classification, the year will count in the usual way.

These students may therefore choose to continue, or not, with any outstanding assessments and activities on a no detriment basis. Note that all marks must be recorded (and, where appropriate, converted) in the usual way as we will not know whether they will increase or decrease the College Mark until the students complete their final years of study.

Where there are specific PSRB requirements, Schools / Institutes must inform students of these and of any consequences of non-completion.
SUBJECT EXAM BOARDS / DEGREE EXAM BOARDS

To accommodate the submission extensions already granted to students, the dates of the DEB meetings will be deferred by 3 weeks. By reducing the SEB-DEB interval by a week, this will allow us to extend the final date for SEBs to ratify module marks / grades and upload to SITS by 4 weeks, as below. However, it is vital that all SEBs adhered to the revised dates for submission of SEB paperwork prior to the DEBs.

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<th>Original Deadline</th>
<th>Revised Deadline</th>
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<tr>
<td>UG SEB</td>
<td>19 June 2020</td>
<td>17 July 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>PG SEB</td>
<td>03 July 2020</td>
<td>31 July 2020</td>
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<tr>
<td>UG DEB†</td>
<td>03 July 2020</td>
<td>24 July 2020</td>
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<td>PG DEB</td>
<td>14 July 2020</td>
<td>04 August 2020</td>
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(† Excludes LLB, MBBS, BDS and all TNE programmes)

The above revised deadlines require the Late Summer Exam period to be deferred from the first two weeks of August to the last two weeks of August and assume that Schools / Institutes will advise students who may have failed modules in July that they will need to resit in August.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENTS

Alternative assessments should be designed to provide the Module Organiser and their fellow assessors with a basis on which to evaluate that the student has achieved the intended learning outcomes. Details of the alternative assessments will be released to students online and students will make their submissions online (via QMPlus). A backup copy of the student’s submission for any alternative assessment should also be submitted directly to the email address as directed by the School / Institute.

Due to the challenge of students working in different time zones and, even within the UK, with different levels of access to computers and the internet, the exercise should be designed to be completed typically within 24, 48 or 72 hours (as determined by the Module Organiser). (In keeping with the QMUL commitment to inclusivity, the intended time required to complete the alternative assessment of up to 72 hours should incorporate sufficient time to accommodate those students with Examination Access Arrangements, e.g. students with disabilities, including specific learning differences (e.g. dyslexia) and mental health diagnoses. The maximum amount of additional time recommended at the university is 100%). If the alternative assessment is in the form of coursework, this may be completed over a period of weeks as is customary.

Where a School / Institute does need to set an online assessment of less than 24 hours, they should survey all students on the relevant module(s) and confirm that they will have robust internet access for the duration of the time-limited exam. (This would need to be established before confirming details of the alternative assessments). Students who cannot complete an assessment for these reasons will be able to claim ECs for a first sit, but we should ensure that we are not delaying awards for substantial numbers of students by using particular assessment formats where they are at all avoidable. Where schools/institutes wish to run exams of fixed durations they should follow the requirements of the paper circulated last week, including a) the ability to set up exam access arrangements for these students and b) a mechanism for dealing with questions about any exam question paper errors/typographical errors within the sitting.
Schools / Institutes are also asked to take account of students on Joint Programmes where a candidate may be required to complete more than one alternative assessment in the same 24-72-hour window. (As for examinations, alternative assessments will need to be coordinated and timetabled across Schools and even across Faculties in order to manage the workload of (a) students and (b) the systems used to receive such a large volume of online submissions, many of which will be simultaneous at the end of each 24-hour submission window).

Guidelines on developing alternative assessments have been developed by the QM Academy, and are available here:  https://elearning.qmul.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Guidelines-for-Constructing-Alternative-Assessments.docx.

(These principles apply to those alternative assessments set and marked by staff within QMUL and cannot extend to any intercollegiate exams set by other universities as part of a QMUL degree. While QMUL cannot determine the nature of assessments for modules run by partner institutions, the principles for award or progression as defined above will still be applied in considering marks returned for intercollegiate programmes.)

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Students may claim for extenuating circumstances in the usual way. However, in addition to the usual grounds for ECs students may claim on the grounds of employment and/or caring responsibilities (there are usually limitations on those grounds), and on a lack of appropriate equipment or technology to complete assessments. Household circumstances (such as a lack of private space in which to undertake an alternative assessment) will also constitute an EC for assessment.

Additionally, students may self-certify for assessments during the current situation, i.e. a student does not need to supply any supporting evidence for an EC claim to be accepted (but must still submit the claim itself, in the usual manner). (This is in accordance with a direct instruction from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.)

If you have a query that is not covered by the above guidance, please can you email this to eo-setl@qmul.ac.uk so that it can be considered and responded to by the Education Support Sub-Group.

Anthony Warrens (Dean for Education, School of Medicine & Dentistry)
Christina Perry (Dean for Education, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences)
Tony Michael (Dean for Education, Faculty of Science & Engineering)

For and on behalf of the Coronavirus Response Education Support Sub-Group

31 March 2020