Coronavirus: Assessment, progression and award

The impact of the coronavirus requires Queen Mary to think creatively in terms of assessing students and considering progression and award while protecting the value of our degrees by paying proper regard to issues of academic quality and standards. Queen Mary has agreed the following principles and amendments to accommodate this extraordinary situation.

Cancellation of examinations
Face-to-face invigilated examinations have been cancelled for April/May/June 2020. Certain professional bodies may accept only invigilated examinations as part of their accreditation requirements. If this is the case, please raise this with your Dean for Education through your Director of Education as soon as possible; in this situation it is likely that exams (together with progression and award for the affected students) will need to be deferred. It may be possible to deliver some examinations remotely in open-book format as alternative assessment.

Alternative assessments
We must ensure that all programme- and module-level learning outcomes can be adequately tested through assessment.

In some cases, assessments that have already taken place may adequately cover those learning outcomes; in that situation you may choose not to deliver any further assessments for the module. This change must be reported to ARCS (arcs-quality@qmul.ac.uk), together with any changes to the assessment weightings required by the removal of elements.

In many cases further assessments will be required. There are no restrictions on the types of assessment that may be used, provided that they adequately test the learning outcomes and pay due regard to the requirements of accrediting bodies (where relevant). These can include open-book examinations delivered remotely. Please consider inclusivity in assessment, and the potential requirement for special arrangements for some students.

The educationalists Sally Brown and Kay Sambell have written a very useful document on alternative assessments including the possibilities and limitations of various formats, for use across the sector. Colleagues are encouraged to refer to this document when considering alternative arrangements.

Study abroad/professional and industrial placements
Queen Mary students studying overseas may need to, or choose to, return home before the end of teaching. Where the host institution is teaching out a programme through (for example) distance-learning students are expected to complete any assessments as required. Where that is not the case, an alternative assessment should be approved. It will not be possible to assess the original learning outcomes, so a reflective journal on the student’s experience may be a suitable alternative (this is already used in some schools as the standard means of assessment). This may be assessed on a pass/fail basis.

Approval
Where a change is minor (ie it does not change the assessment weightings, and the current assessment description in SITS still covers the new assessment), approval sits within the School/Institute, with the nominee of the Head/Director. In all other cases this will be a suspension of regulations – please send details as mass amendments where possible) including the exact new scheme with assessment descriptions and weightings to arcs-quality@qmul.ac.uk, with approval from the Head of School/Director of Education/Subject Examination Board Chair. ARCS will then seek further approvals from the Degree Examination Board Chairs and Academic Registrar before making the amendments, as a quality review mechanism. It is important that we keep a clear record of all changes and approvals.
Progression and award

Queen Mary anticipates that – with the use of alternative assessment – there will be a mark for each module. We will therefore be using the standard progression and award regulations. However, there are three exceptions:

1. The first year of undergraduate bachelors programmes will not count towards the award (for 2019/20 students in the first year). However, students must still pass the usual 90 credits to progress to the second year (though the usual minimum average mark of 40.0 will not be required for progression from years one to two only). Schools/institutes may choose to assess any outstanding elements on a synoptic basis, with one (or more) alternative assessments testing programme-level learning outcomes on a pass/fail basis, rather than the multiple outstanding module-specific assessments. These provisions do not apply to the MBBS, BDS or LLB awards, which have professional accreditation requirements and operate on different regulations.

2. For undergraduate bachelors/integrated masters awards, all module marks are used normally in the calculation of the year average or College Mark for the purposes of progression and classification. In 2019/20 the year average will be taken across the best 90 credits (ie the marks, but not the credits, from the weakest 30 credits will be excluded). As above, this will not change the minimum progression or award requirements, but it will aid some students in meeting them. Again, this excludes the MBBS, BDS, and LLB.

3. Queen Mary students studying overseas or on a placement require particular consideration. Where the host provider is teaching out the semester through distance learning provision students are expected to complete the assessment, which will appear in the profile as usual. Where that is not the case, please use an alternative assessment as described above. Queen Mary will permit progression on the ‘with year abroad/year in industry’ route wherever a student has completed that assessment or the original assessment. The year will not count towards classification except in cases where (on programmes where it normally does count) doing so would be to a student’s advantage. An exception is where students have spent the full second year abroad as part of a three-year programme; their profiles will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis – it is anticipated that we will at least be able to use semester one marks in most of those case.

External examiners

Examination boards should continue to use external examiners as usual wherever possible for the approval of assessment, review of marking, and commentary at board meetings. Our regulations already allow for these activities to be completed remotely. The current situation means that some externals are likely to be unable to act. Where that is the case and another external cannot act in their place, decisions can still go ahead but particular regard should be paid to the SEB’s scrutiny subcommittee and to the views of the SEB Chair, and colleagues outside of the school/institute, including in ARCS, should be contacted in case of queries.