



Queen Margaret University

EDINBURGH

## **CORONAVIRUS EMERGENCY**

### **INTERIM REVISED ASSESSMENT, PROGRESSION AND BOARDS OF EXAMINERS REGULATIONS: IN FORCE FROM 1 OCTOBER 2020**

#### **1 SUMMARY**

This document sets out a number of key principles, and adjustments to regulations, policy and practice, concerning student assessment, progression and award and the operation of Boards of Examiners. The interim regulations were approved by the University Senate on 10 April 2020, with such approval being subject to further review, and amendment where appropriate, by 16 September 2020.

The regulations set out in this document were approved by the University Senate on 9 September 2020, and apply to assessment, progression and board of examiners arrangements during Academic Session 2020-21, with effect from 1 October 2020. These regulations will be subject to further review by the University Senate in light of national recovery from the Coronavirus emergency. A first review will be conducted on 16 December 2020.

The revised provisions presented herein continue to recognise the fundamental importance of maintaining the academic integrity of Queen Margaret University degree awards, while addressing the exceptional circumstances presented by the national Coronavirus emergency. Such recognition is in the interests of students achieving Queen Margaret University awards, and in the interests of prospective employers, including those requiring professional registration.

#### **2 PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING DECISIONS ON ASSESSMENT**

In responding and adapting to the exceptional circumstances presented to learning, teaching, assessment and award by the Coronavirus emergency, the University Senate has approved for adoption a number of key principles:

- No student will be disadvantaged in terms of their assessed outcomes as a result of any disruption to their planned learning and assessment arising from COVID-19 emergency measures.
- Students' achievement of threshold learning outcomes will be protected.
- Learning material that has not been taught will not be assessed, and assessments will be adjusted accordingly.
- Whether or not assessment has been adjusted, consideration will be given to the moderation of marks in any module where its delivery has been demonstrably affected by disruption.
- Reasonable adjustments will be made at the marking and moderation phase to address the potential impact of a period of disruption on student outcomes.

- The flexibility provided by the University's existing published regulations, including those set out in the regulations governing assessment and the operation of Boards of Examiners, will be invoked wherever possible.
- Where necessary flexibility is not provided, board of examiners will operate under these emergency interim regulations and supporting guidance, as approved by the University Senate.
- Priority will be given to the assessed outcomes of students on the final year of a programme, so as to ensure that award decisions are not delayed unduly.

In line with the requirements of the published regulations for Boards of Examiners (Regulation 1.7), a record will be kept of all actions taken, and any mitigations and adjustments agreed by Boards of Examiners. Due to the extraordinary circumstances presented by the Coronavirus emergency, such agreement may be retrospective.

The principles set out above, and any associated supporting guidance, will be applied consistently to student progression, achievement and completion across all taught programmes, irrespective of level or mode of study.

Arrangements for Doctoral candidates are addressed separately to the provisions.

### **3 REVISION TO TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS**

All possible steps will be taken by the University to protect student progression, achievement and completion, subject always to the achievement of the necessary learning outcomes for the programme.

In recognition of the need to protect the health and wellbeing of staff and students, and to meet UK and Scottish Government legislative requirements on physical distancing, face to face teaching and assessment has moved to a blended model of learning, teaching and assessment, with activities conducted on-line, face to face where possible, or through alternative means.

Suitable alternative arrangements continue to be made for students with disabilities who have special arrangements, and who may not have their needs met by online or other provision. Such arrangements are being supported by the Disability Adviser team, and by academic staff.

On the basis that assessment and feedback are fundamental aspects of student learning, assessment will continue to be undertaken by students at all levels for those elements identified as intrinsic to module and programme learning outcomes.

### **4 PUBLISHED REGULATIONS GOVERNING BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

In applying the principles set out in Section 2 above, Boards of Examiners will exercise the latitude currently provided to them under the published Board of Examiners Regulations: <https://www.qmu.ac.uk/media/7192/boards-of-examiners.pdf>. This is described further below.

The Board of Examiners Regulations identify Boards of Examiners as being responsible to the Senate for: the assessment of each student on each module assessed; an overall assessment of each student's performance, and a decision on their progression at each intermediate stage of the programme; and a decision on the award to be granted to each student on completion of, or decision to exit from, the programme.

Under the Regulations, Boards of Examiners are currently required to take account of 'all certificated or verified evidence submitted on behalf of students' in their deliberations on individual performance. Specifically, **Regulation 5.1** confirms that the focus of the Board of Examiners 'will be on students (as individuals and as a cohort), the module and the programme', and that, in making decisions on assessment and progression, the Board of Examiners should consider a number of factors.

The following factors are highlighted as being relevant to Boards' considerations in the assessment diets during Academic Session 2020-21:

- the grades achieved in the current academic year in comparison with previous years (Regulation 5.1b);
- reports from staff on any special circumstances affecting student performance (Regulation 5.1d);
- whether every marginal or fail case has been given full consideration for every possible alternative programme of action open to the Board according to the programme and/or University regulations (Regulation 5.1e);
- any scaling that has been applied to the marks or gradings for an individual, or a module, either by the examiner or the Board of Examiners (Regulation 5.1f);
- any deviation from the programme regulations and/or the University general assessment regulations by the Board of Examiners, leading to a change in progression status or final classification (Regulation 5.1g).

In short, key principles set out in Section 2, are codified within the published Boards of Examiners Regulations; this will provide all boards with the necessary scope to apply those principles; and will provide students, staff and Senate with the reassurance that Boards will not need to step far outside their current obligations and practice.

## 5 ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS

### 5.1 Assessment in the absence of complete assessment information

The University's General Assessment Regulations provide for decisions on **award** in the absence of complete assessment information, for a valid documented cause. The General Assessment Regulations can be found at the following link:

<https://www.qmu.ac.uk/media/7515/assessment-regulations-and-policy-revised.pdf>

Specifically, **Regulation 11.1** provides that:

'Boards of Examiners have discretion to make **an award** in the absence of complete assessment information where it is established to the satisfaction of the Board of Examiners that:

- such absence is due to a valid documented cause, which would include, but not be limited to, a student's illness;
- there is enough evidence of the student's achievement at the level at which they are being examined, **which would normally equate to two thirds of the assessable work at that level**, or evidence is subsequently obtained.

Valid documented cause for incomplete assessment information is interpreted in these interim regulations as including the University being unable to put in place a required assessment.

The regulation above would, under the published regulations, apply to **award** decisions for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students in their final year of study.

During the Coronavirus emergency, it is recognised that there is potential for situations where full assessment information is not available, due to valid documented cause, for students not in their final year of study. Such cause may include action, or inaction, on the part of the University, or documented student illness or personal circumstance associated with COVID-19.

Under these Interim Regulations, Boards of Examiners are empowered to exercise equivalent discretion, in the absence of full assessment information, to **progression** decisions. Such extension provides Boards with the flexibility to approve the progression of full-time UG and PG students to the next academic level, with up to 40 credits outstanding.

Additionally, Boards of Examiners are empowered to award general credit for a module in the absence of complete assessment, where the programme team is able to confirm that core learning outcomes have been achieved in another form. Examples where this could be employed would be where students on an exchange programme have had their programme curtailed without assessment, or where a module assessment has been removed for a cohort, and the core learning outcomes for the programme are met.

In exercising this provision, it will be for the Board to agree whether students under discussion are permitted to progress and to carry forward credits outstanding, or to progress on the basis of the award of general credit on a 'Pass' only basis.

For all programmes subject to accreditation by Professional and Statutory bodies, the application of flexibility of progression regulations will be made in the context of any other guidance provided to the relevant Board of Examiners by those professional bodies.

The basis for any decisions made under the provisions set out above must be applied equally, and recorded in the minutes of the Board.

## **5.2 Amendment to the general assessment regulations concerning reassessment opportunity**

The published general assessment regulations set out the conditions under which students incurring a failed assessment component are reassessed and may progress. Board of Examiners are required to exercise judgement in reaching decisions on individual candidates, and are responsible for interpreting the assessment regulations for the programme, 'in the light of the University's requirements and good practice in higher education' (General assessment regulation 1.8).

The Main Board of Examiners is responsible for determining: whether a student remains in registration, the conditions governing student progression; and the award for which a student is eligible (General assessment regulation 17.2).

In recognition of the impact of the Coronavirus emergency on the University community, and in particular, on the potential performance and attainment of students at all levels, the published

University General Assessment regulations governing re-assessment have been relaxed as follows for assessment undertaken in Academic Session 2020-21:

Specifically:

1. Module Coordinators will pay particular attention to cohort performance compared with the previous year, and will advise the Board of Examiners whether students have been disadvantaged by module delivery or assessment due to alternative COVID19 arrangements. Scaling of marks for the entire cohort may potentially be applied (see also point 4 below).
2. All Boards of Examiners will consider the impact of any changes to assessment outcomes on Honours degree calculations. In particular, Boards will consider the impact on degree classifications of any award of general module credit on a pass/fail basis. Modelling the impact of such revision on the performance of the previous year's cohort will provide the board with an indication of the impact, including %age mark deviation.
3. Where it is demonstrated that student performance has been affected detrimentally in comparison to performance in the previous year (by cohort or module), Boards of Examiners may scale marks by a maximum of 5%. Where it is demonstrated that student performance has been affected positively in comparison to performance in the previous year (by cohort or module), Boards of Examiners will not scale marks downward.

*NOTE: Conveners of each Boards of Examiners and/or Programme Leaders must discuss the application of such scaling options in advance of the Board of Examiners with the Assistant Secretary (Registry & Academic Administration).*

4. The University will consider all students who have progression decisions or awards classified by Boards of Examiners under the provisions set out above at 5.1-5.3, as having had valid extenuating circumstances recognised and applied by the relevant Board.
5. Notwithstanding the above, the University's Extenuating Circumstances provisions, and the University Academic Appeals regulations may be invoked by any student who considers that their progression or award has been adversely affected by matters related to the coronavirus emergency. Application for review under the Extenuating Circumstances and Academic Appeals arrangements will continue to be considered on the basis of factors unrelated to the coronavirus emergency, as described in each of those procedures.
6. Students who require a short-term extension to a submission date should continue to request this through the normal extenuating circumstances process via the student portal. This should be requested in advance of the assessment date.
7. Students may contact [appeals@qmu.ac.uk](mailto:appeals@qmu.ac.uk), or the Students' Union with any queries in the first instance.

## **6 ADJUSTMENT TO THE OPERATION OF BOARDS OF EXAMINERS**

Arrangements governing the operation of Boards of examiners, including quoracy, are set out in the Board of Examiners regulations (Regulations 2.1 – 2.10 refer). Such regulations are written in terms that presume physical attendance by internal and external examiners, and those

members coopted or in attendance at the Board. <https://www.gmu.ac.uk/media/7192/boards-of-examiners.pdf>

The composition of Boards of Examiners includes the Head of Division or Dean of School as Convener, Internal Examiners, External Examiner(s), the Programme/Subject Leader, Year/Level Tutors, any Co-optee(s), and the Secretary. All staff with assigned responsibility for the assessment of a programme attend the Board of Examiners as Internal Examiners. Any Internal Examiner unable to attend is normally required to submit a written report to the Board of Examiners.

The regulations require that External Examiners attend Board of Examiners meetings at which final awards are determined. They are invited to attend subsidiary/module Boards of Examiners as appropriate. The attendance of External Examiners is not required at reassessment Boards of Examiners.

Where an External Examiner is unable to attend a main Board of Examiners due to unforeseen circumstances, and where no other External Examiner is present at the meeting, written confirmation of their agreement with the marks and the progression/award recommendations must be sought. Written confirmation of decisions is not released to students until full agreement of the External Examiner(s) has been received.

Where a Board of Examiners is inquorate, it may decide to proceed, subject to the approval of all members present. The minutes of such Boards must be circulated and approved by all absent members of the Board, including the External Examiners.

During the Coronavirus emergency, the following arrangements will be adopted for meetings of Boards of Examiners:

1. Meetings will be conducted by Microsoft Teams or Collaborate (or comparable alternative) where possible, but may be conducted by circulation of papers.
2. External examiners will attend Boards of Examiners by remote means, and the requirement for permission for non-attendance in person will be waived.
3. Published provisions for quoracy will be waived, but as a minimum, for boards held by remote means, the Board will comprise the following postholders, or their designated nominee in the case of absence: Dean or Head of Division as Convener, relevant Programme Leaders, at least one External Examiner, and the Secretary. Decisions taken will be ratified by the remainder of the Board by circulation.
4. In advance of the meeting, External Examiner(s) will be provided with the sample of student work provided for within the assessment regulations.
5. Staff with the School Office will issue module result reports to Module Coordinators as soon as results have been entered into the Student Records System. Module Coordinators will confirm the accuracy of module results recorded by email to staff of the School Office.
6. The Secretary to the Board will provide progression/award decisions to student profiles prior to the meeting, howsoever conducted.

**APPROVED BY SENATE 10 APRIL 2020/REVIEWED AND REPEALED 9 SEPTEMBER 2020/  
FIRST REVIEW 16 DECEMBER 2020**

7. For Boards of Examiners conducted by circulation, Programme Leaders will be provided with three working days from the circulation of papers to alert the Secretary and the Convener to any amendments to profiles.
8. The Convener will confirm approval of the final set of updated profiles.
9. External Examiners will be required to confirm agreement with decisions for all Level 3, Level 4 and taught postgraduate students.
10. The profiles annotated with progression/award decisions will be taken as the formal record of decisions. These decisions will note eligibility for any sub award where appropriate. Pass lists will not be produced.

**APPROVED BY SENATE 10 APRIL 2020  
REVIEWED 9 SEPTEMBER 2020  
ARRANGEMENTS APPLY WITH EFFECT FROM 1 OCTOBER 2020<sup>1</sup>  
FURTHER REVIEW: 16 DECEMBER 2020**

---

<sup>1</sup> Regulations apply to assessed work undertaken in the 2020-21 Academic Session.