

POLICY FOR FLEXIBLE LEARNING ARRANGEMENTS

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1.0	A policy confirming arrangements for students with flexible learning needs	Education Enhancement	Senate	September 2020

the place of useful learning

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INTRODUCTION

1. The University of Strathclyde is committed to achieving and promoting equality of opportunity in its learning, teaching and research environments. The University recognises that some registered students will have extra-curricular commitments that can be evidenced and are both permanent and temporary, which will require them to spend time off-campus and have the potential to impact their learning experience. Examples of these types of commitments may include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Students with caring responsibilities whose dependents require long-term home or hospital care;
 - b. Performance Sports students who have specific training and competition requirements;
 - c. Students who volunteer for emergency services, such as Mountain Rescue, Coastguard Rescue, the Police or the Fire Services;
 - d. Medically qualified students who are unexpectedly deployed, for example in response to natural disasters;
 - e. Students with specific skills that may be required in emergency situations, for example in response to natural disasters or crises;
 - f. Members of the Army Reservists or other Armed Forces;
 - g. Students who are undergoing gender affirming healthcare.
2. It is important to note that this Policy is not designed to be applied in cases where a student experiences health-related matters or other personal circumstances. Students in this position are expected to comply with the University's [Personal Circumstances Procedure](#), [Voluntary Suspension Guidelines](#) and [Guidance for Students & Staff on Student Maternity, Maternity/Paternity Support & Adoption](#).
3. The University has in place a [Disability Policy](#), which outlines the University's approach to supporting students with disabilities. The [Disability & Wellbeing Service](#) provides guidance and support to students whose disability may impact their learning and teaching experience. Students who request a needs assessment, may find that reasonable adjustments are recommended in relation to their studies. For any students with disabilities that may also have extra-curricula commitments, it will be important that both this Policy and any articulated reasonable adjustments arising from needs assessments are considered in tandem when determining flexible arrangements to support a student.
4. It is important to note that some programmes have specific requirements set by Professional Statutory & Regulation Bodies (PSRBs). These programmes often have industrial placements, which are a component of the programme that must be passed in order to achieve accreditation. These types of programmes are therefore not suitable for the implementation of this Policy.

Management of Flexible Learning

5. Programme Directors, working with other programme-related staff, are responsible for managing flexible learning arrangements for individual students. Depending on the nature of the student's commitments elsewhere, it may be necessary for Programme Directors to request evidence to support the request for flexible learning arrangements. This will be at the discretion of the Programme Director.

6. For students where extra-curricula commitments are identified at the start of their studies, Programme Directors should discuss the likely requirements of the commitment, where known, and support the student in planning a path through a programme and in responding to unexpected events. The key principles listed in paragraphs 10 to 22 below, provide guidance to Programme Directors on appropriate approaches to supporting flexible learning.
7. Some students will unexpectedly require flexible learning arrangements to be put in place at other points than at the start of their studies. Programme Directors should work with these students to identify methods to flexibly support their learning, and discuss ways in which this could work for the remainder of their studies.
8. If Programme Directors are uncertain about how best to manage an individual case, they should seek advice from their Head of Department/School or the Faculty Vice-Dean (Academic).
9. A student may contact their Module Leader or another member of academic staff that they are in close contact with to discuss their options. That member of staff will then raise the matter with the Programme Director.

Key Principles

10. Paragraphs 11-13 set out arrangements that Programme Directors may put in place to support students.

Attendance

11. In cases where students are missing key lectures, seminars or workshops that are reflected in intended learning outcomes and are not available by other means on lecture capture and cannot be taken in future years (i.e. if in the student's final year), it is suggested that catch up sessions are considered, for example through online tutorials, attendance at other scheduled sessions at a later point or one-to-one sessions with teaching staff. Alternatively, a short formative assessment could be undertaken to check understanding is at an appropriate level.
12. For module tests, presentations or any other type of in-class assessment, consideration should be given to whether this element of the module assessment can be discounted and the overall mark for the module subsequently be based on remaining assessment elements. It will be important to consider programme and module intended learning outcomes when making this decision. The Directorate of Student Experience should be informed of any adjustments to ensure changes are reflected within the student record.
13. For students engaged in practical learning, i.e. laboratory work, the Programme Director should work with the student to put in place an alternative plan for any laboratory work that may be missed due to commitments. For example, catch up sessions over vacation dates, using blended learning or video technology (to enable the student to watch demonstrations), practical work to be undertaken at home, (if appropriate), and direction to YouTube tutorials.

Assessment

14. The University's [Policy & Procedure on Extensions to Coursework Submission](#) and [Policy on Late Submission of Coursework](#) should be applied where possible, with extended deadlines agreed at a programme-level to avoid bunching of deadlines.
15. Programme Directors should liaise with Module Leaders to discuss the possibility of students undertaking an alternative assessment relating to their extra-curricular commitment, where appropriate. For example, if an assessment focuses on a reflective log or time management skills, and the student is representing their country at the Olympics, the assessment could be recast with a different focus but for the same learning outcomes.
16. Programme Directors should consider whether there are opportunities for students to take tests and exams offsite, and, if necessary, whether alternative test/exam questions can be set if tests/exams cannot be held at the same time as the rest of the cohort.
17. Consideration should be given to enable students to have their first attempts discounted and receive marks as if taken for the first time. In cases where students fail the 'resit' examination and would normally have an opportunity to resit, Programme Directors should request a regulation waiver to enable a second capped resit, if necessary (this will depend on individual programme regulations).
18. For presentations, consideration can be given to allowing the student to participate via Skype or other appropriate technology.
19. For group work, the Programme Director should consider whether the student could be placed in a group for an assessment the next time the module runs, particularly if group work is articulated in the intended learning outcome. The student may have already undertaken the learning, so may not need to attend the whole module again. This will help to avoid students being overburdened with lectures during an academic year. Students are only permitted to carry over 20 additional credits per academic year to avoid overloading, subject to programme regulations.
20. For research student oral examinations, consideration can be given to whether it is appropriate to conduct an examination via Skype or other appropriate technology.

General

21. Programme Directors and students could consider whether a regulation waiver should be requested at the start of the course to lengthen the maximum period of registration, (essentially stretching the programme), for students where it is clear that they are going to miss a number of lectures/assessments due to their commitments. This is unlikely to be manageable for students who are doing accredited programmes. Discussions to 'stretch' the period of registration for a student should take place at the point of admission and in liaison with the University Finance Team to ensure that any funding implications are captured and considered.
22. As outlined in paragraph 4 above, some programmes will not enable flexible learning due to accreditation requirements or due to the nature of a required placement.

However, for some students, it may be possible to organise an in-house placement to maximise flexibility or a placement within the local area to assist those with carer responsibilities, for example.

23. If a programme has a short placement that the student cannot take part in, thought should be given to whether the student's alternative commitment, i.e. time away with the Army, could count as the placement. Before such an arrangement is put in place, careful thought must be given to how the University can ensure the student has an equitable learning experience and comparable output, however, this approach may help to reduce the number of absences from the programme as a student attempts to catch up on required placement activity.

Appendix

24. [Appendix A](#) sets out a number of anonymised case studies to aid Programme Directors and students when discussing possible support models.

Appendix A – Anonymised Case Studies

A. Performance Sport Student

Student A has represented their country previously at the Commonwealth games, competing in fencing. They are registered in the first year of a BSc programme in the Faculty of Science and the programme requires in-class tests in the laboratory. The Student and Programme Director met at the start of the year to discuss possible arrangements for managing unexpected periods of time away from the University. At the time, Student A was confident that they would not be competing in the upcoming Olympics in Tokyo, which would require three weeks at a pre-training camp during the final three in-class laboratory-based tests of the academic year.

Student A was thrilled to receive a late call-up to join the British Fencing Team for the 2020 Olympics, however this was at very short notice and they had to leave Scotland to attend the pre-training camp in Leicestershire, meaning that they would miss the last three in-class tests.

In consultation with Module Leaders, the Programme Director ascertained that two of the three in-class tests were crucial to the programme and that the related Intended Learning Outcomes could not be measured through any other form of assessment. However, the third in-class test, which carried 10% of the overall marks for the module, was actually assessed through other means in the remaining assessments for the module.

RESOLUTION

For the module where the in-class test was not deemed crucial to the Intended Learning Outcomes, the student was set a short piece of coursework to complete and submit electronically while at training camp. The marks from this piece of work would count for 10% of the module mark, as the in-class test would have done,

For the two modules where the in-class test was crucial, the Programme Director and the student agreed that these should be undertaken when the module ran again during the next academic year as there was no opportunity for a resit within the current academic year. The modules were not pre-requisites for any future modules, and the delay in assessment would not stop the student from performing well on other modules in the interim period. The Examination Board was asked to confirm the progression to the next academic year as an exception, with the knowledge that the in-class test would be taken within the first semester. The Programme Director was satisfied that the rescheduled in-class tests would not clash with second year tests of a similar nature, as these were not included on the syllabus for Year 2.

Arrangements would be notified to the examination board, in terms of ensuring the student could progress to the following year with missing marks, subject to all other required elements achieving a pass mark.

To ensure that the student was not disadvantaged by sitting the tests nearly a year after taking the modules, the Module Leaders both agreed to organise refresher sessions for the student closer to the time of the in-class tests

B. Student with Caring Responsibilities

Student B has been caring for their father for two years, prior to commencing studies at the University. The nature of the father's condition means that there are occasions, often lasting for a number of months, when a flare-up requires the student to provide care on an almost 24/7 basis.

Student B was reticent about commencing a Masters degree within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, due to concerns about how much of the programme might be missed should their father experience heightened health difficulties. The student has therefore registered for the programme on a part-time basis, which has a maximum registration period of 48 months.

Prior to the programme start date, Student B contacted the Programme Director and [Named Contact for Carers](#) within the Access, Equality and Inclusion Service. Together they worked out a plan of action for occasions where Student B would not be able to attend campus, usually at short notice. This involved contacting particular staff within the School Office who would notify module leaders of absences, and providing the Programme Director with regular updates whilst away from the University. Student B and the Programme Director agreed that it would be appropriate for lecture capture to be used for sessions when the student was away, subject to individual Module Leader agreement, which was sought by the Programme Director. This would allow the student to keep up with teaching sessions when he was away from the University.

The arrangements that were put in place worked well for the first year of study. However, shortly into the second year of study, Student B's father became very seriously ill and it was impossible for Student B to utilise lecture capture in a way that had previously worked.

RESOLUTION

The Programme Director and Student B agreed that Student B should go into voluntary suspension. Unfortunately, this became protracted and reached the point where the student was running out of time to complete their studies. The Programme Director was concerned that Student B would not be able to complete their studies within the timeframe allowed. In the meantime, Student B's sister had returned home from Australia and would share caring responsibilities. This meant that even if the father's health deteriorated again, Student B would be able to attend modules.

The Programme Director wrote a case to for an extension to the maximum duration of 48 months on a part-time basis. This was approved by Senate and the student was given 12 months from the start of the next new academic year to complete their degree, which they did successfully.

C. Army Reservist Student

Student C is a member of the Army Reservists and is 18-months into registration for a full-time PhD programme, having taken a career break from their role as a Strategic Operations Manager for the Civil Service, specialising in the digital aspects of warfare.

To date, they have been making good progress on an unfunded PhD and achieving excellent outcomes from progress reviews.

Unfortunately, an international conflict has broken out and Student C has been called up for overseas service, due to their area of expertise. Initially, the student will be based overseas for a period of eight months, without access to the equipment needed to continue their research.

RESOLUTION

Student C and their Supervisor agree that it is appropriate to go into voluntary suspension for the period overseas. However, during the time away, the student is approached by their employers and subsequently re-joins the Civil Service due to a sense of civic duty. On return to Scotland, they are transferred to a part-time registration; however the conflict continues and there are protracted absences from the University for a number of months and insufficient progress is made on the research project.

Student C's Supervisor is supportive of continued registration as the research undertaken so far, and the literature review, are of a high standard. However, as time is continuing, Student C runs the risk of their research becoming out of date before they have a chance to complete their thesis. After a period of uncertainty, the Supervisor and Student C agree that the current project cannot be taken forward.

The Supervisor is aware of another funded project coming up within the Department/School, in an area related to Student C's expertise. The Supervisor works with Student C to help them apply for the new research project and supports discussions with their employer, the Civil Service, to have study leave whilst working for them on a part-time basis. The new registration and study pattern proves manageable for Student C and they graduate with a doctoral degree six years later.

The experiences of reservists are highly varied, and some may not require any adjustments during their time at Strathclyde. However, it is important to be aware that reservists are expected to maintain their relevant skills and fitness levels and, even if not mobilised for an operational tour of duty, will still have to undertake annual training and may have other regular training requirements. Royal Air Force reservists have a 15-day annual training block; for the Royal Navy, the commitment is generally 24 days a year, including a 12-day continuous training block; and most roles in the Army require around 27 days of commitment each year. It is important to encourage students to come forward to discuss their own unique situation should they feel that their duties as a reservist may impact upon their studies at Strathclyde.

<https://www.raf.mod.uk/recruitment/lifestyle-benefits/life-as-a-reserve> (RAF)

<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/careers/royal-naval-reserves/fitting-it-in> (Navy)

https://apply.army.mod.uk/what-we-offer/reserve-soldier?ef_id=EAlaIQobChMIpr_R-rCw5gIVB7LtCh38oQjJEAAAYASABEgLSAvD_BwE:G:s&s_kwid=AL!8141!3!323097708200!b!!g!!%2Barmy%20%2Breservists# (Army)

D. Medical Volunteer

Student D is a mature student who is studying full-time for an MBA. The student is also a qualified medical doctor who volunteers for an organisation that places doctors on short secondments, usually overseas, to provide medical help in the aftermath of natural disasters.

Student D made the Programme Director aware of these volunteering responsibilities at the start of the programme. Given that the nature of this commitment makes it impossible to have any notice of times that Student D might be called away from the University, they agree to deal with absences as and when they occur.

A natural disaster occurs in South America and Student D is sent to assist for a period of one-month. During this month, Student D will not be able to undertake a group project, worth 20% of a 20-credit module. The assessment involves students working together to simulate a real-life working situation and provide a reflective analysis on the management of this, including how colleagues work together and challenges were overcome. The assessment also requires students to reflect on case studies for other similar ventures and provide a short piece of individual analysis, submitted with the group assessment.

RESOLUTION

Although Student D would not be able to be involved in the group project, they would be working in a real-life situation, with a number of colleagues, overseas for a month.

Therefore, the Programme Director conferred with the Module Leader. They agreed that the student could undertake an alternative assessment in the form of an individual analysis reflecting on the team-working of volunteering colleagues in this crisis situation in South America. Student D would also be required to submit an analysis on case studies from previous similar activities. The Module Leader agreed that, given the circumstances, Student D could have an extension of three weeks, following their return to Scotland, to complete the assessment. They would subsequently be required to give a brief presentation to colleagues on the programme, in order to outline their experiences as the Module Leader believed this would benefit both Student D and the rest of the cohort and be in the spirit of the group work required for this module.

E. Scottish Footballer

Applicant E is interested in studying an undergraduate Engineering programme in the Faculty of Engineering, and is also a member of the national football team. They have contacted the Programme Director to discuss whether or not it will be possible to undertake full-time undergraduate studies. This is because their footballing commitments can require attendance at training and matches, (in Scotland, the UK and overseas), which would, at times, clash with scheduled teaching and might also impact on their ability to submit assessments on time and attend examinations (both formal and informal).

RESOLUTION

Applicant E is a high-quality candidate for study at the University. The Programme Director discusses their schedule, and likely commitments for the four years of the degree. From this the Programme Director is able to map out an alternative route through the degree and its assessment schedule, effectively stretching the registration period beyond four years to enable them to study at Strathclyde. The Programme Director takes this to the Vice-Dean (Academic) who is supportive of the approach, and Applicant E confirms that they would be able to work to the schedule proposed.

The Vice-Dean (Academic) proposes a regulation waiver to Senate to stretch Applicant E's studies, and this is approved by Senate. Applicant E commences their studies and graduates after studying for five years and two months.

F. Student undergoing gender affirming healthcare

Student F is currently studying an undergraduate programme in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. They are on a waiting to list to access gender-affirming healthcare via an NHS Gender Identity Clinic (GIC). Student F may require time off to attend the clinic and, if accessing gender-affirming surgery, may need to travel on various occasions to hospitals some distance away. They may also require time off for surgery and recovery. Depending on waiting times, and when appointments or procedures take place, this could have an impact on Student F's ability to attend scheduled teaching, submit assessments on time and attend examinations.

RESOLUTION

Student F's involvement with the GIC is entirely individual to them and, once they become aware of what time they require away and the potential impact on their timetable and studies, they discuss this with their Programme Director. They are also made aware of the [Trans, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse Student Support Network](#) within Student Experience who they contact for additional support. Since initial appointments take place locally and only require a few hours away, the Programme Director agrees to communicate any absences from class to Module Leaders. No initial impact on assessments or exams are anticipated.

The following year, Student F requires several weeks off to undergo surgery and to recover. They are able to access course material online during recovering and Module Leaders agree to a three-week extension for coursework.