University of Strathclyde Glasgow

GUIDELINES TO SUPPORT THE LEARNING & TEACHING OF UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENTS DURING PERIODS OF WIDESPREAD, SIGNIFICANT DISRUPTION

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4	Revisions made taking into account the new Academic Appeals Policy and Procedure and the change in name from the Personal Circumstances Procedure to the Procedure for Consideration of Academic Mitigation by a BoE. References to Schools removed	Education Enhancement	Quality Assurance Committee	August 2026

Version 4

the place of useful learning
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INTRODUCTION

1. During periods of widespread, significant disruption, the University will publish planned approaches for the delivery of learning and teaching for the academic year. Any such approach will be approved by Senate, subject to the University's priorities in line with any regulatory or government guidelines.

2. In delivering learning and teaching, the University has a responsibility to uphold and respond to any government guidance in relation to the health, wellbeing and safety of students and staff. These Guidelines seek to provide a reference point for how to support students through any periods of widespread, significant disruption, particularly in cases where this disruption is ongoing, such as was the case with the Covid-19 pandemic for example.

3. These Guidelines have been created for academic and professional services staff responsible for delivering and supporting learning and teaching activities during periods of significant, widespread disruption.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

4. As the University responds to the impact of any widespread, significant disruption and plans for the academic year, it is essential that it maintains and evolves approaches to ensure students are supported and treated consistently and fairly. This may vary between programmes and learning experiences (depending on disciplines and professional accreditation requirements, for example).

5. In developing academic policy, procedure, or guidance, at University or faculty-level, the following principles should be adhered to:

    a. Any new University or faculty-level academic policy created in response to widespread, significant disruption should be accompanied by appropriate implementation guidelines for the target audience. Where required, implementation guidelines should be accompanied by local module/department /faculty advice and support for staff and students, which will take account of professional body requirements;
    b. Any policies, procedures, or guidance produced by the University or faculties should be supportive of students and student engagement and should not adversely impact on progression;
    c. Any policies, procedures, or guidance produced by the University or faculties should be supportive of staff and staff engagement;
    d. Successful implementation of these Guidelines, and any policies/guidance developed by faculties in response to widespread, significant disruption will require engagement from all partners: academic teams; support teams, and students;
    e. Policy, procedures, and guidance developed should recognise relationships between existing policies across a range of related elements. For example, these Guidelines will refer to Assessment and Feedback Policy, Policy and Procedure for Late Submission of Coursework, Procedure for the Consideration of Academic Mitigation by a Board of Examiners, and the Policy and Procedure on Extensions to Coursework Submission, among others. It should be noted that within these Guidelines there is a focus on using the existing, well-established Procedure for the Consideration of Academic Mitigation by a Board of Examiners. At the heart of this approach is an emphasis on student communication and engagement with staff so that they can explore support options for students;
    f. Where possible and appropriate it is anticipated that any guidance will be applied consistently across and within faculties, particularly where students are on joint programmes and where assessment is outwith the student's "home" department;
    g. Any academic policy, procedure or guidance being created should take account of the University's commitment to Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity.

6. For these Guidelines, the following broad principles apply:

    a. The ethos and content of these Guidelines should apply to all students; irrespective of mode and pattern of study and learning;

    b. Where possible, these Guidelines should apply to all taught elements of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, however it is recognised that there may be instances where external accreditation requirements have an impact on programmes;

    c. The requirement for staff to ensure that students are aware of coursework deadlines to allow them to manage their time accordingly, is stipulated in the Assessment & Feedback Policy (sections 3.2 and 3.3) and reinforced in the 'Add Coursework' section on MyPlace;

    d. It is generally not expected that synchronous teaching activities are provide both online and in person simultaneously, to ensure that staff are not overburdened with increased workloads. Exceptions for this may be at the discretion of an individual member of staff, subject to Faculty approval, as indicated in the Hybrid Teaching and Learning Guidance.

HOW TO MANAGE PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

7. The impact of widespread, significant disruption will be varied and will impact students in different ways. For some, this may be limited to experiencing the restrictions faced by all members of the community during a pandemic for example. Others may experience challenges that will directly impact on their studies and their ability to engage with them, which is a key point of these Guidelines and critical to underpinning the management and recognition of personal circumstances.

8. In cases of widespread, significant disruption, particularly where this is ongoing, implementing the Procedure for the Consideration of Academic Mitigation by a Board of Examiners to manage all instances of disruption impacting learning and teaching is unlikely to benefit students or the University, due to the volume of paperwork that this would generate, which could potentially lead to delays in responding to students. In such instances of ongoing disruption, Senate will decide whether new arrangements need to be put in place to underpin and enhance the University's usual approach to managing personal circumstances.

9. During periods of widespread, significant disruption, particularly where this is ongoing, it is possible that the University will receive requests from students seeking to undertake learning in a different way from the approach articulated in the programme specification and/or module descriptor. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, when learning and teaching activities were undertaken via a blended learning model, including some on campus activities, requests were submitted to learn entirely remotely on the grounds of safety (either personal or for those caring for others). Any requests, during periods of disruption, to study outwith the standard parameters, are the responsibility of the Executive Dean who will nominate those with the delegated responsibility to consider and record these on a case-by-case basis.[1]

10. Students who fall within this category should follow the six steps set out below. Nomenclature of roles varies within the four faculties. *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent* is used to describe the staff with the responsibilities across all four faculties.[2] The University's expectations are that in periods of significant, widespread disruption, the Vice-Deans (Academic) will ensure that staff are made aware of the responsibilities of different roles within the faculties in enacting these steps. It will

[1] The Executive Dean will finalise the outcome in cases where it has not been possible to reach agreement.

[2] Colleagues with responsibilities within paragraph 10, steps 1-6 may include: Programme Leader, Academic Advisor, Advisor of Studies or other roles. For the latter two roles, these may be at department and/or Faculty-level.

also be important to ensure that students know who to approach.

Step 1: Students are to communicate with their *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent* to explain their personal situation to enable staff to understand the nature and extent of their concerns to support these students in their learning as much as is possible.

Step 2: The *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent*, in consultation with the nominated Faculty representative (if not the *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent)*, must review the following with the student:

a. Overall student engagement and mitigations that would need to be put in place for any students at risk;
b. Individual's personal circumstances, including any concerns or additional personal support which may need to be put in place which may include, but not be limited to, personal financial hardship and/or mental health concerns;
c. Accreditation requirements for the individual's programme of study and any mitigations that would need to be put in place;
d. A review point agreed with the student, considering changing external circumstances, in the context of any regulatory or government guidance.

Step 3: The *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent* will determine the appropriate support requirements and where appropriate, refer the individual to student support services.

Step 4: The *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent* will determine whether the individual's request for study outwith standard parameters should be recommended. This should involve contact with the University's student support services. Any level of engagement with the student support services should be considered as suitable evidence. It should be noted that details relating to the nature of that engagement are not required. The *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent* will ensure that appropriate Faculty colleagues are updated on the outcome of the case.

Step 5: If the student is on a Tier 4/Student Route visa, the *Advisor of Studies or Equivalent* must seek advice from the Visa Compliance Team in relation to any appropriate and permissible concessions or adjustments.

Step 6: Approved requests will be entered into the personal circumstances record and be available for the Academic Mitigation Board as required.

11. For students on combined programmes, the student should report only to their home department, who will then ensure that all others are informed, as appropriate.

ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK

12. The paragraphs above set out several scenarios that are likely to lead to students learning in a variety of different ways. Module Leaders and Programme Leaders are therefore asked to consider assessment and feedback arrangements to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by widespread, significant disruption.

13. Where directed by Senate, it is important that staff apply existing policies and procedures empathetically, such as the Policy and Procedure on Extensions to Coursework Submission and where relevant the Policy & Procedure for Late Submission of Coursework, in recognition that there may be an ongoing level of uncertainty for the student cohort, due to the external factors arising from periods of disruption.

14. In periods of widespread, significant disruption it may become necessary for Module Leaders to request amendments to assessments falling outwith the Formal Assessment Period, to ensure parity for the student cohort. In such cases, as directed by Senate, guidance will be issued on extraordinary arrangements for making changes to programmes and modules. It is important for Module Leaders to seek input from the Programme Leader before proposing changes.

15. The University's Assessment & Feedback Policy contains useful information for staff on developing assessments and considering various ways in which feedback can be provided to students to enable them to support learning. Section 5 of the Policy clearly sets out responsibilities for assessment at various levels.

SCENARIO PLANNING

16. Consideration and planning should be undertaken for potential scenarios that may occur during periods of widespread, significant disruption that will impact learning and teaching activities. Table 1, below, identifies potential disruptions and should be used by Programme Leaders and Module Leaders as a starting point for scenario planning.

17. Actions undertaken will be aligned to any regulatory or government guidance, as published at the time.

Table 1

Scenario Planning for Periods of Widespread, Significant Disruption

Scenario	Potential Impact	Planning
Local or national lockdown during the teaching period	Face-to-face teaching on campus suspended on advice of Government guidance	Methods by which planned on campus lectures, tutorials, seminars, practical demonstration can be held online, or replaced by alternative activities that can offer the student an equivalent experience and meet programme-level Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs).
Widespread outbreak of endemic or pandemic illness on campus during the teaching period	Face-to-face teaching on campus may be suspended on the advice of government or regulatory guidance, however it may still be possible for some sessions to go ahead	Prioritisation planning should be in place to determine which programmes would be most adversely impacted by a loss of face-to-face teaching, (for example programmes with practical elements). At department -level a clear prioritisation plan should be produced and discussed at faculty-level to ensure that access to face-to-face learning is managed by reducing the impact on the student experience as far as possible.
Localised endemic or pandemic outbreak on campus relating to a particular cohort or department during the teaching period	Face-to-face teaching on campus may be suspended for particular cohorts of students and staff who are ill and/or self-isolating, affecting the delivery of face-to-face teaching for this group	As in the event of a lockdown situation, students should be given access to online materials and teaching sessions, if possible, to minimise the impact on their studies. If a cohort is missing a key practical element of the programme, then plans should be made to deliver that aspect of the programme once students and staff are cleared to be back on campus. Clear and timely communications to students will be key in this scenario.

Scenario	Potential Impact	Planning
Lockdown in countries outside the UK occurring before the start of a semester	Students may not be able to return to the country to attend on-campus teaching or assessment activities due to their own or UK/Scottish Government guidance	Teaching and assessment activities should be made available online, where possible, to allow students to continue to engage with their studies. If students from the same programmes are missing practical sessions, thought should be given to delivering these again if the students can return to campus at a later date.
Local or national lockdown during the formal assessment period	Planned on-campus assessments cannot take place on the advice of Government guidance	Plans should be produced for delivering the formal assessment period by other means, drawing on experience and good practice from the Covid-19 pandemic, with the use of online examinations/alternatives to practical assessments with a clear rationale for students as to how ILOs can still be met. Staff should refer to the Formal Assessment Period: Guidance in the Event of Disruption.
Widespread endemic or pandemic outbreak on campus during the formal assessment period	Several planned on-campus assessments cannot take place	Prioritisation planning should be in place to identify which on-campus assessments should be prioritised. Assessments that can be undertaken online, should be moved to this mode of delivery. In cases where students are at a higher risk from an outbreak, or confirm that they are uncomfortable to attend campus, alternative assessment arrangements should be put in place, or the assessment should be repeated later, if possible. Depending on how widespread the disruption caused by an outbreak or endemic, the University may require students to apply formally for such arrangements.

Scenario	Potential Impact	Planning
Localised endemic or pandemic outbreak on campus relating to a particular cohort or department during the formal assessment period	A cohort and staff are unable to undertake planned on-campus assessments due to a localised outbreak	Consideration should be given to delaying assessments and rescheduling for when students and staff are cleared for on campus attendance again. Clear and timely communications with the student body will be key in this scenario.
Disruption to placements due to national or local lockdown or outbreaks in placement sites	Students are unable to complete their placement activity	Planning for this eventuality will depend on the nature of the placement. If the placement is short, it may be possible for the student to liaise directly with the placement provider to arrange another placement opportunity. It may also be possible to undertake the placement online. For longer placements that form a core part of the programme, Programme Leaders will need to consider whether other activities could replace the placement whilst ensuring that the programme ILOs are still achieved. For programmes accredited by professional bodies and with placements that must be undertaken to achieve accreditation, Programme Leaders will need to liaise with the professional bodies to determine how best to proceed and will need to discuss the outcome with students to answer any concerns.
Disruption to other off-campus activities due to national or local lockdown or outbreaks in external sites	Students are unable to engage with physical collaborative or professional opportunities that form a core part of their programme, i.e. 1 to 1 or group counselling sessions in counselling programmes.	Programme Leaders should encourage students to liaise with professional partners to explore online alternatives to planned face-to-face sessions. For collaborative provision programmes, Programme Leaders will need to liaise with partners to determine whether activities planned in other institutions/with those in industry can be rescheduled or conducted online.

Scenario	Potential Impact	Planning
Loss of access to on campus and online learning and teaching activities due to widespread energy blackouts, cyber attacks etc.	Students and staff are unable to access broadband and electrical power off campus and are unable to travel to campus due to lack of public transport and safety arrangements for on campus spaces	Programme Leaders should devise a catch-up plan for when energy is restored and consider changes to assessments in cases where ongoing energy challenges mean that it is not possible for students to catch up on missed activities, even with the provision of online materials.
Disruption to teaching activities due to industrial action, including action short of a strike, such as a marking boycott	Students miss lectures/seminars and in some cases will not be provided with materials to cover missed activities. In cases where action short of a strike occurs, there may be delays in Boards of Examiners being able to consider progression and outcomes. If a marking boycott were to occur, students may be missing a significant number of marks, affecting progression and outcomes.	Heads of Department are responsible for managing arrangements locally to ensure that in cases where materials are not provided to cover missed teaching activities, Boards of Examiners are made aware of the situation affecting cohorts and take this into account, as broad personal circumstances, when reviewing individual student profiles. As happened during the Covid-19 pandemic, they will be asked to consider students' historic grades as well as reviewing their performance in the given year. In cases where marks are missing, Boards of Examiners will be directed by Senate to make decisions based on the students' whole profiles, as happened during the Covid-19 pandemic.
Significant incident restricting access to campus on an ongoing basis, i.e. a terrorist incident or ongoing threat or destruction of buildings on campus, for example via a fire.	This is unlikely to impact all students but it may affect cohorts, for example, if access cannot be gained to a building where practical work takes place, i.e. a lab, due to damage to the building	Heads of Department put in place contingency plans for teaching activities and for assessment activities and ensure that these are reported to Boards of Examiners so that they can be considered when progression and outcome decisions are made.

Scenario	Potential Impact	Planning
Adverse weather, or national industrial action, causing widespread and ongoing disruption to the transport system	Students and staff are unable to attend campus for lectures, seminars and formal assessments	Much like planning for endemic or pandemic outbreaks restricting access to campus, Programme Leaders should work with Module Leaders to ensure a pivot to online learning and assessment where possible, and to provide catch up materials online.

STUDENT PROGRESSION/AWARDS

18. The University is committed to ensuring that widespread, significant disruption does not detrimentally affect students' academic performance at module or programme level.

19. The University community will build on experiences from previous academic years and reflect on emerging good practice during this period, particularly in relation to the Covid-19 outbreak. It is possible to manage the assessment of all students in all years of undergraduate and postgraduate taught study (Years 1-5) through periods of widespread, significant disruption and to ensure that progression/award of degrees is achieved.

20. For accredited programmes there may be some challenges that require an element of compromise, however, wherever possible, progression and award decisions will be made to incorporate eligibility for professional registration. Where an expected award decision and professional registration is not possible, this must be communicated to students, and alternative arrangements put in place to achieve this at the earliest opportunity.

21. The University's Procedure and Guidance for Markers and Boards of Examiners in the Event of Widespread, Significant Disruption, focuses on ensuring no academic detriment in circumstances arising from the pandemic. Supplementary guidance to the Procedure and Guidance for Makers and Boards of Examiners will reflect information circulated to students and will take account of any approved alternative arrangements to the Formal Assessment Period to enable the University to facilitate:

    a. Credible and secure arrangements for the progression of years 1-5; and
    b. Recommendations for awards for all years of study.

22. Decisions taken by Boards of Examiners' will be based on academic judgement and therefore not subject to appeal on these grounds.