

# University Principles and Policies on Off-Campus Assessment



## Purpose

1. This policy and guidance document has four specific objectives:
  - a. To provide a set of principles to govern the setting, invigilation and submission, and marking of off-campus assessments.
  - b. To outline the specific University procedures for off-campus examinations, including resits.
  - c. To clarify the guidelines and requirements for study abroad assessments (incoming and outgoing students).
  - d. To provide guidance on the design and administration of assessments taken in distance learning mode, including coursework and examinations.

## Scope

2. The principles established in this document apply to all summative assessments, coursework and examinations, either taken by students in an 'off-campus' setting or marked and/or moderated 'off-campus'. 'Campus' is defined as the Newcastle main campus or any of the University's branch campuses or partnership sites, in the UK or overseas. 'Off-campus' is defined as any location not included in the above definition, including placement sites, study abroad locations, and students' 'home' environments. The principles do not apply to formative assessments.
3. The policies outlined for off-campus examinations, placement/study abroad and distance learning assessments apply only to assessments in those areas, and a discrete scope has been stipulated for each. The policies outlined in those sections apply only to taught programmes (UG and PGT) and the taught components of research programmes. The policies outlined in the section on Postgraduate Research degrees apply only to research (PGR) programmes.
4. Any exemptions to these policies must be approved by the relevant Undergraduate or Postgraduate Dean.

## Principles

5. The University's Principles on Off-Campus Assessment are:
  - a. Newcastle University takes all reasonable measures to assure the integrity of its assessment processes and the standards of its academic awards. In particular, there are measures in place to assure the security of University assessments, including coursework and examinations, as far as reasonably practicable. The range of security measures is subject to periodic review.
  - b. As part of its security and quality assurance arrangements, the University normally requires that assessments are both invigilated and submitted on campus. As defined above, 'campus' includes University branch campuses and partnership sites. In these cases, as part of the legal agreement and partner approval process, the partnership organisation would normally agree to adopt University assessment security protocols. Any exceptions to Newcastle assessment protocols should be agreed as part of the partnership agreement and approval process. There are four exceptions to this principle, each of which will be addressed in specific sections below:
    - i. When an individual student request to sit examinations off-campus has been approved (generally resits, and generally at overseas venues).
    - ii. When Newcastle students submit coursework or take examinations while on a study abroad programme or placement.

- iii. When distance learning students submit coursework or take examinations either online or in an off-campus site.
- iv. When a research student or an examiner cannot attend an examination on-campus and approval has been given by the relevant Postgraduate Dean for alternative arrangements.
- c. The University recognises that staff will mark assessments off-campus, and that some assessments will be sent to external examiners or external supervisors (or, alternatively, from off-campus locations to campus to be marked). In such cases, every effort should be made to ensure the safety and security of the assessments and marking processes. Potential strategies for ensuring security may include, but are not limited to: maintaining electronic or duplicate copies of submissions, sending electronic files through secure means (i.e. University File Drop-Off service or University email servers), and sending physical assessments through secure means (i.e. Courier delivery).
- d. All coursework submitted off-campus (whether via the VLE or post) must be acknowledged by receipt in adherence to the Policy on Assessment and Feedback. Submission times must also be recorded, and any late submissions noted as such.

### **Policies on Off-Campus Examinations**

6. Students who have a permanent home address outside of the UK are allowed to take resit exams in a branch campus or British Council office in their home country, during January, May/June and August exam periods. If there is no British Council office available, students must seek an appropriate alternative venue (i.e. a higher education institution or a venue that regularly conducts degree-level examinations). The following conditions must be met:
    - a. The student has submitted an application by the set deadline (available through the Exams and Awards Office) and paid the appropriate fee.
    - b. The student has identified an appropriate off-campus exam location, which has in turn been approved by the Exams and Awards team. Students may contact the Exams and Awards team for advice in finding an appropriate venue, but this must be done early enough for the application to be submitted by the deadline.
    - c. The Exams and Awards team, in consultation with the module leader or other key academic as appropriate, has determined that the exam is suitable for off-campus arrangements.
    - d. The student has not previously been issued a formal warning or academic penalty in light of an assessment irregularity.
  7. Most written examinations will be suitable for off-campus arrangements, and for the purposes of equitable practice, any suitable exams should be available for off-campus resits. Module leaders who wish to make their written exams unavailable for off-campus resits must seek approval from the relevant Dean.
  8. Online examinations may be suitable for off-campus arrangements, depending on the resources available at the off-campus site. In the case of a closed-book online exam, it would be necessary to ensure a locked-down browser and/or strict invigilation so that the student did not access other web sites. It may be more appropriate for online examinations to be taken on paper in such instances.
  9. The University recognises that many non-written exam formats (e.g. oral exams, performances, practical and/or lab-based exams) may not be suitable for off-campus arrangements, and the Exams and Awards Office is not involved with the invigilation of non-written examination formats. If a student applies to resit an exam of this type, it is the responsibility of the academic unit to handle this request and make suitable arrangements if it is approved.
  10. The Exams and Awards team will ensure that all off-campus exam locations agree to abide by University protocols on a routine (i.e. annual) basis. Where possible, the Exams and Awards team should also encourage the use of branch campuses as an alternative exam location.
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11. Where an unseen examination is taken both on and off-campus, the Exams and Awards team must ensure that the start times are synchronised, or that the exam times are suitably overlapped so as to avoid the potential for collusion, taking into account international time zones. For this reason, off-campus exams may require a particularly early or late start time, and students may not be permitted to leave an off-campus exam before its end. It may also be necessary for the invigilator to stay with the students for a certain period of time after the completion of the exam. The exam start time, as determined by the Exams and Awards team, is not negotiable. In rare cases, if exam times cannot be synchronised, the Exams and Awards team may ask the module leader to provide an alternative exam paper or assessment; if this cannot be done, the student's application for an off-campus exam will be denied.
12. At the time of submitting the off-campus exam application, the student will pay the stated fee to the University; the fee must be paid separately for each exam arranged. The fee is refundable if for any reason the Exams and Awards office is unable to ensure suitable and secure arrangements for the exam. In addition, the student will be responsible for the direct costs of any off-campus exam, e.g. any fees due to the host venue for invigilation, use of facilities, etc.
13. UK students will not normally be permitted to take off-campus resit examinations. However, a concession may be made under exceptional circumstances, following on a recommendation made by a Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) committee and approval by the relevant Dean. In these exceptional circumstances, the Exams and Awards team will work with the academic unit to organise appropriate and secure exam invigilation.
14. Students (UK or overseas) will not normally be permitted to take first attempt examinations off-campus. However, a concession may be made under exceptional circumstances, following on a recommendation made by a PEC committee and approval by the relevant Dean. In these exceptional circumstances, the Exams and Awards team will work with the academic unit to organise appropriate and secure exam invigilation.
15. If a student fails to attend a scheduled off-campus examination that has been arranged at his/her request, and does not attend the relevant on-campus exam scheduled at the same time, the normal regulations for non-attendance will apply – i.e. the student is deemed to have failed the attempt and a mark of 0 is recorded.
16. Reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate exam provisions that have been granted for students when they submit applications to sit exams off-campus. However, it may not be possible for certain provisions to be accommodated, depending on the provision and the off-campus venue, and the Exams and Awards office will assess such applications on a case-by-case basis. Where provisions are not feasible, the academic unit may be asked to provide an alternative form of assessment; if this cannot be done, the student's application will be denied.

## **Policies on Study Abroad and Placement Assessments**

### *In-coming Study Abroad Students*

17. Academic units are required to provide alternative assessments (either alternatively timed or in an alternative format) for modules that are available to non-EU exchange or study abroad students for Semester One. Schools are not required to provide alternative assessments for Science Without Borders students or EU exchange students. Any alternative form of assessment must be approved by Faculty Education Committee.
18. Semester One study abroad students must either sit an invigilated exam on-campus before returning to their home institutions OR submit an assessment in an alternative format (e.g. a written essay or report). In the latter case, students should submit electronically to Turnitin so that plagiarism checks can be made as necessary.

19. Semester Two and year-long study abroad students (including those full-year students who commence study in Semester 2) are expected to complete any required assessments on campus with the rest of their module cohort.

### **Newcastle Students on Study Abroad**

20. The University is responsible for considering the appropriateness of study abroad partners when institutional-level agreements (or Erasmus agreements for European partners) are put in place. At that time, a judgement will be made by the University as to the appropriateness of the student experience at the study abroad institution, including assessment policies and procedures.
21. Newcastle students studying abroad will normally complete assessments (coursework and exams) at the study abroad institution, although some assessments may be submitted once the student returns to Newcastle campus, and will adhere to the assessment practices of the study abroad institution.

### **Newcastle Students on Placement**

22. Newcastle students who undertake placements that are part of their degrees (as opposed to a 'year out' in which students have suspended their studies) will normally be expected to complete assessments linked to their placement learning objectives. If coursework related to the placement is completed off-campus, it must be submitted through Turnitin (where technically possible) so that plagiarism checks can be made. Physical copies may be submitted in addition and should be posted in a secure fashion, following the general principle outlined above.
23. If a student on placement sits examinations off-campus, then secure arrangements must be agreed by the academic unit and placement supervisor and signed as part of the student's learning agreement at the outset of the placement.
24. If any physical copies of assessments are circulated (i.e. from the placement site to markers on campus), the academic unit is responsible for ensuring their security. The general principle above should be followed in such instances.

### **Policies on Distance Learning Students**

25. The University must take all reasonable and practicable steps to ensure that students' assessed work can be attributed to them and that any methods for the transfer of work are secure and reliable. Academic units should adopt methods for verifying the identity of distance learners, appropriate to the type of assessment; methods should be clarified in the assessment field of the MOF and approved by the relevant Dean.
26. Attention should be paid to assessment design, so that students are neither penalised nor benefitted by taking the assessment off-campus. The Learning and Teaching Development Service can be consulted on appropriate assessment design and secure assessment methods, including Blackboard exams and the use of Personal Capture.
27. Where possible appropriate coursework should be submitted to Turnitin. Any text-based summative work that is worth 30% or more of a 20 credit module (or the equivalent of 6 credits) must be submitted to Turnitin. If submission to Turnitin is not possible for any reason (i.e. the file size is too large), then the module leader should adopt alternative secure arrangements – either submission to Turnitin in smaller instalments, submission via University Drop-Off, or secure delivery with proof of posting.
28. Distance-Learning students must sit examinations either on-campus or in a designated and approved examination centre. The Exams and Awards team is responsible for liaising with the relevant module leader or other appropriate staff to agree the examination site(s) and arrange appropriate invigilation.

Arrangements made by the Exams and Awards office are non-negotiable by students, although PEC forms may be submitted as necessary.

### Policies for Research Degree Programmes

29. When research (PhD and MPhil) theses are sent to examiners off-site, every effort should be made to ensure the safety and security of the assessment. Electronic files should be sent through secure means (i.e. University File Drop-Off service) and physical copies should be sent by Courier.
30. As stipulated in the University Regulations, it is expected that all oral examinations will take place on-campus unless specifically requested otherwise and that all expected attendees are present on campus. With the approval of the relevant Dean of Postgraduate Studies, an oral examination for a candidate may be held off-campus. In these circumstances, both examiners and the candidate are generally expected to be present. Only in very exceptional circumstances may the Dean permit other arrangements to be made – i.e. when either the candidate or one of the examiners is not able to be present on campus.
31. Approval for an oral examination to be conducted by video link (or equivalent audio-visual service) will be given only where the integrity of the examination can be guaranteed. Any time difference between the two locations should be taken into account and the timing of the examination planned to ensure that the candidate is not disadvantaged in any way. The candidate and examiners must be able to see each other at all times during the examination, and advice on appropriate audio-visual facilities can be obtained from NUIT. Any materials brought into the examination by the candidate must be declared and visible to the examiners at all times.

32. Last modified by LTDS, August 2019

Reviewed by LTDS, September 2021

This document is primarily intended for:

Degree Programme Directors / Directors of Studies; Module Leaders; staff in academic units supporting off-campus assessment

Contact:

[lt ds@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:lt ds@ncl.ac.uk) 0191 20 83978