Possible Disruption to Programme delivery, Examinations and Assessments arising from an emergency situation.

Guidance for Deans, Heads of Academic Units, Chairs and Conveners / Secretaries of Boards of Studies, Boards of Examiners and PEC Committees.

An emergency situation, in the context of this guidance, means any event or circumstance beyond the reasonable control of the University that adversely affects the University's ability to conduct programme delivery, examinations and assessment in accordance with usual practices and policy. The full definition of an emergency situation is set out in General Regulation W75 and includes industrial action and the impact of an epidemic or pandemic.

Once Senate has declared an emergency situation, this Guidance will normally be followed until the end of Semester 3 of the Academic Year (and associated assessments) directly affected by the emergency situation, unless extended, or concluded at an earlier date, by a further resolution of Senate at an extraordinary meeting requested by Senate.

[The Guidance has been prepared by Professor Suzanne Cholerton (PVC Learning and Teaching) and Mrs Lesley Braiden (Academic Registrar), in consultation with: Mrs Angela McNeill (Head of Student Progress Service); Dr Oli King (Chair of Regulations Working Group); Dr Sara Marsham (Chair, Taught Programmes Sub-Committee); Professor John Kirby (PG Dean FMS, Chair of PGR Sub-Committee) and Dr Richard Harrison (Head of Learning and Teaching Development Service), taking account of comments from Executive Board, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Deans and Directors of Faculty Operations.]

1. **General**

1.1 Through this Guidance, Deans, Heads of Academic Units, Directors of Excellence in Learning and Teaching (DELTs), Chairs and Conveners / Secretaries of Boards of Studies, Boards of Examiners and Personal Extenuating Circumstances (PEC) Committees are empowered by Senate to take decisions and responsibilities relating to procedures and approaches which fall outside the normal regulations, in order to protect the interests of students, and the maintenance of academic quality and standards, in the context of a declared emergency.

Heads of Academic Units may also, under the provisions of this Guidance, require School or Institute managers to undertake specific tasks in the context of a declared emergency.

The Guidance assumes the availability of Heads of Academic Unit, Deans and Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellors to undertake the responsibilities outlined. In the absence of these members of staff, authority for decisions would lie first with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching; then other academic members of Executive Board; and ultimately with the Vice-Chancellor.

1.2 A summary of normal roles and processes is provided in the Appendix. Roles vary between Academic Units. As far as possible, in any emergency situation recognised by Senate, normal practice should be followed. Taking into account any guidance issued by Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committees (FLTSECs), if available, the Chairs of FLTSECs, Heads of Academic Unit or their nominees will however have authority to alter normal quality assurance and regulation requirements – as detailed in this guidance - if warranted by the unusual circumstances.

The same principles apply in the case of matters affecting PGR students, with the Chairs of Graduate School Committees and Heads of Academic Unit or their
nominees having authority as described above.

As an over-arching principle, all changes from normal procedure or regulation made under the auspices of this Guidance must be recorded and retained for scrutiny by Senate after the emergency situation has ended.

1.3 Any Head of Academic Unit or Dean who is unable to act in accordance with this guidance must inform their Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor so that alternative arrangements can be made.

1.4 Any Examinations Convener, Secretary or Chair of a Board of Studies, Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee or Board of Examiners who is unable to act in accordance with this guidance must inform the relevant Head of Academic Unit so that alternative arrangements can be made. The Head of Academic Unit should nominate for appointment a suitable Acting Convener / Secretary / Chair. The nomination of acting staff should be promptly advised to the Chair of FLTSEC, Director of Faculty Operations and the Examination & Awards Team (exams@ncl.ac.uk). In such circumstances, the Head of Academic Unit should normally assume the role of Chair of the Board of Examiners or Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee. If the Head of Academic Unit is unable to find staff able to fulfil the role of Convener or Secretary, s/he should consult the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor who shall be authorised to allow alternative arrangements.

1.5 Heads of Academic Unit are responsible for considering the impact of emergency events that lead to the cancellation of scheduled sessions and are authorised to make all reasonable efforts to ensure that learning opportunities are provided to enable students to meet learning outcomes for their modules and programmes.

1.6 It is the collective responsibility of members of Boards of Examiners to ensure preparation of papers for assessment. They have a responsibility to do all they reasonably can to ensure that students’ performance is properly and fully assessed. Heads of Academic Units and Chairs/Conveners / Secretaries of Boards of Examiners have a leadership role in this regard.

2. **Programme delivery affected by cancellation of classes or other sessions**

2.1 The Chair of the Board of Studies, or the Head of Academic Unit on the Chair’s behalf, may determine arrangements to provide learning opportunities that allow students to meet learning outcomes for their modules and programmes.

2.2 When considering any appropriate arrangements made to mitigate the impact of an emergency situation on programme delivery, the following principles should be applied:

- Consistency of approach, as far as reasonably possible
- There should be a focus on the availability or delivery of content that allows students to meet the learning outcomes of the module or programme affected.
- Fairness to students in terms of the weight of assessment, the timing of assessments and the application of appropriate deadlines
- Reasonable timing of any alternative arrangements (eg to ensure that these do not cause a clustering of assessment deadlines or other problems for students)

2.3 Any other options which do not take account of the above principles must be approved by the Chair of the relevant FLTSEC.

2.4 Particular care should be taken to assess and mitigate the impact of the loss of dissertation support and supervision.
2.5 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching), in consultation with the Academic Registrar and the relevant Deans will maintain an overview of arrangements to ensure that the above principles are applied, to ensure consistency and fairness.

3. **Assessment deadlines and timescales**

3.1 In line with the normal provisions of the Assessment and Feedback Principles, the Head of Academic Unit, in consultation with the Chair of FLTSEC and, where possible, with the relevant Degree Programme Directors (DPDs), is responsible for determining whether cohort deadlines for the submission of assessed work should be extended to take account of an emergency situation which make the original deadlines inappropriate or unachievable.

3.2 The Head of Academic Unit, in consultation with the Chair of FLTSEC and, where possible, with the relevant DPDs, is responsible for determining whether it is possible for feedback to be provided within the 20-day turnaround time specified in the Assessment and Feedback Policy; and for determining any appropriate revised feedback arrangements.

3.3 In the event that examination papers need to be revised to ensure no disadvantage to students affected by the emergency situation, the Academic Registrar will review the centrally-set deadlines for submission of examination papers, and the options for revisions after the deadline, in consultation with the Head of Academic Unit and Head of the Student Progress Service.

4. **Co-Requisite and Pre-requisite modules**

4.1 Heads of Academic Unit and Boards of Studies will need to consider how to mitigate, over a period of time, any gaps in students’ learning during an emergency situation that may affect subsequent module choices or potential ability to meet the learning outcomes.

5. **Setting and marking of assessments**

5.1 The Head of Academic Unit is responsible for ensuring that appropriate assessments are set. These should reflect the general principle that students are not required to answer examination questions on topics where the curriculum has not been delivered in a way that would make it reasonable for such questions to be answered. In some cases where papers have already been set this might require changes in the rubric of an examination paper (for example, to give a wider choice of questions). Such changes can be agreed by the Head of Academic Unit in consultation with the Chair of FLTSEC.

Determining the extent to which the material has been sufficiently delivered to allow for assessment to be reasonable will be a matter of consultation and judgement involving the Head of Academic Unit and the member of staff concerned. Consideration should also be given to the reasonable balance between delivered topics and appropriately supported self-study.

5.2 Initial action must seek to ensure that assessments and examinations are set in accordance with the assessment pattern detailed in the module outline or relevant programme documentation for non-modular programmes. If this is not possible, alternative assessments will need to be set. The Head of Academic Unit is authorised:

- To make changes as necessary to the assessment requirements for a module, in consultation with the Chair of the FLTSEC, with consideration of the intended learning outcomes (this includes, for example, deferring in-course tests). Such changes will have due regard to any professional accreditation requirements. (It is
recognised that alternate assessments may test different learning outcomes, but will
nevertheless give assurance of the student’s abilities on the module and the
programme.) Where this is the case it will be necessary to ensure that the overall
programme’s learning outcomes have been appropriately assessed.

- To dispense with External Examiner scrutiny of draft assessments (including draft
  examination papers) if this will unduly delay arrangements for assessment.
  (Normally, this will entail additional internal arrangements to assure quality, on a
  case-by-case basis.)

5.3 The Head of Academic Unit should also make all reasonable efforts to ensure
that assessed work is marked in advance of the scheduled meetings of Boards
of Examiners. The Head of Academic Unit is authorised to adjust normal
marking, scaling and moderation procedures if necessary. Such adjustments
will be reported to the Boards of Examiners.

5.4 Heads of Academic Unit must also ensure that resit assessments are available. It
should be noted that University regulations already allow for the format of the resit
assessment to vary from that of the original, Students should be notified of any
new format.

5.5 Once the emergency situation has been resolved, it will be necessary to recover the
situation, in so far as is practicable, as quickly as possible. In particular, it will be
necessary for the Head of Academic Unit to decide which of those assessments /
examinations which have not been held can proceed, and when they will take place
(see 9.1). In arranging such assessments Heads of Academic Unit must have
regard to the need to expedite outstanding assessments and avoid delay wherever
reasonably practicable. This need for follow-up remedial action should be borne in
mind wherever arrangements are being made to cope with the emergency.

5.6 Where revised assessments are set, the period allowed for student completion must
be sufficient to provide an equivalent opportunity for the student to submit, as normally
allowed for a similar assessment and may require submission during the vacation
(Academic Units must ensure that appropriate means for submission from a distance
are available). All efforts should be made to ensure that there is sufficient time
between submission of the coursework and the next Board of Examiners to enable
assessment to be completed in time for consideration by that Board of Examiners.

6. Communications

6.1 General communications with the entire student body about the impact of the
emergency situation and the steps to be taken to mitigate it will be co-ordinated and
managed by the office of the Academic Registrar.

6.2 The prime responsibility for notifying students of the specific impact of the
emergency situation in terms of the academic programme and associated
arrangements rests with Academic Units. Heads of Academic Unit should take
responsibility for communication for all modules owned by the Academic Unit. In
view of the large number of students taking modules outside of their own Academic
Unit, Heads of Academic Unit should be cautious about any pronouncements that
affect a programme of study. Advice to students shall be in accordance with this
and any supplementary guidance. Where possible, such advice must be given
using the NUContacts\(^6\) system, and must be copied to the Head of the student’s
Academic Unit and the Examinations & Awards Team.

\(^6\)Newcastle University Contacts system, used to send emails to student
cohorts: https://nucontact.ncl.ac.uk/GUI/Toppage.aspx
Every effort should be taken to ensure that all candidates are contacted, including external candidates. In particular, students shall be advised, as soon as possible, which if any assessments / examinations may not take place as scheduled and of any alternate assessment requirements.

6.3 There will be an assumption that all assessments are going ahead and students should assume that they are to complete all assessments. Formal notice to students relating to any cancelled examination/assessment for specific modules is to be provided in reasonable time by the Head of Academic Unit – and the communication must be copied to the Examinations & Awards Team and the Chair and Secretary of the Board of Examiners.

6.4 Heads of Academic Units are asked to act as the key channel of communication with the Director of Faculty Operations on the impact of the emergency on individual assessments. Directors of Faculty Operations will contact Academic Units about course work and examinations, with a view to ascertaining which, if any, may be affected by the emergency.

6.5 The Examination & Awards Team will maintain a central listing of the examinations which it understands to be affected by the emergency situation. Heads of Academic Units and Directors of Faculty Operations must advise of changes as soon as possible.

7. Management of Examinations

7.1 The Examinations & Awards Team (or Learning and Teaching Development Service for OLAF assessments) will work with Academic Units on matters such as the availability of examination papers, and availability of staff to answer any queries for each examination. This will include any explanations to candidates about adjustments to the rubric of an examination paper necessary to reflect the impact of the emergency situation (eg to give a wider choice of questions).

7.2 If no staff are available to answer any queries which arise during an examination, the senior invigilator will note this. The Examinations & Awards Team will maintain a central record and the information will be made available to Chairs of Boards of Examiners.

7.3 Examination scripts will be collected by the Examinations and Awards Team and returned to the Academic Unit Office. The Head of Academic Unit should inform the Examinations & Awards Team where this is not possible, so that scripts can be securely stored by the Examinations & Awards Team if necessary. Otherwise, all scripts are, initially, to be given to the Head of Academic Unit who must retain custody of any scripts that are not being marked due to the emergency.

7.4 If an examination is taken or an assessment submitted, but not marked, it is the responsibility of the Head of Academic Unit to ensure not only that scripts are stored safely but also marked as soon as possible after the emergency situation is ended.

8. Release of marks

8.1 In accordance with normal practice, the Head of Academic Unit (often via a Chair of a Board of Examiners at a module moderation board) should ensure that module results are collated, reviewed and released for Board of Examiners consideration. In addition, the Head of Academic Unit should ensure that a full record is made of any data gaps resulting from the emergency situation. At this stage, consideration should also be given to whether there is an opportunity to obtain the missing results at a later stage. (see 9.1). This information should be circulated to relevant Boards of Examiners, Directors of Faculty Operations and the Examinations & Awards Team – codified as follows:
9. **Arrangements for Boards of Examiners**

9.1 **Preparation of papers**

9.1.1 In accordance with normal practice, the Chair of a Board of Examiners€ should ensure that:

- Students are advised of the normal arrangement for advising of personal extenuating circumstances. (The notice to students about PECα forms should advise that the Board will take into account the impact of the emergency situation in reaching decisions on candidates in the context of the results as a whole.) This includes advising students about any special PEC arrangements or procedures which have been agreed in the light of the emergency situation.

[Note: As a general principle, the PEC procedure is intended to take account of individual circumstances. Issues affecting whole modules or cohorts would typically be considered under the procedures for moderation and scaling. In an emergency situation, however, the PEC submission provides a suitable, familiar process for students, through which they can document how an emergency situation has affected them or their work.]

- That the Secretary€ is making arrangements to collate PECα forms and convene a meeting of the PEC Committeeα and relay recommendations to the Board of Examiners.

- That the Secretary€ is making arrangements to convene the Board of Examiners and to collate results in the normal format for the Board of Examiners.

---

€ Or Acting Chair / Acting Secretary as appropriate

α PEC – Personal Extenuating Circumstances

† If the emergency situation would prevent a Personal Extenuating Circumstances Committee from operating, the Head of Academic Unit may nominate new membership.
9.1.2 In addition, the Secretary and Chair of the Board of Examiners should take steps to inform themselves, in advance of the meeting of the Board, of the effect that the emergency situation has had on assessments for students on the programme/s. This must include information on modules run by other Academic Units.

9.2 Membership of Boards of Examiners

9.2.1 University Examination Conventions specify that:

‘The relevant degree programme directors and named representatives of the main areas of study involved in the programme shall be present at meetings of the board of examiners. The appointed external examiners shall normally be present at meetings of the Board of Examiners at which qualifications are awarded.’

There is also exceptional provision for the External Examiner(s) to be consulted in writing if s/he cannot attend the meeting. There is no further prescription on attendance, and no quorate definition. Paragraph 6.3 also applies.

The Board must have sufficient knowledge of degree programme regulations to have confidence in any progress / classification decision taken. Therefore, noting normal University regulations and this guidance, it is the responsibility of the Chair to determine whether the Board is sufficiently attended to enable progression / award decisions to be taken.

9.2.2 The Board may proceed in the absence of a Degree Programme Director, if the Chair and other attendees at the Board of Examiners have sufficient expertise about the programme regulations.

If the Head of Academic Unit, Chair of the Board of Examiners or Chair of the PEC Committee declares that they are unable to run a Board of Examiners and / or a PEC Committee or that the Board has been unable to make decisions on a significant number of students, the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor has authority to convene an extraordinary Faculty Review Board.

The purpose of this review is to consider the results for all students on a programme to determine whether decisions can be based on the balance of evidence and the standard metrics used to determine progression and classification decisions. Membership of the Faculty Review Board is to include the PVC (or nominee), the relevant Dean, the relevant Head of Academic Unit and representatives from relevant subject disciplines (Heads of Academic Units or others). Where possible, membership should include the relevant External Examiner(s). If this is not possible, the External Examiner(s) should be consulted by telephone and email on classification decisions. There should be as much representation from the subject as practical. However, the purpose of the Faculty Review Board is to review the standard rules and metrics used to determine averages and degree classifications rather than to debate subject specific issues. The Faculty Review Board would also need to consider extenuating circumstances to determine whether moderation may apply in specific cases. As far as possible the Faculty Review Board should follow normal Board of Examiners protocols – section 7 may also apply.

9.3 External Examiners

9.3.1 If an External Examiner is unable to act, all reasonable efforts to find a replacement should be made: Heads of Academic Unit are empowered to do so. Note that the rules governing the appointment of External Examiners may be relaxed only in consultation with the Chair of FLTSEC. Changes to External Examiner arrangements should be reported to the Chair of FLTSEC and the Learning and Teaching Development Service as soon as possible.
9.3.2 Boards for non-final stages of a degree programme are empowered to proceed in the absence of one or more External Examiners.

9.3.3 Where no External Examiner is available for a final stage Board of Examiners, the Board must proceed and make provisional decisions on candidates. However, these provisional decisions must not be released until after the Chair of FLTSEC has been consulted. It is for the Chair of FLTSEC to determine whether these provisional results should be released, based on an assessment of the available marks, attendance at the Board and the QA protocols adopted within the Academic Unit to verify the available marks. The presence/absence of an External Examiner, or input from the External, at a Board of Examiners must be minuted.

9.4 Meetings

9.4.1 Boards of Examiners should plan to meet at the normal scheduled times, regardless of any prospective limitations in the availability of information. They should proceed as outlined in this Guidance, and be prepared to meet again as soon as is practicable when missing information becomes available.

9.4.2 Boards of Studies, which are required to assure and enhance the quality of the student learning experience and to maintain the standards of the award(s), should continue to meet at the normal scheduled times even though attendance may be reduced. The Boards should continue to monitor the summary results of module, stage and programme and consider alternative assessments, if required.

10 Board of Examiners decisions

10.1 Boards of Examiners are reminded that they are empowered to use discretion as they deem fit, in accordance with University regulations. That is:

‘... Notwithstanding the student’s results, and without prejudice to the requirements for professional accreditation, the board of examiners may, in its ultimate discretion:

(a) Deem a student to have passed specific modules – including core modules,
(b) Deem a student to have passed the stage of a programme.
(c) Deem a student to have progressed to the next stage of a programme, despite not meeting a specific progress regulation or examination convention.
(d) Recommend a student for an award, a higher award or a higher degree classification (see Exam Conventions 54 & 57). A recommendation for an award, for a higher award or a higher degree classification is not necessarily limited to the appropriate award or classification related to the student’s final programme average.

‘The exercise of discretion does not set a precedent as each individual case should be considered individually. However, in any discussion regarding the possible exercise of discretion, the board shall ensure that no student in similar circumstances has been treated less favourably.’

(UG Examination Conventions 38-39; 2017/18 edition). The wording of the equivalent Examination Conventions for Postgraduate (Taught) Programmes is slightly different, although the same principles apply.

10.2 Boards of Examiners should proceed on the basis that their core role is to decide whether individual students have satisfactorily demonstrated the achievement of the learning outcomes associated with the programme of study. They should be prepared to take full account of any disruption to examinations or assessments and to exercise discretion on an individual basis. This requires that Chairs and Secretaries are fully informed of the impact on individual candidates. Progression and award decisions taken by the Board must also comply with any external accreditation requirements.

10.3 Boards of Examiners will need to decide if they have sufficient evidence on which to
base a decision on achievement of learning outcomes in respect of each individual student. The guiding principle is that there should be sufficient evidence on which to base the decision of the Board. Sufficient information is not necessarily complete information, and the Board must use its discretion in deciding whether the available run of marks is sufficient to determine a progression decision. Boards should consider the balance of evidence available about a particular candidate. Boards considering candidates for whom professional accreditation issues arise must ensure that any decision based on incomplete results is consistent with the terms of the accreditation or is otherwise acceptable to the accrediting body. For some stages of a degree it may be appropriate to publish only a broad outcome (e.g. pass or fail) and then to reconvene if or when further information becomes available to determine a more detailed set of outcomes.

10.3.1 To avoid the risk of inconsistency in determining whether there is sufficient evidence for a decision to be made, Boards of Examiners should seek advice from the Chair of FLTSEC, in line with any further guidance issued.

10.4 Caution should be exercised, and if the Board is not convinced that sufficient evidence exists to enable decisions to be made on an academically sound, fair and consistent basis, they should not be made. If this is the case:

10.4.1 The Board should empower the Chair to make decisions as required at a later date or otherwise arrange for a re-convened Board.

10.4.2 Where the Chair is given authority to act, the Chair shall consult the Chair of FLTSEC before acting.

10.5 In accordance with normal procedures, the Board should retain a full minute when discretion is used – and, if appropriate, where discretion is withheld.

10.6 Non-final stages

10.6.1 For other than the final stage of a degree programme, it may be necessary for Boards to issue results in different levels of detail for different students – e.g. full results with marks/grades for some students but only pass/fail for others, and perhaps no results at all for some. This will depend on the extent of the evidence available to the Board on the achievement of learning outcomes by each candidate. The Board should ensure that a clear minute is taken of the evidence relied on in reaching decisions on individual students.

10.6.2 If a sufficient run of results is not available to support a progress decision, Boards should reconvene and agree more detailed results wherever practicable.

10.6.3 Where results continue to be unavailable, the Board may permit students to proceed to the subsequent stage of the programme, where it is judged that, on the evidence available, the student has gained the appropriate knowledge and skills to proceed to the next stage. This decision will take account of all evidence available including whether there is evidence of inadequate performance. For undergraduate students this decision will be made at the Board of Examiners meeting where results are considered. Students who are permitted to progress in the absence of full marks must be advised that such a decision is provisional and that their academic status will be reviewed when the full results are known. (See also paragraph 9.2).

10.7 Final stages

10.7.1 For the final stage of a degree programme, each Board will need to decide whether it has sufficient evidence to classify the result for each candidate. It is important that each Board has confidence in classification decisions which must be evidence based. Whether to award a classified degree, or a degree where the classification
has yet to be determined, is a matter for the Board in light of all the circumstances and with a view to being as fair as possible to each student. The Board may also choose to make no award to particular students if there is insufficient evidence to have confidence in the award, but this must be regarded as a decision of last resort to be avoided where possible.

10.7.2 To avoid the risk of inconsistency in determining whether there is sufficient evidence for a classification to be made, Boards of Examiners should seek advice from the Chair of FLTSEC, in line with any further guidance issued.

10.7.3 In line with the normal guidance for Boards of Examiners / PEC Committees, it is expected that Boards of Examiners will not consider students for a higher classification where there is little evidence of achievement at the higher level. It may therefore be more appropriate for students to be given another attempt at the affected assessment/s.

10.7.4 Where the results are incomplete and depending on the evidence available to them, Boards may choose for particular candidates:

- To award a classified degree.
  
  Depending on the specifics of the case, a classified degree may be awarded in the absence of a complete set of results where the Board is nonetheless satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to support the classification proposed.

- To award an unclassified degree.
  
  That is: to award an Honours degree (undergraduate) or a Pass degree (Postgraduate). If the Board does not have sufficient evidence to award a particular degree classification, the Board must consider whether it is able to make an interim unclassified decision awarding an Honours degree (undergraduate) or Pass (postgraduate), enabling the candidate to graduate, with the class of degree being decided when the emergency is resolved.

- To make normal resit / repeat decisions.

- Not to make any decision until further module results are known.

10.7.5 In accordance with the principle noted above, Boards may determine whether other awards can be made – for example, it may be possible for an undergraduate Board to award a pass degree/ Higher Education Diploma / Certificate, and for a postgraduate Board to award a Diploma/Certificate.

10.7.6 Boards should be very cautious about issuing fail results to individuals on the basis of incomplete information. The Board should ensure that a clear minute is taken of the evidence relied on in reaching decisions on individual students.

10.8 Taught Postgraduates: progression to dissertation stage of a Masters

10.8.1 A particular issue arises in respect of taught Masters degrees with an intermediate Diploma, or interim progression point, before permission is normally granted to proceed to the dissertation stage of the Masters programme. In cases of doubt as to progression, because of inadequate information, Boards of Examiners should allow students to progress to the dissertation / Masters stage but, as far as is practicable, students should have the degree of doubt explained to them to minimise disappointment and appeals if they fail the Masters stage. The degree of risk associated with progressing to Masters in the case of weaker students should be carefully explained to them at a meeting, and also in writing. Boards may need to be prepared to cope with difficult issues arising in a situation where a student does well in a Masters dissertation but is subsequently found to have performed at a ‘fail’
standard in preceding coursework or examinations, the results of which were unavailable to the Board at an earlier stage. (See 9.2).

11 **Research Postgraduates (PGR students)**

11.1 **Final award**

11.1.1 The situation here is less predictable, but the key issue is examination of MPhil/PhD theses. Specifically it can be anticipated that issues might arise for students who are in the process of being examined or for students who will shortly be submitting their theses for examination.

11.1.2 Particular care should be taken to mitigate negative impact on PGR students whose visa may be adversely affected by a delay in examination, or whose sponsors may have set rigorous and non-negotiable deadlines for completion.

11.1.3 It is the responsibility of individual members of staff to inform their Head of Academic Unit if they will be unable to perform their duties in respect of PGR student assessments.

11.1.4 Heads of Academic Units are responsible for ensuring that PGR students are informed, through the usual channels, if a member of staff will be unable to perform their assessment duties.

11.1.5 For students who are currently being examined there might be internal examiners who are unable to carry out their duties until such a time as the emergency situation has been resolved. In such circumstances the Head of the Academic Unit will need to consider whether it is appropriate to prepare an alternate nomination and ask the Dean of Postgraduate Studies to appoint an alternative internal examiner or second external Examiner, with an Independent Chair.

11.1.6 For students who submit their thesis for examination during an emergency situation there may be difficulties in appointing the examiners who have been identified as most appropriate. Should this occur the Head of Academic Unit will similarly need to give consideration to possible alternative examiners.

11.1.7 For members of staff who submit their theses for examination during an emergency situation, and for whom two External Examiners are normally required, the Head of Academic Unit might wish to consider making an exceptional request to the Dean of Postgraduate Studies for only one External Examiner and one internal examiner to be appointed (with an additional non-examining chair being appointed as normal).

11.1.8 Standards of degrees awarded must not be compromised. Reasonable flexibility in examination arrangements will be necessary, but it is not appropriate to proceed without an External Examiner. It may be advisable to appoint more external examiners than normally needed, in order to allow for some flexibility. If it is necessary to postpone an examination in order to maintain standards, this must be done.

11.1.9 In the event of re-examination and the internal examiner being unable to act, and it is not practical to replace the examiner, the Dean has discretion to act on the advice of the External Examiner (rather than both Examiners), or use the external examiner (rather than the internal), where only one examiner is required to check revisions. Similarly, it may be necessary to substitute the supervisor for checking minor corrections. Such matters should be considered on a case by case basis by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies to determine whether alternative mechanisms can be used.

11.1.10 Any adjustments to normal assessment arrangements approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies should be reported to University Learning, Teaching &
Student Experience Committee by the Graduate School Committee as part of the annual reporting cycle.

11.2 Progression

11.2.1 The University requires annual progression panels for research students. Heads of Academic Unit must seek to ensure that panels are convened where possible. It may also be appropriate for the Head of Academic Unit to chair progress panels. In the event that it is impossible for a progress panel to be convened, students will be permitted to progress to the next academic year of the programme and to register as normal. If appropriate, conditional candidature is deemed to be extended until the progress panel can be held. The advice above (7.6) in respect of weaker students applies. Heads of Academic Unit should ensure that progress panels are convened as soon as possible after the emergency is resolved.

11.3 A record of all progression decisions that fall outside the normal regulations must be logged by the Academic Unit.

12 Other notes

12.1 If there are missing assessments for a module.

12.1.1 If no assessment has been set for a particular module, it will be necessary for the Head of Academic Unit responsible for the module (via the module moderation board if appropriate) to determine whether the following options apply.

- Whether sufficient other evidence exists to enable a decision to be reached on a consistent basis about each student’s overall performance and achievement of a satisfactory range of learning outcomes.

  For the avoidance of doubt, it may be possible for the module result to be determined on the basis of available assessed elements for the module – e.g. if the module is normally assessed by course work and examination, but only the course work mark is available, the final result may be based on the course work. Normally, this will only apply if the completed assessments amount to 50% or more of the intended module assessment. Wherever possible, and subject to professional accreditation requirements, this option should be considered. (University General Regulation W71 refers)

- Whether it is appropriate to set an assessment at a later date without unduly disadvantaging students – e.g. an open book examination during the following term, or a take-away examination paper.

  This will need to take account of the fact that students from different degree programmes/stages may be studying the module. An alternative assessment may be possible – and is the normal requirement - for non-final stage modules where no assessment has previously been set. Only with permission from the Chair of FLTSEC can non-final stage assessments be dispensed with.

12.1.2 The Head of Academic Unit is empowered to make adjustments to the normal assessment pattern, in line with the above options, provided that a written proposal is also submitted to and approved by the Chair of FLTSEC. Consultation with the Chair of FLTSEC is required if neither of the above options is possible.

12.1.3 If there is no mark possible for a module, then the students must be deemed to have completed the module to a satisfactory standard. For the students’ future transcript this must be recorded as a # sign (or the weighted mark resulting from any partial assessment). A module decision code will be introduced to indicate
'Unusual circumstances outside of the candidate’s and the University's control prevented assessment. Candidate deemed to have passed the module.’ The Head of Academic Unit (that owns the module) shall ensure that this mark/decision is recorded in NESS/SAP Campus Management system and communicated to Boards of Examiners as necessary.

12.1.4 Ordinarily, Heads of Academic Unit should ensure that there is no requirement for a final stage student to take assessments at a later stage. If final stage assessments have been cancelled, the Board of Examiners must consider the award of a classified degree for the student, taking account of the missed assessments. Should a student appeal or dispute the classification (on the basis of marks not known at the time to the Board of Examiners), they will be given the opportunity to have an assessment in the relevant modules at a later date. This opportunity will be offered as a first attempt, so that the student is not penalised because of the emergency situation. Where the assessment for a module has been missed and this has a direct impact on accreditation, the Academic Unit must offer an appropriate assessment to students at a later date.

12.2 Correction of Errors

12.2.1 It is intended that Boards of Examiners will carefully assess the available run of marks before reaching a progress decision and that the Board will have confidence in any decisions made. However, the University must be prepared for any errors that may occur. Boards of Examiners have and will retain the right to amend factual errors. Any error will result in a case by case review and judgements will inevitably be influenced by timing. Therefore, the following statements are for general guidance only.

- Where possible, the Chair of the Board of Examiners should review the circumstances to determine whether a pass by discretion is appropriate.

- In the event of a non-final stage student being permitted to proceed and subsequently being discovered to have failed core modules, the Chair of the Board of Examiners should counsel the student as to their performance and the danger of proceeding. If however the student has registered for the subsequent academic year and is determined to continue their studies, they will be entitled to do so on the understanding that they accept the risk to their future academic performance. In this circumstance, a PEC adjustment will be deemed to have been granted to allow the student to proceed to the next stage ‘trailing’ that module.

- Where at all possible, Boards of Examiners should avoid situations where, in the following year, students are retrospectively deemed to have failed the current stage. Similarly they should avoid situations where students are retrospectively deemed ineligible for an Honours degree.

As a matter of principle, there should be no retrospective detrimental decisions once a Board of Examiners has made a decision to proceed.

If the Board cannot give such an undertaking, then the student must be advised that they could be retrospectively deemed to have failed the previous stage and they must be given the opportunity to suspend studies.

- If a final stage student has been advised that they have passed the degree as an interim decision but has subsequently been discovered to have failed key modules, the Chair of the Board of Examiners should urgently consult the student and advise of resit opportunities without detriment. This particularly applies to modules required for professional accreditation.

12.2.2 Other circumstances will require careful consultation with the appropriate Dean.
12.3 Attempts and resits

12.3.1 If a student is deemed to have failed a module, the normal arrangements for resits will apply. However, the timing of the resit may be subject to review, depending on the status of the emergency. The student will have used an attempt at the module and future maximum mark will be adjusted in accordance with normal regulations. The student will be expected to complete any resit examinations on campus in the normal manner, unless there is an approved arrangement under the policy for off-campus examinations.

12.3.2 Where an assessment has not been set due to the emergency, this will not count as an attempt at the module and thus no adjustment will be needed to treat any substituted arrangements as a first attempt. Alternative assessment may be required. Normally, this should not require the student to attend the campus during the resit period.

12.3.3 Every effort should be made to ensure that students who fail the initial attempt at a module, particularly where adjustments have been made under 2.1, have an opportunity to complete a resit (and be advised of the mark) before they need to re-register for a subsequent stage. In particular, efforts should be made to facilitate exceptional second attempts between the Board of Examiners meeting where resits are considered, and the start of the next academic year. However, subject to the number of failed modules and the permission of the Board of Examiners, if the emergency prevents this, the student will normally be deemed to have been granted an adjustment to proceed to the next stage ‘trailing’ that module/s.

12.4 Award Ceremonies

12.4.1 It is assumed that award ceremonies will proceed to the planned schedule, although it cannot be stated that all students due to attend ceremonies at the normal time will actually be able to do so. If appropriate, the Examinations and Awards Team will make contingency plans for additional award ceremonies at a later date.

13 Other

13.1 Where circumstances arise that are not covered, specifically or in principle, by these regulations, advice should be sought from the Chair of Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee or the Faculty Pro-Vice-Chancellor. If appropriate, the Chairs of other FLTSECs and/or senior University officers, and ultimately University Executive Board will be consulted to calibrate the advice provided.

13.2 For non-Faculty provision, the Chair of University Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee, and the relevant Head of Service, also have authority to act in accordance with this guidance.

13.3 References to Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committees in this guidance should also be read as extending to the Cross-Faculty Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee in respect of non-Faculty provision.

- This emergency guidance was approved by Senate in May 2006 and a supplementary clause (6.2.3 Faculty Review Boards) was approved by the VC in July 2006 as Chair of Senate.
- The document was refreshed in 2009 following adjustments to University regulations on emergencies.
- The document was again refreshed in March 2014, November 2014 and January 2015 to reflect revised nomenclature.
- This version revised and endorsed (with amendments) by Senate on 20 March 2018
## Appendix - Normal roles and responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chair of Faculty Teaching, Learning &amp; Student Experience Committee (FLTSEC)</td>
<td>Approval of module outline forms including assessment patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval of degree programme regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guidance to Heads of Academic Unit and Chairs of Boards of Examiners in support of normal QA protocols and the maintenance of standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of Academic Unit (HoU) (or occasionally a designated subject leader)</td>
<td>Ensuring that assessments are offered as stipulated in the module outline form, and that they are marked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensuring that normal procedures for the release of marks, Scrutiny Sub-Committees and Boards of Examiners are implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appointment of Chair of Boards of Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nomination of External Examiner appointments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of Boards of Studies (Degree Programme Director DPD)</td>
<td>Ensuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience along with the quality and standard of the award. Responsible for annual review of programme content and delivery for report to FLTSEC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensuring that programmes have a Moderation and Scaling Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appointment of the Chair/Secretary of a PEC Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examinations Convener</td>
<td>Co-ordinating the submission of examination papers to the Examinations &amp; Awards Team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liaison with the Examinations &amp; Awards Team in the event of any queries. (May also be the Secretary of Board of Examiners.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary of Board of Examiners</td>
<td>Collating papers and arranging the PEC Committee and the Board of Examiners, ensuring appropriate minutes and implementation as requested by the Chair of the Board of Examiners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of Personal Ex turating Circumstances Committee (PECC)</td>
<td>Consideration of individual students mitigating circumstances and requests for adjustments to assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Approval of immediate adjustments to assessments such as extensions to assignments or deferral of examinations along with setting aside previous attempts at a module, semester or stage of a degree programme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A PEC Committee provides Boards of Examiners with an assessment of the scope and severity of mitigating circumstances affecting a student which have not already been addressed by an adjustment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair of Board of Examiners (BoE)</td>
<td>Oversight of the arrangements for the examination and assessment process for the programme / Academic Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chair of the Board of Examiners (who is also in some cases Chair of the PEC Committee).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ensuring that progress/award decisions are taken in accordance with regulations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liaison with External Examiners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicating decisions to the Examinations &amp; Awards Team. Ensuring appropriate action on Board decisions within the Academic Unit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion with individual students, as required, on particular progress issues.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Module Leader

Responsible for the day-to-day management of the module, through the Degree Programme Director, to the Head of the Academic Unit.

Responsible for the quality and standard of the module and ensuring it adheres to the Faculty, University regulations, policies & Procedures.

Coordinates the work of all staff contributing to the module in terms of delivery, assessment, feedback and moderation.

Coordinating with the DPD the dates for assessment and ensuring the feedback of assessed work.

Normal process

1. Board of Studies approves pattern of teaching & assessment

2. Module leader determines assessments.

3. Examination papers approved by External Examiners

4. Module leader arranges for in course assignment and deadline to be set

5. Academic Unit Examinations Convener arranges for examination papers to be collated for the Academic Unit and sent to the Examinations & Awards Team.

6. Examinations & Awards Team manage the timetabling of examinations and make arrangements for scripts to be securely delivered to the Academic Unit Office.

7. Module leader arranges for assessments to be marked.

8. Academic Unit owning the module release marks to Boards of Examiners. (There may be a module moderation board to approve marks before release).

9. Secretary to Board of Examiners arranges for PEC Committee to meet to consider personal circumstances.

10. Chair of Board of Examiners liaises with External Examiner and ensures arrangements are in place for sampling etc.

11. Secretary to Board of Examiners arranges for module results to be collated and prepared in a format acceptable to the Board of Examiners and for the meeting of the Board.

12. Chair of Board of Examiners ensures that a decision is taken on all candidates and that results are sent to the Examinations & Awards Team, input into relevant databases and released to students.