

Assessment Framework for Undergraduate Graduating Cohorts on Programmes with Work Placements: Academic Year 2021-22

1. What is the Assessment Framework 2021-22?

Undergraduate students graduating in the academic year 2021-22 have faced Covid-related disruption to their studies in 2019-20 and 2020-21. At the point of writing this assessment framework, fewer disruptions to this academic year are anticipated. We will, however, keep the framework under active review as the year unfolds and we will take further steps to address any issues that arise as a result of Covid-related, or any other, disruption to studies.

This assessment framework is comprised of a package of measures and mitigations designed to ensure fair outcomes for the 2021-22 graduating cohorts, taking into account the challenges faced over the last two years. The aim is to ensure students are not disadvantaged in comparison to the last two cohorts and to students graduating from other institutions. The framework has been discussed, and agreed, with the Guild of Students.

2. What is our aim?

In every decision we take about assessment and degree outcomes, we have to balance two things: the need to ensure our students are not disadvantaged by Covid, and the imperative to protect academic standards and the integrity of a University of Birmingham degree. Preserving academic standards ensures that your degree can never be questioned in the future by an employer, professional accrediting body or – if you choose further study – another university.

The package of measures and mitigations outlined below is specific to the 2021-22 graduating cohort.

3. Mitigations applying to all Undergraduate Graduating Cohorts in 2021-22

In terms of your existing marks profile going into the final year of study, this year's graduating cohorts are in a different position to those of last year and the year previous to that. In particular, while students on a four year degree with a placement may have some marks missing from the second year, they are likely to have most marks available from the third year.. This means that as long as marks are accrued as expected in this final year of study, we will have a profile available to consider whether further mitigations are necessary before we arrive at your final degree classification. It's important to remember that some mitigations have to be tailored to meet the requirements of external accrediting bodies, and this will be communicated locally if it applies to your programme.

Mitigations for the final examination boards for 2021-22 (summer 2022)

- In previous years, final year undergraduate students were not allowed to take resits to retrieve failure in final year modules. This policy has been changed so that from the coming session, final year UG students will be allowed to resit failed modules in the supplementary examination period, with marks being capped at the pass mark. As normal, students will be also able to apply for an uncapped resit on the basis of ECs (extenuating circumstances).
- Exam boards will consider the total marks profile of individual students, particularly in the case of borderline classifications, to ensure that any Covid-related disruption is taken into account. In each case, the Exam Board will assure itself that each student has met their programme learning outcomes and gained any core competencies required for professional accreditation. Note that students will progress to a degree based on the usual requirement to pass at least 100 credits in the final year.
- In cases where we need further evidence, and ONLY where it adds positive information, we may consider any first year marks that are available as part of the overall picture of a student's outcome. We cannot retrospectively add the first year marks into the degree classification algorithm because that would be unfair to some students, but we can consider them in a positive way to inform our understanding of a fair outcome for each student.
- The impact of extenuating circumstances (ECs) will be considered as usual at Exam Boards; students are required to submit their reasons for requesting ECs and extensions as usual, and as much evidence as possible should be supplied for extensions beyond 5 days. NOTE: If students wish to request a deferral of any assessments, they are also required to submit their reasons and supporting evidence. Deferred assessments will be scheduled for the Supplementary Period in August and they will usually take the same format as the original assessments.
- We will compare the module marks achieved by this year's graduating cohort with that of the last three years' cohorts to ensure you are not disadvantaged. If we find a variation beyond the normal variation between years, we are able to scale marks accordingly at the summer exam boards. In order to do this we would need the support of our External Examiners and in each programme we have to be certain we are in alignment with the requirements of individual professional bodies.

Additional information for students on four year UG degrees including a work placement:

Students on four year UG degrees (BA, BSc, BEng), with a placement in the 3rd year (i.e. in 2020/21),

- In a four year UG degree (BA, BSc, BEng), with a placement in the 3rd year (i.e. in 2020-2021), Stage 2 marks (comprising years 2 and 3) are usually worth 25% of a final degree classification, with the marks for the placement year contributing 12.5% (note: in some programmes the placement contributes a mark, whereas in others they are pass/fail only, in which case the mark for Stage 2 is based entirely on the year 2 mark).
- To ensure you are treated in the same way as other students whose second year was disrupted in 2019-20, we will only use your second year marks if they do not have a negative impact on your overall degree classification.
- To ensure this policy is fair to all students and in line with previous years, the full 12.5% for the 2nd year can be counted if students have marks for at least 60 credits from 2nd year (2019-20) based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules. For students with more than 20 and fewer than 60 credits, the formal progression mark from second year (2019-20) will be weighted at 6.25% of their overall mark for degree classification.
- Students who have <20 credits from their second year (2019/20) will have received a formal progression mark, but it won't be used to influence the final degree classification because it would have undue weight compared to other students. It can, however, be used in a positive way during the degree classification process as evidence of potential or the impact of disruption.
- To summarise: the marks for your final year will count 75% of the degree classification if the 2nd and 3rd year combined is 25%; 81.25% if the 2nd year is 6.25%, and 87.5% if the 2nd year marks are not used.

Students on four year UG Master's degrees (MSci, MEng) with a placement in the 3rd year

- The marks for the credits achieved in the 3rd year (i.e. in 2020-21) will be combined with the 4th year (2021-22) to contribute 80% (as normal) to the final degree classification.
- To ensure you are treated in the same way as other students whose second year was disrupted in 2019-20, we will only use your second year marks if they do not have a negative impact on your overall degree classification.
- To ensure this policy is fair to all students and in line with previous years, the full 20% can be counted if students have marks for at least 60 credits from 2nd year (2019-20) based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules. For students with more than 20 and fewer than 60 credits, the formal progression mark from second year (2019-20) will be weighted at 10% of their overall mark for degree classification.

- Students who have <20 credits from their second year (2019/20) will have received a formal progression mark, but it won't be used to influence the final degree classification because it would have undue weight compared to other students. It can, however, be used in a positive way during the degree classification process as evidence of potential or the impact of disruption.
- To summarise: the marks for your Stage 3 will count 80% of the degree classification if the 2nd is 20%; 90% if 2nd year is 10%, and 100% if the 2nd year marks are not used.

Degree classification boundaries for classified degrees

- An overall mark of 70% is required for the award of a 1st class degree classification, with 60% for a 2.1, 50% for a 2.2 and 40% for a 3rd. There is, however, a 'zone of discretion' for each degree classification boundary and these have been set to ensure that academic standards continue to be maintained.
- In the zone of discretion, students who achieve an overall mark of 68 will be considered for a 1st class degree. This same zone of discretion applies to the boundaries in all degree classifications (58 for a 2.1; 48 for a 2.2; 38 for a 3rd).
- In order to qualify for the uplift in degree classification, students in 2021-22 will need to have at least 50% (60 credits) of their modules in the final year in the higher classification. This means the following:
 - For graduating cohorts on a 4 year degree with a work placement in the 3rd year (BSc, BA, BEng), in order to profile up to a first class degree, at least 60 credits (50% of the module marks) in the final year must normally be in the 1st class category and, of the remainder, at least 40 credits must be in the 2.1 category.
 - For graduating cohorts on a 4 year degree (MSci, M.Eng etc) with a work placement in the 3rd year in order to profile up to a first class degree, at least 50% of the module marks at Stage 3 (i.e. year 3 and 4) must normally be in the 1st class category and a majority of the remainder of the module marks at Stage 3 must be in the 2.1 category.
 - Note: There might be situations in which a student has an overall mark of <70%, but is not awarded a 1st class degree because the above criteria are not fulfilled. In such cases, if the Board of Examiners decides that a student with <70% should be awarded a 1st Class Honours, based on the full profile of marks across all years of study, an award can be made 'Notwithstanding Regulations' as long as the External Examiner is supportive.

4. Mitigations applying to Continuing Undergraduate Cohorts (2021-22)

- Many of this year's 1st year students will have missed taking their A levels (or equivalent) so although year one marks don't count towards your final degree classification, these assessments are very important. They help you to understand the requirements of degree level study, develop your academic skillset and expertise in the application and communication of your learning, and ensure you are prepared for the second year of study.
- Continuing students should submit all assessments. We cannot know at this moment whether this academic year will be further disrupted, or whether we will be required to make further adjustments and mitigations as you approach graduation. It's important, therefore, that as many students as possible are able to build profiles of marks over time so we are able to consider them for progression and eventually graduation. This will ensure we are able to deliver fair outcomes for all students.
- Continuing UG students will progress to the next year of study based on the usual requirement to pass at least 100 credits. In order to ensure students are not disadvantaged, however, this policy will be reviewed after the summer Exam Boards. The results will be compared with the performance of previous cohorts (pre-pandemic) and we will also ensure that all requirements of professional bodies are met.
- The resit policy for final year UG students has been reviewed and resits to retrieve failure of final year modules will now be allowed. This policy will also apply to students in the 3rd year of a 4-year Undergraduate Masters degree, so that these students will be able to retrieve failure in their 3rd year by taking resits in the supplementary examination period in 2021-22.

5. Further measures and mitigations applying to all undergraduate students

- The majority of assessments have been designed and scheduled to be taken online, although some subjects will set in-person exams for pedagogic reasons and where particular assessments are required by professional bodies. Assessments will vary depending on the subject, type of programme and whether there are specific professional body requirements.
- Regular online group tutorials were introduced for all taught students for the first time last academic year and were appreciated by students. These will be continued in 2021-22, although the frequency varies by year. The aim is to ensure each student has quick and regular access to a tutor and a small group of peers. The tutorials are a forum in which you can discuss academic matters as determined by the programme running in your School and also any raise any issues that you feel should be communicated to your Department or School.

- We have retained the policy whereby no external evidence is required for a short extension to assignments of up to five days. Note, however, that all extensions require a reason and students are required to produce external evidence if the request is for longer than five days.
- For any students who are completing a major project or dissertation that would normally require lab access or in-person data collection, Covid-adapted project pathways have already been put in place if required. This will ensure you can progress and/or graduate successfully if we encounter further disruption.
- Your Student Reps continue to work closely with your Schools and Departments to ensure that any issues raised are addressed. Please make sure you know your local Student Reps. Remember, your Reps can also escalate issues to the Guild who have a remit to work with the University on your behalf. We have also introduced College level 'Student Forums' to offer another route for your voice to be heard.