Examination board guidance and resources 2019/20

Continuing Students

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1. **Introduction and contacts**

1.1 The information and guidance given here and in the supplementary Appendices are for all those who are involved in the processing of examination results and recommendations for undergraduate **non-final year (continuing)** students in 2020 under the Emergency Framework for Assessment and Progression (and other relevant Regulations where applicable for your School/Department). **Please read this pack carefully.**

Sections 1.2-1.5 and sections 2-5 of this pack are taken from the Undergraduate Protocols document. The protocols are also available as a separate document for your reference and are located in Appendix K.cont.

A full processing timeline can be found in Appendix A.cont of this pack.

1.2 The emergency adaptations to assessment and progression as set out in the Framework were based on the principles that, wherever possible, students should not be disadvantaged by the situation in which we all find ourselves, and that the academic standards of everyone’s degree should be maintained.

1.3 In order to ensure that non-final year students were able to progress to the next year of their studies, they were required to engage with a formative piece of Bridging Coursework to prepare them for their next year of study. For students on professional programmes, the Bridging Coursework was also designed to address any PSRB requirements, thereby reducing the amount of additional work students would need to complete the following year. As with final-year students, the approach was designed to ensure ‘no detriment’ and also ‘reduced pressure’.

1.4 **Continuing BSc/BEng/BA students**

- The most positive position will be taken from the second year; it is recognised that some students will not have many credits from their second year and that the University needs to make sure the degrees awarded next summer are still credible.
- Students with 60 credits or more at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark that will be weighted, as normal, at 25% of their overall mark for degree classification, but only if it improves their result (the final year will be weighted at 75% of the overall mark, as normal; if the Stage 2 mark is not used the overall mark will be based on 100% from the final year). The 60 credits is based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules.
- Students with <60 credits, and at least 20 credits, at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark that will be weighted at 12.5% of their overall mark for degree classification but only if it improves their result (the final year will be weighted at 87.5% of the overall mark; if the Stage 2 mark is not used the overall mark will be based on 100% from the final year). These credits are based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules.
- Students with <20 credits at Stage 2 will receive a formal progression mark, but it won’t be used for the final degree classification; in this case the overall mark for degree classification will be based on 100% of the final year mark.
- Note that the bridging coursework will have credit associated with it in some instances, e.g. for PSRB programmes.
- In order to inform a judgement on degree classification in borderline cases after the final year (2020/21), a modified profiling system will be used (see Appendix A); the profile of marks as a whole (including second and first year marks) will be considered by Boards of Examiners and ‘notwithstanding regulations’ can be applied.

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1 Students who were on an Erasmus year abroad in 2019/20 only needed to take the Bridging Coursework if they had completed less than 50% of the assessment in a module. If they had completed 50% or more of the assessment, it will count as 100%.
The points above are in line with the no detriment policy outlined in the Framework for Continuing Students.

Students will be permitted to re-sit completed or partial modules that they have failed at Stage 2 (i.e. where a student had made a first attempt, including the bridging coursework if that contributes to credits, e.g. for PRSB programmes). All assessments should be completed by the end of October 31st 2020. Note that there will be no resits for year 1 unless these are needed for professional programmes.

Resits will be capped in the usual way at the pass mark%.

External Examiner approval for draft papers/assessments is not required, but they should be part of the Boards.

1.5 Continuing MSci/MEng students

The most positive position will be taken from the third year; it is recognised that some students will not have all the credits from their third year and that the University needs to make sure the degrees awarded next summer are still credible.

For the degree classification after the final year next session, the marks for the credits achieved in this 3rd year of the MSci/MEng will be used to calculate an overall mark for the degree classification based on Stage 3 (i.e. years 3 and 4) counting, as normal, 80% of the overall mark (Stage 2 counts 20%). The credits in year 3 will be based on completed modules and partial credits for incomplete modules. However, the marks for year 3 will only be used if they improve the overall mark for degree classification; if not, the final year marks will count 80% of the overall mark and Stage 2 will count 20%.

Note that the bridging coursework will have credit associated with it in some instances e.g. for PRSB programmes.

In order to inform a judgement on degree classification in borderline cases in the final year (2021/22), a modified profiling system will be used (Appendix A); the profile of marks as a whole (including second and first year marks) will be considered by Boards of Examiners and ‘notwithstanding regulations’ can be applied.

The points above are in line with the no detriment policy outlined in the Framework for Continuing Students.

Students will be permitted to re-sit completed or partial modules that they have failed (i.e. where a student had made a first attempt, including the bridging coursework if that contributes to credits, e.g for PRSB programmes). All assessments should be completed by the end of October 31st 2020.

Resits will be capped in the usual way at 40%.

External Examiner approval for draft papers/assessments is not required, but they should be part of the Exam Boards.

1.6 If you have any questions or require any further information please contact one of the following:

- **Marcelle Cobbold** (Head of Taught Student Administration) (email m.y.cobbold@bham.ac.uk)
- **Vicki Phillips** (Assistant Director, Student Administration) (email v.h.phillips@bham.ac.uk)
- **Sarah O’Donovan** (Deputy Head of Taught Student Administration) (email s.g.odonovan@bham.ac.uk)
- **Jess Coles** (Deputy Head of Taught Student Administration) (email j.l.coles@bham.ac.uk)
- Queries related to bridging coursework module assessment set up – **Curriculum Management Team** (email curriculummanagement@contacts.bham.ac.uk)
2. **Role of Boards of Examiners**

2.1 The role of Boards of Examiners will need to be moderately different in autumn 2020, as it was in summer 2020, to reflect the Emergency Frameworks for assessment and progression.

2.2 The fundamental role of Boards remains the same, i.e. oversight and confirmation of marks, progress decisions and awards, in accordance with QAA guidance:

“For awarding bodies, it is your responsibility to make sound judgements about the circumstances in which credit and qualifications may be awarded. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to make such awards even where students have not completed all planned learning and assessment. Awarding bodies will need to judge the extent to which there is sufficient evidence to determine that outcomes at the appropriate level have been achieved and this may be different for different courses and students. Where a decision is taken to award credit or qualifications to students who have not completed all planned assessment, the awarding body should record the basis for that decision.”

2.3 **Module marks and Bridging Coursework**: As normal, the Board should approve all module marks. This year, module marks for continuing students (if not already confirmed at June Boards) will be calculated in line with those for finalists, i.e. if the modules are incomplete, the mark will be calculated using adjusted component weightings and the credits pro-rated.

2.3.1 Students on programmes with PSRB requirements will receive a numeric mark for their Bridging Coursework, which will be recorded against a credit-bearing LC, LI or LH Bridging Coursework module as appropriate. Students on programmes without PSRB requirements will receive a pass/fail mark recorded against a zero-credit Bridging Coursework module.

2.4 **Progression Marks for Non-final year students**: In accordance with the Emergency Progression Framework, all non-final year students will be progressed automatically to the next year. The Board will need to approve the pre-calculated Progression Marks for students progressing from year 2 or above. Students who have fails in more than 50% of the modules they have attempted should be provided with tutorial advice so that they can prepare effectively for the following year and/or consider whether it is in their interests to repeat the year or resubmit assessments (either in autumn 2020 or in 2020/21 as an external student). The pre-calculated Progression Marks for students progressing from year 2 or above will be displayed in Online Results.

2.5 **Extenuating circumstances**: Boards should consider and approve ECs recommendations as normal, but should be aware that ECs Panels have been advised to balance the need for flexibility regarding availability of evidence with the need to ensure that ECs decisions are taken in the context of
maintaining academic standards. In addition, it is recommended that programme leads highlight any particular COVID-related issues that may have affected student performance more generally.

2.6 **Recommendations ‘Notwithstanding Regulations’ normally referred to Progress & Awards Board (PAB):** The principle of Notwithstanding Regulations is replaced this year with the principle of ‘Notwithstanding Emergency Frameworks’ (where the latter supersede Regulations). PAB consideration of any individual cases will take place by circulation or Chair’s action as appropriate, and any cases should be submitted to Marcelle Cobbold (Head of Taught Student Administration) as soon as possible once they are identified. Advice on individual cases can be sought from Registry as normal.

2.7 **Programme sign-off forms (‘Determination of Students’ Eligibility to Graduate Spring 2020’):** Any completed forms not previously submitted to the Board should be received and ratified by the Board, and confirmed as such in the minutes. There is no need for approval of these forms by other School or College committees.

2.8 **Chair’s Statement:** The Chair (and external examiner) will need to sign off a statement as normal to confirm that the Board has operated appropriately and all degree classifications have been agreed by the external examiner. A revised statement will be provided by Registry to reflect the current arrangements.

3. **Determination of Resit Assessments**

3.1 Any continuing student who has failed a completed or partially completed module in 2019/20 will, as normal, be permitted to resit the same assessment (i.e. a second attempt of the same, previously submitted assessment). Resits are expected to be capped at the pass mark as normal. Uncapped ‘first sits’ can still be offered as a result of ECs (but not on a ‘blanket’ basis to all students).

3.2 Decisions about which students may need to take resits should be taken at Board meetings in September.

4. **Role of External Examiners**

4.1 While the external examiner role remains broadly the same in principle (i.e. they scrutinise and endorse outcomes of assessment processes, confirming results and progress decisions), there are some important differences this year.

4.2 **Framework arrangements:** External examiners are not asked to give retrospective approval to the emergency Frameworks. They have been informed of the broad approach, and their role this year, as in all years, is to quality assure the application of the Regulations (i.e. Frameworks) rather than approve the University’s legislation.

4.3 **Moderation:** External examiners will be required to moderate samples of work in accordance with their normal duties. There is no need for externals to review samples of Bridging Coursework completed by non-final year students, given that this coursework is formative rather than summative.

As normal, External Examiners should not normally be expected to adjudicate between internal markers. Disagreements between internal markers should be resolved before a sample of work is seen by the External Examiner. This may be through the use of a third marker, or consultation with senior colleagues within the School. In all cases it should be transparent to the External Examiner how the final mark was decided. If, in exceptional cases, a mark has not been agreed internally, the views of the External Examiner can be taken into account in determining the final mark. External...
Examiners are not permitted to alter the mark of any student.

4.4 **Meetings with students:** External Examiners should be provided with the opportunity to meet with students, as normal, and meetings should be arranged virtually by Skype or similar.

4.5. **Attendance at Board of Examiners meetings:** As normal, an external examiner should attend all Board meetings (virtually, if face-to-face Boards are still not possible) or, if this is not possible, a consulting mechanism should be in place before marks and decisions are released. If there are any difficulties with securing external examiner input, please consult with the DPVC (Education).

4.6 **Confirmation of module marks and checking standards:** External examiners should check on standards by scrutinising module marks statistics to confirm that they are not seriously out of line with previous years and that standards have been maintained. The external examiner should be asked to endorse all progression decisions. This is essential in order to evidence the maintenance of academic standards and that students have been treated fairly and not disadvantaged by the situation. We may need to produce this evidence in response to academic appeals or complaints from students.

4.7 **Annual report:** By the time of the autumn Boards of Examiners meetings, external examiners will already have submitted their annual reports. If there are any additional issues external examiners wish to raise at that point, they may submit further comments by 30 September.

5. **Practical Arrangements for Virtual Board of Examiners Meetings**

5.1 **Virtual meetings:** Meetings may be held virtually using Skype for Business, Zoom, Teams, Canvas Conferencing or similar. If the meeting cannot take place face-to-face and holding a virtual meeting is problematic for any reason, Schools may wish to consider email circulation (but should be aware of data protection and confidentiality considerations if discussion is effectively on record through email correspondence).

5.2 **Number and timing of meetings:** As indicated in the timescales above, Schools may wish to hold internal Board meetings for non-final year students. However, beyond this, it is not envisaged that there will need to be an increase in meetings.

5.3 **Quoracy:** The normal quoracy arrangements apply, i.e. a minimum of three academic staff plus an external examiner (see above regarding the role of the external examiner). If this is not possible for any reason, please consult with the DPVC (Education).

5.4 **Agenda:** For the benefit of the external examiner, agenda items should include a brief summary of the Emergency Frameworks. A template for the Agenda as well as a summary document will be provided by Registry, either for circulation to members in advance, or to be read out by the Chair. The summary will emphasise that the key principle is to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by the situation while ensuring that academic standards are maintained.

5.5 **Minutes:** It is important to ensure that Board decisions are minuted clearly and accurately, and that minutes are returned to Registry to form part of the formal record of the exceptional arrangements this year. Minutes may need to be used as evidence should students appeal or complain, or should the QAA or OfS decide to scrutinise the University’s arrangements (note: a template for the Minutes will be provided by Registry).

5.6 **Support available:** Once agreed, the various sections of this document will form part of an updated version of Registry’s ‘End of Session’ guidance pack. For this year only, in order to provide additional support for colleagues and emphasise the University’s commitment to Quality Assurance, each College’s Academic Policy Partner (or delegate) will be available to attend Boards of Examiners in an
advisory capacity should there be any queries in relation to the application of the Emergency Frameworks.

6. Support and Training

6.1 For this year only, in order to provide additional support for colleagues and emphasise the University’s commitment to Quality Assurance, each College’s Academic Policy Partner (or delegate) will be available to attend Boards of Examiners in an advisory capacity should there be any queries in relation to the application of the Emergency Frameworks.

6.2 A summary of the Emergency Framework has been provided by Registry and is located in Appendix G.cont, either for circulation to Boards in advance or tabled and read out at the start of the meeting. This will help to provide the context for the decisions that the Board will make.

6.3 Please visit the BIRMS Examination Board information web page to access resources.

6.4 Registry will aim to provide training via Zoom on the use of the new Proceed 2020 ART (ART 5) including rollup and module mark calculation. Details have been circulated by email and the training will take place on 2 September. Guidance documents are available and are located in Appendices H.1.cont and H.2.cont.

6.5 In terms of general support during the pre and post Exam Board periods, please contact your TSA administrator in the first instance, or the BIRMS Team, Head of TSA or Deputy Heads. To enable effective query handling during remote working, please contact the staff member by email or Skype for Business messenger in advance if you wish to have a face to face Skype for Business or Zoom call, so that this can be arranged. Your named contact will be able to advise you which days they will be based in the office during the partial return to campus working.

7. Documentation to be returned to Taught Student Administration for non-final year cohorts

Please send documentation by email to eos-tsa@contacts.bham.ac.uk and cc m.y.cobbold@bham.ac.uk.

7.1 A copy of the following should be submitted by close of business on 14 September 2020 for the main processing period:

7.1.1 The minutes (in paper or electronic format) from the meeting of the Board of Examiners. Minutes should include programme and module codes and student ID numbers for ease of reference. Minutes should be anonymised in accordance with paragraph 6.1.1 of the Code of Practice on the Assessment of Taught Programmes and Modules and Academic Feedback. (A useful sample template for recording minutes can be found in Appendix B.cont.)

7.1.2 The signed Chair of Board of Examiners Statement. The Chair of the Board of Examiners should complete the Chair’s statement (Appendix C.cont) to confirm that all decisions have been taken in accordance with the relevant Regulations and that appropriate information on exceptional cases is provided for consideration by the Progress and Awards Board. Please note that this form requires the External Examiner’s signature.

7.1.3 Summary of Extenuating Circumstances (see section 8 for details on ECs) and recommendations made outside the emergency framework.

7.1.4 Summaries of decisions for non-progression of individual students.
8. **Extenuating Circumstances**

8.1 The overall principles and framework set out in the Regulations and the **Code of Practice on Extenuating Circumstances (ECs)** will continue to apply during the COVID-19 pandemic. The **University’s Emergency Framework for Assessment and Progression** is designed to address the situation in a broad sense for all students, but it is recognised that individual students will experience a variety of different circumstances – both related and unrelated to the pandemic – for which they will wish to submit ECs.

8.2 The following points therefore take precedence over the legislation in order to ensure that ECs can be handled fairly and as simply as possible, both for students and staff, during this unprecedented time. These points are based upon the same underlying principles as the Emergency Framework for Assessment and Progression; i.e. *no detriment, reduced pressure, inclusivity and academic integrity*.

a. **Deadlines**: Schools are advised to adjust local deadlines to take account of any new or amended assessment deadlines and/or dates of Boards of Examiners meetings. Schools should be flexible if individual students are unable to meet deadlines.

b. **Forms**: The University’s standard Notification of Extenuating Circumstances form has been amended to recognise the exceptional circumstances and the relaxed requirements for evidence (see below). It does not matter if students submit the original version of the form – either version is entirely acceptable.

c. **Evidence**: It is accepted that students may not be able to provide evidence of circumstances that have impacted upon their assessment, whether related or unrelated to the current situation. The normal evidence requirements are therefore suspended and Schools will need to balance the need for flexibility regarding availability of evidence with the need to ensure that ECs decisions are taken in the context of maintaining academic standards.

- It is expected that colleagues will exercise judgement as to whether it is reasonable and proportionate to require evidence on a case by case basis. Students have been advised that they ‘...should follow your School’s normal processes and deadlines for requesting extensions/deferrals or submitting Extenuating Circumstances. However, we appreciate that you may not be able to provide evidence that you have been advised to self-isolate (for example, if NHS 111 have provided you with advice over the phone). Please do not worry about this. You can submit extension/deferral requests and Extenuating Circumstances without evidence, as long as you explain clearly why you have been advised to self-isolate.’

d. **ECs Panels**: Panels are advised to meet using video conferencing software such as Skype for Business or other University approved system. If this is not possible for any reason, meetings may be held via email, with due regard to the sensitive information being discussed and data protection considerations, including the potential for subject access requests. Appropriate records of meetings and decisions should be kept, as normal.

e. **Confidentiality**: When using video conferencing facilities, Panel members must ensure that they are able to work in a space which will allow for confidentiality when discussing student cases. This is due to the sensitive nature of the information which may be presented or discussed, to avoid any exposure to vulnerable members of the same household e.g. children, and because the information discussed may constitute special category personal data in accordance with GDPR if the student in question is identifiable.
### Further advice:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUE OR CONSIDERATION</th>
<th>ACTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACCESS / SOFTWARE</strong></td>
<td>All staff with access to a University of Birmingham laptop or PC should also have access to Skype for Business or other University approved system. Staff are able to login to these platforms using their University email address. Wellbeing Officers should confirm that all panel meeting attendees have access to the agreed platform prior to the meeting and it is recommended that attendees test their equipment in advance of the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONFIDENTIALITY</strong></td>
<td>As laid out in the University’s Extenuating Circumstances Code of Practice, confidentiality of the ECs panel is ‘paramount’. Ensuring confidentiality in a virtual meeting presents a new set of challenges. Maintaining a confidential environment for this type of meeting means ensuring all panel participants are in a secure location without other individuals present. The volume of attendees’ devices should be appropriate, so that they can hear and participate on the meeting, but not so loud that the meeting may be heard elsewhere. Where a participant may have vulnerable family members within the same household, steps must be taken to ensure that sensitive topics are discussed without exposing family members to such subjects. The meeting should not be digitally recorded in any way. Panel members should also be able to ensure these conditions will be maintained for the duration of the meeting. EC Panel attendees should be advised of these required conditions prior to the meeting and should be encouraged to raise any issues at the earliest opportunity prior to the meeting taking place. If at any point during the meeting attendees encounter issues with maintaining confidentiality, they should halt the meeting until this can be addressed.</td>
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9. **Academic Transcripts under the Emergency Framework for Assessment and Progression**

   9.1 Please refer to Appendix I to view a sample academic transcript.

   9.2 The ‘Credits’ column has been renamed to ‘Credits Studied’ and a new ‘Credits Awarded’ column has been added. This will reflect that in some cases, students will have been awarded partial credits for modules. Where a student has not attempted a module and a mark of ‘N’ was entered for the module, this will reflect on the transcript as a mark of ‘-’ a result of ‘AUDITED’ and number of attempts ‘0’.

10. **Data protection, student debtors and feedback to students**

    10.1 Operations Managers or nominees are regularly provided with lists of students excluded from the University due to outstanding tuition fee debt. Until the debt is cleared, marks for these students should not be confirmed at a Board of Examiners meeting (although their work may be assessed and given a provisional, unconfirmed mark).

    10.2 If you are unsure which students still have a financial or other Hold, please contact your named School contact in Taught Student Administration who will be able to provide you with the information. A BOXI report is also available which will provide this information (**Banner Documents > Students > Students Records (General) > Students with an Active Hold**).

    10.3 If students have a financial hold, the validation within BIRMS will prevent these students’ marks and progress decisions from being released to Banner.
10.4 If an excluded student does undertake an assessment and requests feedback, this must be provided by the School, as this is personal information held under the Data Protection Act and therefore potentially liable to inclusion under a Subject Access Request. The student should be informed that any marks are not approved or ratified by the University until the tuition fee debt is cleared. Only Registry may produce transcripts for these students, which will have the words “Marks not approved” stamped across it.

10.5 Once the debt is cleared, Registry will ask the School to take Chair’s Action and confirm the student’s marks and progress or award decision. The marks and decision may then be released into the student portal.

10.6 If you are unsure which students have had their financial or other hold recently released, a BOXI report is available which will provide this information (Banner Documents/Students/Students Records (General)/Students with a Released Hold).

11. Useful Web Links

- **End of Session Resources:**
  https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/eos/index.aspx

- **Information about accessing BIRMS:**
  https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/birms/access/Index.aspx
  (you will need your **adf** username and password to log-in)

  Alternatively the BIRMS intranet can be accessed via the BIRMS channel link on the ‘staff.home’ tab in the my.bham portal

- **Cohort Legislation:**
  https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/legislation/index.aspx
  This provides cohort specific links to Codes of Practice that you may find useful such as the Code of Practice on Student Attendance and Reasonable Diligence.

- **Extenuating Circumstances procedure:**
  https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/extcircs/index.aspx

- **Academic Integrity (Including Plagiarism and Conduct in Examinations and Class Tests):**
  https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/conduct/plagiarism/index.aspx

- **Academic Appeals:**
  https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/as/registry/policy/complaint-appeal/appeals/index.aspx