



Support for Assessments 2020-21

Dear student

I am writing to you with an update on support we are putting in place in recognition of the ongoing impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on students.

My colleague, Joanne Clague, Registrar and Chief Operating Officer, wrote to you on 5 January 2021 outlining how we as a University are responding to the current government measures that have been put in place until early March to help limit the spread of Covid-19. It is our understanding that the Northern Ireland Executive will be reviewing the position in the middle of February, after which we will communicate any further updates to you.

In the meantime students have been asking for clarification on two important issues; first what support the University is putting in place to support your assessments this year – commonly referred to as a 'safety net'; and second, you have asked for an early decision on whether or not graduation will take place this July.

In setting out supporting measures we have had discussions with the Students' Union, reviewed what is happening across higher education and taken advice from sector and professional accrediting bodies.

Assessments in 2020-21

Below I have set out six key commitments to all students undertaking assessments in 2020-21 to mitigate against the impact of COVID-19. The commitments are to ensure students are supported in these challenging times while at the same time protecting the quality of the programmes and the integrity of your results. In summary, these are:

- **Tailored methods of assessment** – ensuring all students can demonstrate your knowledge and attainment of learning outcomes, in a safe, fair and secure way.
- **Flexibility with coursework deadlines** – available to all students for Semester 2 coursework assessments, up to 48 hours beyond the specified deadline. No late penalty marks will be deducted from assessments submitted within a 48-hour window of the specified deadline.
- **COVID-19 related exceptional circumstances process** – open to all students, with self-certification accepted for up to a 14 day period. Where a student's ability to complete an assessment is impacted by COVID-19, you can request an extension or deferral to enable you to complete your assessments when you feel best able to do so within this academic year.
- **Confirmation of fair outcomes** – Boards of Examiners, the internal body in your School which ratifies student results, will take additional measures to confirm outcomes for you that are comparable with those in previous years.
- **Reduction in progression requirements** – where appropriate, Boards of Examiners will permit undergraduate students to progress to the next year of study

on the basis of passing four modules (80 credit points) this year; and postgraduate taught students to progress to their dissertation if all taught modules have not been completed. This will apply where it is permitted within the programme specifications and where it is believed this will not have a detrimental impact on your overall performance.

Fee-free resits – available to students who fail a module on first attempt.

In making these commitments I would assure you that we have prepared for remote teaching and assessment this year, unlike last academic year when we all had to respond to an unexpected situation. Can I also encourage you to take advantage of all the support that is being made available to you both by your School and by professional support services to help you study this year.

For fuller information on the six commitments we have made, as well as support for your studies, please visit [MyQueen's](#).

Graduation July 2021

You also asked us for an early decision on whether or not we will be able to deliver graduation ceremonies in person this summer.

While at the time of writing the roll out of the vaccination looks promising, strict social distancing rules and limitations on large gatherings remain in place. Indications are that they are likely to remain in place for some time. It has therefore been decided that we will not be scheduling in person graduation ceremonies in July 2021.

This is disappointing for all of us given that the ceremonies are a celebration for both staff, students, friends and family of all that students have achieved during their time with us. We know you will have further questions. We are currently working on alternative plans and will communicate these to you no later than the end of February 2021.

While I appreciate that for some the news about graduation will be disappointing, I trust that the measures I have outlined above in terms of what we are doing this year to help give you some additional support in your assessments is welcomed. I continue to be impressed by the way you have engaged with your studies in this very different year. I know that it has been challenging but your continued motivation and resilience is much appreciated by all in the wider University community.

Best wishes

Professor David Jones
Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education and Students