

Variations to Principles and Regulations of University of Chester and The Quality and Standards Manual 2019-20

Introduction

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown measures implemented across the UK had a significant impact on the University, its students and staff from March onwards. However, the University did not cease to operate at any point; work was undertaken to ensure the continued delivery of learning, teaching and assessment online. Inevitably, this meant that the academic experience of our students was different from the one that they had anticipated and necessitated some variation to the University's published procedures.

The University **did not** implement an emergency set of regulations. Throughout, the University has attempted to maintain the provisions set out in the Principles and Regulations and the Quality and Standards Manual. Where variations or additions to these documents have been required, the University has at all times acted to ensure the continuation of learning, teaching and assessment and to do so in ways that could not be to the disadvantage of any student.

Key measures

The detail of the variations and additions that have been made to the University's regulatory framework is provided in this document. The key changes can be summarised as possible:

1. Suspension of the process to modify modes and forms of study. This enabled the swift transfer of learning, teaching and assessment to an exclusively online mode.
2. Variation of assessment in modules already being taught. It was necessary to introduce alternative modes of assessment for tasks that would ordinarily have required students to be present at the University (or partner institution).
3. Automatic progression for Level 3 and Level 4 students¹. Following an exercise to map programme learning outcomes against learning, teaching and assessment already delivered, all students at Levels 3 and 4 are permitted to progress to the next level of study.
4. Expansion of conditional progression regulations. This increases the number of credits that a student may have outstanding whilst still being permitted to progress to the next level of study.
5. Expansion of condonement of failure regulations at Level 5. This increases the number of failed credits that can be condoned, enabling a student to progress and not be required to undergo further assessment.
6. Students who were unable to complete assessment due to illness or other personal circumstances connected with the Covid-19 pandemic were permitted to make an application to the Mitigating Circumstances Board for an extension or deferral without requiring supporting evidence.

¹ This applies to the majority of University of Chester programmes. However, where PSRBs require the achievement of Level 4 outcomes be demonstrated through successful completion of assessment, students have not been automatically progressed. The cohorts to whom automatic progression could not be applied were notified accordingly.

7. Introduction of a 'no detriment' policy for degree classifications. This introduces an additional method for the calculation of undergraduate degree classifications, taking into account the average mark achieved by students at Levels 5 and 6 (and Level 7 on integrated Masters programmes) in assessments submitted prior to Friday 20 March 2020. Students will be awarded a classification based on whichever method produces the most favourable outcome.

Principles and Regulations

The Principles and Regulations of the University of Chester apply in full unless a specific variation is noted in this section:

Part A: The Powers, Responsibilities, Principles and Awards of University of Chester

A5: Changes to Modes and Forms of Study and the Awards to which they may lead

Modifications may be made to modes and forms of study between validation and review, subject to the observance of appropriate approval procedures

For the safety of staff and students, the University, on the authority of the Chair of Senate, transferred all learning and teaching activities to online platforms from midnight on Thursday 19 March 2020. For this purpose, the requirement for an approval procedure was suspended.

Part D: Regulations Governing the Design of Approved Academic Provision Leading to Awards of University of Chester

D1.10: Assessment Requirements

...the formal documentation for a programme or course of study shall state the basis on which students will be assessed for any award to which such academic provision may lead.

The imposition of The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 prevented the University from conducting assessments that required students to be physically present at any of its sites. The University made provision for the replacement of all 'in-person' assessments with alternatives. Given the proximity of the imposition of these regulations to the date of assessments, a procedure to ensure the quality and standards of these replacements, without amending formal documentation was established in accordance with A6.13. Details of replacement assessments were provided to students via new assignment brief documentation.

Part F: Regulations Governing the Assessment of Students

F1: Considerations which shall form the nature of process of Assessment

Assessment must be the basis upon which the achievement of the individual student in fulfilling the objectives of the mode and form of study is judged.

The University, on the authority of the Chair of Senate, determined that assessments not counting towards the classification of an award should not proceed. An extensive mapping exercise was conducted for programmes at Levels 3 and 4 to verify student achievement of the relevant learning outcomes based upon assessment submitted on or before 20 March 2020 **and** through engagement with appropriate learning and teaching activities for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year.

F2.1: Information for Students

The nature, forms and weightings of assessments for the programme or course of study shall be made known to students at the start of each level or year of their studies.

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F2.10: Progression and Conditional Progression within a Programme of Study

The second and third paragraphs of this clause is amended as follows (changes shown with yellow highlight):

Full time undergraduate students shall not be allowed to progress to the next level of study until all modules at a given level have been passed or condoned. However, a student with no more than 20 credits outstanding (deferral, reassessment or third assessment attempt) shall be allowed to progress conditionally to the next level of study. A student with more than 20 credits but no more than 60 credits outstanding shall be allowed to progress conditionally to the next level of study where the outstanding components within the outstanding module(s) amount to no more than the equivalent of a full 40 credit module. A student with more than 20 credits but no more than 60 credits of outstanding assessment shall not be allowed to progress conditionally to the next level of study where the outstanding components within the outstanding module(s) amount to more than the equivalent of a full 40 credit module. In both cases the percentage weightings assigned to the assessment components and the credit value of the modules shall be used in this calculation.

A student with more than 60 credits outstanding shall not be allowed to progress to the next level of study.

F4.3: Condonement of Failure in Assessment

The third paragraph of this clause is amended as follows (changes shown with yellow highlight):

Level 5

In the case of a student who is registered for a minimum of 120 credit points at Level 5, an Awards or Progression Assessment Board, having due regard to the standard of the award, the programme objectives, the programme assessment requirements, and any professional requirements, may allow condonement of failed modules up to and including 40 credits at Level 5. In order for this to apply, the student must have a profile (following initial assessment, reassessment or third assessment attempt) with

no more than 40 failed credits. If these conditions are met, condonement will be applied to those failed module(s) where both the overall module mark falls in the range 30-39% and there is no component mark below 20%. The Board will deem that a student in this position has achieved the credit for the condoned module(s), although the fail marks themselves will stand and will be recorded on the student's transcript.

F4.8: The Determination of the Final Degree Classification (Honours degrees)

The following preface is inserted and the current clause re-numbered 4.8.1.:

In response to the COVID-19 disruption, students who studied at Level 5 and/or 6 in the 2019/20 academic year, and who were expected to submit assessment after 20 March 2020, shall have final averages calculated using both calculation methods described in F4.8.1 and F4.8.2 below, with the average which gives the best outcome used in the determination of the final classification.

New clause 4.8.2. is added:

An average for the Level(s) being studied by the student in the 2019/20 academic year shall be calculated, using only the marks of components submitted by the student on or before 20 March 2020; these components must also have been due for submission on or before this date. The percentage weighting of the component(s) and the credit value of the module(s) shall be taken into account in the calculation of the average.

This no-detriment average shall be combined with the standard average for levels not studied in the 2019/20 academic year, with a weighting of one-third for the Level 5 average mark and two-thirds for the Level 6 average mark. Where a student has been admitted by direct entry to Level 6, the overall mark shall be calculated on the basis of the Level 6 marks only. Figures used in this calculation shall not be rounded but will be expressed to two decimal places.

In cases where the student completed Level 5 before the 2019/20 academic year, the average for Level 5 will only be used for degree classification purposes if there are numerical marks for 50% or more of the required Level 5 credits.

In cases where numerical marks exist for between 100 and 120 credits at the relevant level, the calculation will be based on the highest 100 credit marks at that level. In cases where numerical marks exist for in excess of 120 credits at the relevant level, the lowest 20 credit mark will be deducted from the calculation. In cases where numerical marks exist for fewer than 100 credits at the relevant level, all marks will be used. This shall apply to all levels included in the calculation of the final average, including the no detriment average for levels studied in the 2019/20 academic year.

Notwithstanding the omission of certain module marks for the purpose of calculating overall degree classification, all modules must be passed or condoned in order for a student to obtain a degree.

Marks obtained at another institution prior to admission to University of Chester may not be counted for the purpose of determining the degree classification.

Where, exceptionally, students are registered for programmes based upon a 15-credit modular structure, the classification should be calculated using the identical number of credits as described above.

Once this procedure has been completed, the Awards Assessment Board shall determine the class of degree in accordance with the following scale:

70% and above	-	First class honours
60% – 69%	-	Upper second class honours
50% - 59%	-	Lower second class honours
40% - 49%	-	Third class honours
0% - 39%	-	Fail

A list of students shall be provided to the Awards Assessment Board, ranked by overall mark total express to two decimal places. The indicative, provisional degree class shall be ascribed.

Students whose overall total marks fall within one of the following ranges shall have that initial overall mark raised the threshold of the next degree class above, i.e.:

- a mark within the range 69.50 to 69.99 shall be raised to 70
- a mark within the range 59.50 to 59.99 shall be raised to 60
- a mark within the range 49.50 to 49.99 shall be raised to 50

Students whose overall total mark falls within one of the following ranges shall be reviewed for possible raising of the indicative degree classification to the next class above, i.e.:

- 67.00 to 69.49 shall be considered for raising to the first class
- 57.00 to 59.49 shall be considered for raising to the upper second class
- 47.00 to 49.49 shall be considered for raising to the lower second class

Where a student's Level 6 average has been determined by the no detriment calculation, and where the student has an overall total mark within one of those ranges stated above, the higher class shall be awarded where at least half the Level 6 component credits for which numerical marks are available, and which were included in the calculation of the Level 6 no detriment average, are in the higher class.

Where a student's Level 5 average has been determined by the no detriment calculation, but where the Level 6 average has not been determined by the no detriment calculation, in cases where the overall total mark falls within one of those ranges stated above, the student shall be placed in the higher class where at least half the Level 6 module credits for which numerical marks are available are in the higher class, in the same way as under F4.8.1.

The Academic Integrity Review Panel may make a recommendation on the calculation of the student's average mark or degree classification.

F4.8: The Determination of the Final Degree Classification (Foundation degrees)

The following preface is inserted and the current clause re-numbered 4.8.3 'Standard calculation':

In response to the COVID-19 disruption, students who studied at Level 5 in the 2019/20 academic year, and who were expected to submit Level 5 assessment after 20 March 2020, shall have final averages calculated using both calculation methods described in F4.8.3 and F4.8.4 below, with the average which gives the best outcome used in the determination of the final classification.

New clause F4.8.4 'no-detriment calculation' is added:

These requirements are sequential.

Students who have fulfilled the credit requirements for the award of a Foundation Degree will be awarded the classification on the basis of Level 5 module marks only. Level 4 modules must be passed or condoned but the marks do not contribute to the average upon which the classification is based.

An average for Level 5 shall be calculated, using only the marks of components submitted by the student on or before 20 March 2020; these components must also have been due for submission on or before this date. The percentage weighting of the component(s) and the credit value of the module(s) shall be taken into account in the calculation of the average. The final average shall not be rounded but will be expressed to two decimal places.

The number of Level 5 credits used to determine the average is dependent upon the number of counting Level 5 credits for which numerical marks exist. In cases where numerical marks exist for between 100 and 120 credits, the best 100 credits will be used; where numerical marks exist for in excess of 120 credits, the lowest 20 credit mark will be deducted from the calculation. In cases where numerical marks exist for fewer than 100 credits, all marks will be used.

A provisional degree class should be awarded in accordance with the following scale:

70% and above	-	Distinction
60 to 69.99%	-	Merit

Students whose average mark falls within one of the following ranges shall have that initial overall mark raised to the threshold of the next degree class above, i.e.:

a mark within the range 69.50 to 69.99 shall be raised to 70 and a distinction awarded

a mark within the range 59.50 to 59.99 should be raised to 60 and a merit awarded

Students whose average mark falls within one of the following ranges shall be reviewed for possible raising of the indicative classification to the next class above, i.e.:

67.00 to 69.49 shall be considered for raising to distinction

57.00 to 59.49 shall be considered for raising to a merit

Where a student's Level 5 average has been determined by the no detriment calculation, and where the student has an overall total mark within one of those ranges stated above, the higher class shall be awarded where at least half the Level 5 component credits for which numerical marks are available, and which were included in the calculation of the Level 5 no detriment average, are in the higher class.

The Academic Integrity Review Panel may make a recommendation on the calculation of the student's average mark or their eligibility to be awarded a foundation degree with distinction or merit.

F5: Additional Assessment Regulations pertaining to Integrated Masters Programmes

From the fifth paragraph, new clause F5.1. 'standard calculation' containing the existing text. The following preface is added:

In response to the COVID-19 disruption, students who studied at Level 5, 6 or 7 in the 2019/20 academic year, and who were expected to submit assessment after 20 March 2020, shall have final averages calculated using both calculation methods described below, with the average which gives the best outcome used in the determination of the final classification.

New clause F5.2 'no-detriment calculation' is added:

An average for the Level(s) being studied by the student in the 2019/20 academic year shall be calculated, using only the marks of components submitted by the student on or before 20 March 2020; these components must also have been due for submission on or before this date. The percentage weighting of the components and the credit value of the modules shall be taken into account in the calculation of the average.

In the case of students studying Level 7/Year 4, the no detriment average for Level 6/7 will be calculated using all Level 6/7 components submitted on or before 20 March 2020 (and which were due by that date), including relevant components submitted in previous academic years.

Classification of Integrated Masters programmes will be by means of a weighted average of Level 5 marks and the marks for Levels 6 and 7 together.

Averages for Level 5 and Level 6/7 shall be calculated, with each mark weighted according to its credit value.

At Level 5, in cases where numerical marks exist for between 100 and 120 credits, the calculation will be based on the highest 100 credit marks at that level. Where numerical marks exist for in excess of 120 credits, the lowest 20 credit mark will be deducted from the calculation. In cases where numerical marks exist for fewer than 100 credits, all marks will be used.

These averages shall then be combined in the ratio of 20:80. Figures used for this calculation shall not be rounded but will be expressed to two decimal places.

The degree classification will then be determined by the method used in the determination of Bachelors degrees set out in F4.8.1 and F4.8.2, except that the marks for Levels 6 and 7 taken together should be used in the calculation of whether a borderline degree class should be raised; in borderline cases based on the no detriment average, the higher class shall be awarded where at least half the Level 6/7 component credits for which numerical marks are available, and which were included in the calculation of the Level 6/7 no detriment average, are in the higher class.

The Academic Integrity Review panel may make a recommendation on the calculation of the student's average mark or degree classification.

Quality and Standards Manual

The requirements of the Quality and Standards Manual apply in full, unless a specific variation is noted in this section.

Handbook A: The Design of Academic Provision and Structures

Neither Programme Specification nor Module Descriptor documents were altered as a result of the changes to learning, teaching and assessment after 20 March 2020. The following procedure was instigated for the proposal and approval of alternative assessments:

1. Only a change in the mode of assessment required approval (e.g. from an examination to an essay).
2. Alternative assessments were only instituted if the learning outcomes that related to it could continue to be reliably assessed. Staff were instructed that new assessment tasks should be as close to the original as possible.
3. A standardised replacement assignment brief template was used for the proposal of new tasks. These were scrutinised against criteria by the Programme Leaders and Head of Department. Their publication to students signalled approval.

Handbook B: Approval, Modification and Withdrawal of Academic Provision

Usual arrangements for the modification of provision in response to the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic were suspended. AQS facilitated 'light-touch' procedures in order to maintain appropriate rigour and oversight of replacement assessment tasks (described above).

Handbook C: Collaborative Provision

Variations and additions to the University's regulatory framework applied equally to all partner institutions.

Handbook D: Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

No changes.

Handbook E: Admissions

No changes.

Handbook F: Assessment

The majority of variations are covered by the changes and additions noted in Part F of the Principles and Regulations.

Section 7: Mitigating Circumstances

The University recognised the disruption to the lives of all of our students caused by the pandemic. Clause 7.3 (evidence in support of requests for the consideration of mitigating circumstances) was suspended, enabling students to make a statement rather than obtain independent documentary evidence when seeking an extension or a deferral.

Section 8: Assessment Boards

New provisions to enable the conduct online of Module Assessment Boards and Awards/Progression Boards has been put in place; however, the functions and responsibilities of these has been maintained.

Handbook G: Postgraduate Research Degrees

Section 7: Examination and Examiners

The prohibition on remote vivas (1.13) was removed and a new policy to enable this to take place as approved by the Academic Quality and Enhancement Committee.

Handbook H: Placement Learning and Professional Programmes

No changes.

Handbook I: Information

No changes.

Handbook J: Supporting Student Academic Achievement

No changes.