

Exceptional progression arrangements and compensation for degree planning to progress to next year

This is additional information relating to the [information for continuing undergraduate degree students](#) issued on 24 April 2020.

The health and wellbeing of our staff and students is at the heart of everything we are doing during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. We are aware of how uncertain and frightening the current situation is for everyone. We know you are all affected by coronavirus in different ways, with practical, personal, employment and academic factors affecting you and your families.

We are doing everything we can to help you continue and/or complete your studies despite the disruption, and in the light of these exceptional circumstances. In order to do this we have worked through a sequence of factors: firstly moving to teaching and learning online when buildings were closed, designing alternative assessments where existing arrangements were no longer possible, then moving on to exam board practices. We have had to take into account a fast-changing national context, feedback from students and staff, and sector practice.

Q: What is the overall policy?

Our policy is to support you to achieve your personal objectives for this year, whether that is achieving your award, or progression to the next stage of your studies. We encourage you to complete assessments if you can, but there is a 'safety net' if you are not in a position to do so.

Q: What is the thinking behind the exceptional progression arrangements, and why now?

As the impacts of the national pandemic situation have developed, this will continue to affect us all, into the summer and beyond. Therefore, the option of delaying significant amounts of assessment to July/August is no longer feasible.

We want to be able to confirm progression decisions for as many students as possible before the summer, to reduce stress and uncertainty about workloads, for both students and staff. Please note that academic staff will be on leave during the summer and will not be available to provide academic support after the end of June.

Therefore, we have identified a process to allow exceptional progression to the next stage of study, through introducing the concept of 'compensation' for affected modules.

Q: Some programmes cannot be compensated in this way, due to professional accreditation or other requirements eg Nursing, Teacher Education, Engineering,

some Care programmes.

Your Programme Leader can confirm the position for your programme.

Q: What does 'compensation' mean?

'Compensation' means that modules will be recorded as 'ungraded pass' for the purposes of progression, if you are unable to submit assessments, or if you submit and do not pass. No resit will be required. Compensation can be applied to modules affected since the start of the COVID-19 disruption, ie Semester 2 (S2), Semester Continuing (SC, running over Semesters 1 and 2), and Semester 3 (S3) modules.

Q: How do these exceptional progression arrangements act as a 'safety net'? Who for?

Many students have been able to continue their studies and are engaging successfully with teaching and learning at a distance. But others have told us that they are unable to study effectively under current circumstances, for a range of reasons, and this is affecting their ability to submit assessments in this semester, or over the summer.

The 'safety net' is there for those students who are in this position, to give reassurance that they can continue with their programme in Academic Year 2020-21, and to take some pressure off in the light of the challenges they are experiencing. The 'safety net' refers to progression, not to final awards.

Q: In what circumstances will compensation NOT apply?

Compensation will not normally apply:

- i) Where you are in the final year of an award, whether this is at Honours level, or if your programme is an Ordinary degree, DipHE or CertHE. You will normally need to pass all modules that make up the final level, to ensure that you fully meet the academic standards of that award (see Q12)
- ii) Where your programme has professional, statutory, or regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation requirements which prevent this, or there are conditions from another institution. This includes **Nursing, Teacher Education, some Engineering and Care programmes**. Your Programme Leader can confirm the position for your programme.
- iii) Within postgraduate programmes, where you will need to pass all modules to ensure that you fully meet the academic standards of that award.

Q: How is this fair to students who are working very hard to submit assessments, compared to students who will be compensated?

We recognise that our students have different individual circumstances and responsibilities beyond their academic studies, so the 'safety net' allows some personal choice, including the potential to prioritise certain modules. It is intended to provide reassurance for those who are feeling overwhelmed. For many students, their main objective is to complete their assessments now, to gain the grades they were aiming for, and benefit from the assessment process, including learning from feedback. We want to encourage students to complete assessments where they can, whilst providing a safety net for those who just cannot.

Q: Why should students be motivated to complete assessments? What are the benefits?

We would encourage you to submit assessments if you are able to do so, especially for modules where you have already completed some assessments. There are substantial advantages in doing so:

- i) You will receive a mark and grade as normal
- ii) Feedback gained on your academic achievement which will help you to improve
- iii) The academic benefits of being fully prepared to move to the next level. This is particularly important if you will be entering your final year (Level 10).
- iv) Fully completing modules where you have already completed some assessments, including modules studied across both semesters.
- v) Recognition that you have successfully passed modules in challenging circumstances.

Q: What are the downsides of compensation?

There are some potential disadvantages, that you should consider carefully.

- i) Your transcript will show an 'ungraded pass' rather than an 'A', 'B', 'C', or 'D' against modules concerned; displaying your grade may be more advantageous in future applications for employment or study.
- ii) You may be less academically prepared for study at the next level if you do not undertake assessments.
- iii) If you are currently intending to continue study, and your plans change later on and you wish to exit, it will normally be necessary for you to undertake some further assessments to achieve specific learning outcomes, to be eligible for that award (see Q12).

Q: Does compensation apply to all types of module, even Core or placement modules?

Yes, for purposes of progression. But not if you are in the final year of your award. But see #2 about programmes with professional accreditation.

Q: Is it sensible to compensate a core module which is intended to prepare students for the next level, especially for Level 10?

We would encourage you to submit assessments for core modules if you are able to do so. However, we consider it would be unhelpful to prevent progression solely on the basis of non-completion of a core module in the current circumstances. We will seek to provide support as appropriate for progressing students during the 2020-21 academic year.

Q: What happens if I can't submit assessments now, but I aim to submit in August?

We will record modules as 'ungraded pass' for the purposes of progression by default in June. If you aim to submit later in order to get a mark and grade, you should submit a MC claim online, **and** let your tutor know your plans. If you do not submit by the deadline date in August, the 'ungraded pass' will stand.

Q: What happens if my plans change next year, and I want to leave with my Ordinary degree instead of continuing to Honours level?

If you have submitted assessments and passed all your modules, then you will be eligible for an Ordinary degree. If you have any compensated modules, it will normally be necessary for you to undertake some further assessments, to ensure that you fully meet the academic standards of the Ordinary degree. There may be some exceptions to this, depending on your overall profile of modules and marks; this would be considered on a case-by-case basis. You should discuss your situation with your Programme Leader in the first instance. The same principles would apply if you were at an earlier stage of your programme, for example at DipHE level.

Q: I had difficulties in Semester 1 too, and I'm worried about going on to next year. Can I start the whole year again?

You can apply for a Repeat Year, where you re-enrol on the same level of your programme as a 'fresh start'. You should discuss this with your PAT in the first instance to see if this might be appropriate for you, as there are academic and funding implications.

Q: Does compensation apply to part-time students?

Yes, the principle applies in the same way. Compensation can be applied to modules affected since the start of the COVID-19 disruption, ie Semester 2 (S2), Semester Continuing (SC, running over Semesters 1 and 2), and Semester 3 (S3) modules.

Q: Does compensation apply to postgraduate programmes?

No. Within postgraduate programmes, you will need to pass all modules to ensure that you fully meet the academic standards of that award. You can use the mitigating circumstances process to defer assessments if you are not able to submit assessments at the current time.

Q: Why not use 'condonement' instead of 'compensation'?

Condonement means that the student has failed a module but the Exam Board can nevertheless award the credit, to enable progression or award. However the student's transcript shows that module as a fail, which is potentially disadvantageous for future study or employment. Condonement is built into our regulations and continues to be available where appropriate.

Q: How have students and staff been consulted on these arrangements?

The Deans of Faculty, Subject Network Leaders and Academic Registrar and other colleagues are meeting frequently with the HISA Vice-President (HE). They have fed in perspectives from a range of staff and students, to shape our response to COVID-19 situation in terms of exam board arrangements and regulatory adjustments. We have sought to take into account initial feedback and concerns from students and staff, and alignment with practice in other universities. The exceptional progression and compensation arrangements were discussed and endorsed by the university's Business Continuity Group (chaired by the Principal and Vice-Chancellor, with representation from all Academic Partners) and Quality Managers Forum.

Q: How does UHI's approach compare with other universities?

Every university is implementing policies appropriate to its own situation. Most have adjusted their assessment regulations in some ways, including for progression, award of credit and mitigating circumstances processes. We can reassure you that our approach is designed for the University of the Highlands and Islands' context and student population and is aligned with national requirements to maintain confidence in the academic standards of your programme

Q: Other universities have just cancelled assessments, why haven't you done this?

There have been some media reports that all Scottish universities have cancelled all exams and assessments – this is not true, although some have decided to cancel Semester 2 assessments for some students. Many universities are continuing with alternative assessment formats, as we are. We believe it is unfair to students who feel able to complete assessments to cancel wholesale. We encourage you to complete assessments if you can, but there is a 'safety net' if you are not in a position to do so.

A survey published by the [Higher Education Policy Institute](#) on 7/4/20 shows that a majority of students still want the opportunity to complete their assessments remotely, and we need to take this into account.