

## **Update for degree students about assessment support measures in academic year 2020-21**

5<sup>th</sup> February 2021

The health and wellbeing of our students and staff is at the heart of everything we are doing during this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic.

We know that most of you are managing your studies successfully, despite the demands of the pandemic situation. We understand you are all affected by COVID-19 in different ways, with practical, personal, employment and academic factors affecting you and your families. Some of you will be experiencing challenges which affect your ability to study as normal. We want to do what we can to help you continue and/or complete your studies successfully. We hope this update will help to reassure you and keep you informed about our thinking. We will continue to listen to your feedback in this evolving and uncertain context, and ensure that we remain aligned with national guidance for higher education.

### **Range of measures to support your learning**

We have already put a range of measures in place to support your learning, and mitigate the ongoing impact of COVID-19 restrictions.

We have:

- Adjusted modules and programmes to take account of limited campus access.
- Adapted programmes to remote delivery (where this was not previously the main mode of delivery)
- Rescheduled some practical and placement activities. We will keep this under review and make contingency plans if necessary in accordance with Scottish Government guidance
- Provided laptops and other hardware to students experiencing digital poverty
- Provided remote access to specialist software and learning resources
- Facilitated campus and library access for students in need (where this is possible in line with Scottish Government guidance)
- Reviewed the number and type of assessments, and deadline dates so that these can be managed more easily in the current circumstances
- Changed all in-person examinations to other forms of assessment for academic year 2020-21
- Coordinated communications to reach students with relevant information

### **Range of measures to support you in completing assessments**

We have received positive feedback from many of you about our approach to teaching and learning this year, and the support you have received from staff.

However, we recognise that some of you may be concerned about assessment, and what to do if you encounter difficulties. We want to reassure you that we have introduced a number of measures to support you to do the best that you can. These measures will take account of your individual circumstances, in addition to the adjustments to support your learning (as outlined above).

Mitigating circumstances – via a simple online process. We have relaxed the eligibility requirements for mitigating circumstances. You do not need to provide any documentary evidence. We will accept any reasonable grounds, including IT / connectivity issues, employment, caring or home-schooling responsibilities, or challenges with having a suitable study space at home. By identifying your circumstances as COVID-19 related, your request will be approved automatically. Please keep in touch with your personal academic tutor if you apply for mitigating circumstances. They will be required to endorse your request but will also be able to discuss any issues or queries you may have. You can apply online at [www.studentjourney.uhi.ac.uk](http://www.studentjourney.uhi.ac.uk)

Extensions – you can use the online mitigating circumstances process to apply for a short extension. This means you can submit your assessment late without incurring a penalty.

Deferral - you can use the online mitigating circumstances process to defer your assessment to the next assessment opportunity. This means that you can take more time to complete work and submit it without incurring a penalty. For assessments due to be submitted in semester 2, the next assessment opportunity will be in summer (August 2021).

Semester 1 assessments – if you have outstanding assessments from semester 1, you can choose to submit these either during semester 2 as normal, or defer these to the summer without penalty. If you are able to do so, we encourage you to submit in semester 2. The additional flexibility may relieve pressure and enable you to focus on your current modules, but you should discuss with your personal academic tutor. [Student FAQs here](#)

If you feel that your circumstances are more challenging, speak with your personal academic tutor for advice about other possible options, such as suspending studies.

### **Principles underpinning the assessment support measures**

We seek to ensure that:

- We enable students to complete their qualification or progress to the next stage. Wherever possible, progression and award decisions will be made within normal timescales
- We maintain the academic standards of our awards, and that credit and qualifications are awarded consistently
- We continue to meet the accreditation requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, where relevant.
- We make assessment decisions that are fair and students are treated consistently
- Students are not academically penalised, and we will take the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic into account as far as reasonably possible
- We continue to provide opportunities for assessment at all levels, using alternative assessment arrangements where necessary. If we are unable to deliver practical elements, students will not be penalised.

### **Potential further assessment support measures**

We are actively considering whether there is need for any further measures to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19. We are analysing assessment data from semester 1 to understand impacts on students'

achievements so far this year. We are engaging proactively with the Highlands and Islands Students' Association and listening to student feedback. However, we need to consider the details carefully to ensure that any further measures are in line with the principles above. We will also of course need to consider the implications of new Scottish Government guidance as this is published. In the meantime, please continue to engage with all of your modules, and prepare for completing your assessments as well as you can.

### **Different assessment support measures in academic year 2020-21**

We are not intending to apply the same set of exceptional assessment measures in 2020-21 as in academic year 2019-20, because the context we are in now is different. Last year, there was sudden and unprecedented disruption mid-year due to the pandemic lockdown. Academic year 2020-21 is different - learning, teaching and assessment has been adjusted (where necessary) to current circumstances, with the majority of learning and assessment planned to be online. Nonetheless, we recognise circumstances may be more difficult for some of you as the pandemic continues, so the support measures focus on options for individuals.

### **Further information**

If you have queries or concerns about your studies, speak to your personal academic tutor or course leader. Alternatively, you can contact student support staff at your local academic partner.