

H/02/42/02

The University of Edinburgh

**Senate Education Committee
Monday 25 May 2020 at 2.00pm
Conducted via Microsoft Teams**

A G E N D A

For Discussion and Approval

1. **Planning for Academic Year 2020/21:**
 - Widening Participation Considerations Paper A
 - Preparing for End of Semester 1 2020/21 Assessment Paper B
2. **Postgraduate Research Matters**
3. **Governance Arrangements during COVID-19 Recovery**

Widening participation across the student lifecycle is a priority for the University of Edinburgh, evidenced in our commitment in [Strategy 2030](#) and our [WP strategy](#) launched in 2018.

Supporting and increasing access for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds is more important than ever. No learners will be left unscathed by the COVID-19 pandemic and we know our learners from underrepresented groups are going to have even more intense challenges; lack of access to Wi-Fi or sufficient technology, lack of quiet space to study in, extreme financial worries, mental health and wellbeing issues (in particular for those with caring responsibilities), and heightened isolation (in particular those care experienced or estranged students living alone). There was already strong evidence that showed the detrimental impact that a 6 week summer holiday has on young people living in poverty. Research already suggests that the achievement gap between different socioeconomic groups may grow primarily during the summer holidays, when children are away from school, and so a gap of potentially 3 months out of education is likely to have longer term impacts than we're aware of right now.¹

Poverty is a huge barrier to accessing higher education and 18 year-olds from Scotland's 20% least deprived communities are more than four times as likely to enter university as those from the 20% most deprived communities. Around 22% of children in Edinburgh live in relative poverty (defined as their household income being below 60% of the average income). Edinburgh is an affluent city and it ranks in the top Scottish quartile for incomes, but it is in the poorest Scottish quartile for indicators of poverty. In the most deprived areas of Edinburgh, the proportion of households living below the poverty threshold rises to 33%. This level is comparable to the rate recorded in the most deprived parts of Glasgow and almost double the rate recorded across Edinburgh's least deprived areas.

School closures and digital poverty

For prospective students, isolation and time out of formal education has introduced uncertainty and cultivated a sense of unpreparedness for university life. But this new reality is more real for some. A recent report from the Sutton Trust shines a spotlight on how the COVID-19 pandemic is widening the existing attainment gap for students from the poorest backgrounds². The Sutton Trust report reveals that not all students have equal access to this online provision. Almost half (48%) of applicants feel the COVID-19 health crisis will have a negative impact on their chances of getting into their first-choice university. Working class applicants were more likely to be worried about the negative impact (51%, compared to 43% from middle class homes). Applicants from working class backgrounds were twice as likely to have insufficient access to internet access, devices for learning or a suitable place to study, compared to those from middle class homes.

School hubs have been set up in most local authorities in Scotland in order to continue to support vulnerable students or those with additional learning needs, but a spokesperson for the Scottish Children's Services Coalition (SCSC) said: "We have concerns that just under 1 per cent of schoolchildren are at childcare hubs and, of those attending, 86 per cent are the children of key workers, while only 14 per cent are vulnerable children.

"These are very small numbers, reflecting the fact that only a tiny fraction of vulnerable children are taking up these places and should set alarm bells ringing."³

¹ Achievement gaps in summer holidays for socio-economic groups
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0907568218779130> Alexander et al, 2016

² Sutton Trust, 2020: <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-and-social-mobility-impact-brief/>

³ <https://www.tes.com/news/fears-about-vulnerable-pupils-during-lockdown>

Care experienced, estranged students and those with caring responsibilities: some specific challenges

For those students without family networks COVID-19 has brought an abrupt and very specific hardship; what home/family should they return to and what support networks are available to them at a frightening and isolating time? Charities supporting care experienced and estranged students combined efforts swiftly and surveyed their target groups to find out what their main worries were. In that survey 62% of students cited worries around earning money and 50% were worried about getting essential supplies such as food. 62% said they were worried about their ability to complete their courses and 55% were worried about feeling lonely or isolated⁴.

Mature students, particularly those with caring responsibilities, are facing intense challenges in terms of continuing with their studies and having the space, time and financial resource to complete access courses as well as undergraduate courses. The SWAP East route into the University of Edinburgh (that provides a route in via college) is a popular pathway for mature students and typically 70-100 students every year enter the University via this route. In a recent survey of their students at least 25% of their students attending the University and those on college courses identified themselves as single parents.

Final year students

Speaking to graduating students from lower income families they described the hardships they are currently facing in terms of loss of part-time employment and the fear of having no financial safety net; a fear echoed by many students. ██████████, a final year Philosophy student spoke of the swift communication she had received from her academic School following lockdown, but also of the uncertainty around her graduate prospects, citing that at least 50% of the graduate roles or internships she had applied for had been axed and that SME internships were in high demand. She hadn't even considered postgraduate study due to the cost and was even less likely to consider it within the current environment as well as due to family pressure to get into the workplace to earn money. ██████████ and her fellow fourth year ██████████ are founders and editors for the [Level with Me](#) online journal about the experiences of students from underrepresented groups and both spoke of how "Uni felt like it stopped on 13 March" and how abrupt that felt in terms of losing out on graduation, friends leaving, not to mention the fear of not being able to find work once the restrictions ease.

So what are we doing and what else should we be considering right now?

In the central WP team we have been rapidly exploring different ways to connect with our prospective students in schools, colleges and local communities – being careful not to overburden teachers and students, but offering clear and tailored support. We've been setting up online sessions and making our resources available online for students to access as well as pre-recording IAG sessions for school teachers to use with their students. Colleagues across the University are working together to harness the resources and expertise we have and to make it available in an accessible and useful way (via the Moray House Online School platform). A member of the central WP team is at the end of the phone or video call for [care experienced and estranged students](#) and coordinates a staff mentoring scheme for current care experienced students which has continued through the lockdown – with University staff still managing to find time to continue to support their mentees.

⁴ <https://becomecharity.org.uk/media/2279/supporting-care-experienced-and-estranged-students-in-higher-education-responding-to-covid-19.pdf>

Recognising the wide-ranging impacts of COVID-19 on education and wellbeing, the University has significantly up-scaled the [support for current and incoming students](#) (of the approx. 700 students who have benefited from the financial support available over 100 are from disadvantaged backgrounds). Work is moving swiftly to ensure offer holders will also have access to short study-skills courses that can help with preparations for their first academic term – these will provide a resource to help students adjust to the new University Environment and enable them to feel a part of the University community before they arrive as well as to attempt to level the playing field for those who have been out of formal education since the early spring (with a particular focus on Maths and English).

Now, possibly more than ever before, we must consider those students who face disadvantage or barriers within their educational journey. We need to ensure that the [progress we have made in widening access](#) over the last few years doesn't fall by the wayside and that we remember those learners at every stage in the student lifecycle:

- by maintaining our connections and support for local communities and schools,
- ensuring fairness is embedded into every aspect of the admissions process,
- enhancing the welcome and transition to the University,
- strengthening the support structures we have in place for the most vulnerable students,
- considering the educational gaps they may have experienced when reforming and designing our curriculum (in particular year 1),
- considering more ways to make postgraduate study accessible and affordable,
- and continuing to help our graduates to access incredible employment opportunities despite the challenging circumstances they find themselves in.

Laura Cattell, Head of Widening Participation/Deputy Director

Student Recruitment and Admissions

22.05.2020

Delivering Curriculum 2020-21: Preparing for end of semester one assessment

Context

Assuming there will be a range of local and global public health constraints still in place by December 2020 and in accordance with planning for a hybrid approach to teaching and assessment we were asked to explore possible options for the December 2020 exam diet. A small group of colleagues from across the University met on Thursday 14th May and this note provides a summary of the discussion and some follow up clarification.

Feedback from summer exam diet 2020

The majority of pre honours (SCQF level 7-8) exams due to take place in April-May 2020 were cancelled and all in person exams for honours and PGT students (SCQF level 9-11) were replaced with one of three options:

- 2 or 3 hour exam plus one hour to allow for remote/online uploads plus one hour for students with SDS approved, additional time learning adjustments
- 48 hour open book exam
- Alternative assessment with a typical deadline of 7 calendar days.

Appendix one shows the volume of replacement exams that were scheduled for May 2020. Initial feedback from Schools and ISG colleagues on the May 2020 diet has been broadly positive although the work involved in setting up the assessments (e.g. drop boxes) and then addressing the marking has been considerable and many colleagues have reported concerns about the clunky processes especially for short format exams that required uploads of scanned documents. Early submission stats from at least one School are promising and indicate good engagement with the significant majority of students.

The group agreed that with appropriate time for planning and preparation and some further exploration of appropriate digital solutions there were valuable lessons learned that could be translated to a new remote exam diet if necessary.

Preparing for December 2020

Colleges were asked to gather feedback and it was broadly accepted that it would be appropriate to plan for no face to face exams for the majority of students in December 2020 (see appendices two and three). Most subject areas are exploring coursework/alternative assessment for semester one but it was noted that quantitative and technical subjects would require timed, exam style assessment of one form or another. It is standard across quantitative and many scientific disciplines to use exam-based assessment and although colleagues may be willing to explore longer term solutions this would require considerable consultation and planning over a more prolonged period than is available to us at the current time.

A key guiding principle that the whole group thought would be essential is that even with the hybrid methods of teaching the approach to assessment must be identical for the entire cohort. In other words, assuming we have to allow for significant numbers of students not being on campus, any exam diet must be delivered remotely.

MVM have concerns about PSRB verification requirements for individuals sitting exams and would need to explore workaround solutions for the November OCSEs if it was deemed necessary. A significant amount of MVM assessment is via MCQ and there is concern that these might not be deliverable in remote format which might therefore necessitate a change to teaching approaches. The Vet School are preparing an approach which would allow for rebalancing of assessment such that the essential practical aspects are still covered this academic year but once the students are back on campus, hopefully more reliably in semester 2. Any practical skills elements that have been missed by students in years 1-4 will be similarly picked up once students return.

Also important to note that new UG students joining from many secondary schools will not have undertaken final exams and therefore will be lacking in examination practice and skills. It will therefore be important to avoid delaying all exposure to exam format until the end of semester two.

The group discussed how to define an assessment as an exam. It was agreed that a common understanding was that exams were scheduled, timed assessments, usually of short duration, involving simultaneous release with no extensions permitted except for those managed under the learning adjustments. In follow up I sought clarification on the regulatory definition of an exam in the context of remote exams. In response it was noted that exam hall regulations do not apply to remote exams and we do not currently have a mechanism to invigilate remote exams which means there is no current regulation that defines a remote/digital assessment explicitly as an exam.

Suggested options for December 2020

No face to face exams for any students

Guiding principle: Reduce reliance on exams, in course (ICA) and end of course assessment (CWA) therefore the primary approach in many Schools but would need further exploration of (CWA) submission deadlines and the exam timetable to avoid overloading students and markers.

Any assessment diet would NOT extend beyond 21st December 2020.

Honours and PGT (SCQF level 9-11): where it is considered essential to use end of course exam format assessment the options will be:

- 2 or 3 hours plus one hour to allow for digital uploads and plus one hour for students with additional time adjustments.
- 24 hour open book exams (not 48 hours)

Paddy Corscadden has confirmed that 24 hour open book exams are widely used across the sector and he would support this in preference to 48 hours. The assessment is meant to replicate the short format 2-3 in person exam and hyper focussed and anxious students are prone to use the full length of time permitted so 24 hours is considered to be preferable to 48 hours.

Pre honours (SCQF level 7-8): Where possible pre honours courses to be assessed through in course work and end of course assessment (CWA).

Where short format, timed assessments required (typically quantitative and technical subjects as well as some with PSRB expectations) at the end of the course the options will be:

- 2 or 3 hours plus one hour to allow for digital uploads and plus one hour for students with additional time adjustments.
- 24 hour open book exams (not 48 hours)

Issues to be addressed

- How long would the assessment diet need to be, can we reduce to less than 10 days?
- Would alternative CWA of 7 day duration be considered as part of the assessment diet
- Would a revision period still be required and if so how long?
- How do you replace oral language exams, synchronous live performance music exams?
- What are the regulatory definitions of remote/online exams?
- How do you mitigate for misconduct and/or fraud?
- What technical/digital solutions can be employed to reduce workloads and improve the staff and student experience (ISG have been asked to provide comment and feedback)?
- How do we deliver secure candidate authentication for PSRB based assessments in the event that online assessments become the norm?
- Careful communication and support and skills development for students undertaking remote exam assessments would be critical during semester one
- We need be clear that plans, guidance and regulations are sufficiently robust and clear to ensure that we do not need to use a no detriment approach in future diets even if there are further Covid related lockdowns.
- Longer term all members of the group agreed that we should seek to explore ways to reduce our reliance on assessment and the overall volume of assessment

Lisa Kendall, Sabine Rolle, Richard Baxstrom, Judy Hardy, Alex Laidlaw, Michael Seery, Scott Rosie, Phil Larkman

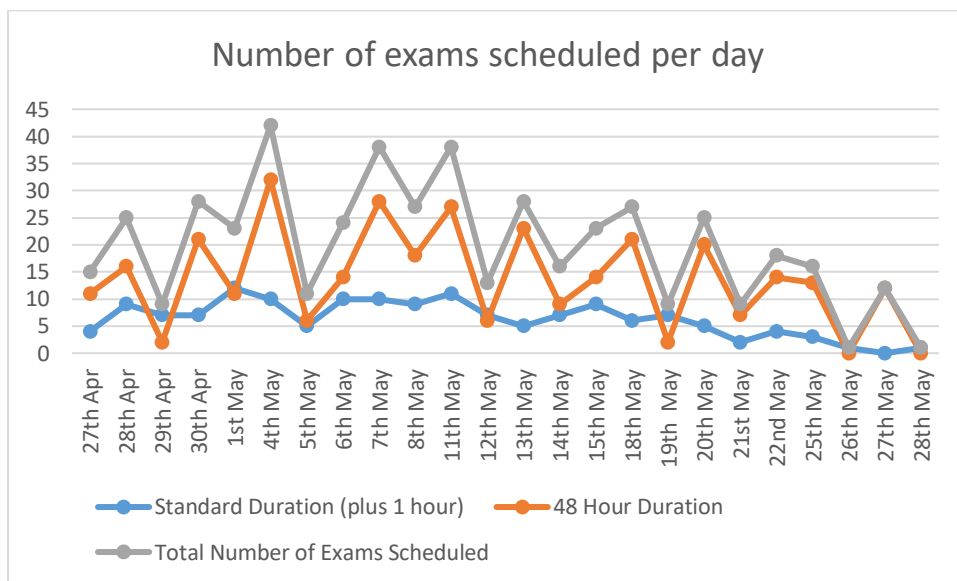
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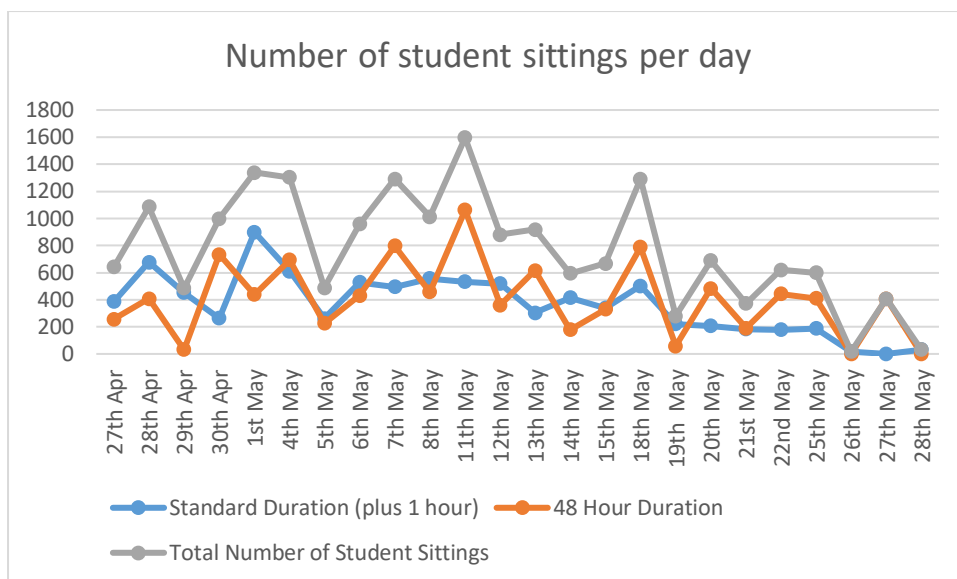
Appendix One: May 2020 exam diet final schedule stats

Assessment type	No. of exams	No. of exams %	No. of student sittings	No. of student sittings %
Standard duration +1hr	151	31.6%	8,764	47.2%
48hr assessment	327	68.4%	9,799	52.8%
Total:	478	100%	18,563	100%

Assessment type	Retained original date	Retained original date %	Moved to new date	Moved to new date %
Standard duration +1hr	121	80.1%	30	19.9%
48hr assessment	200	61.2%	127	38.8%

Assessment type	No. overlap	No. overlap %	Overlap 72hrs	Overlap 72hrs %	Overlap 48hrs	Overlap 48hrs %
Standard duration +1hr	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
48hr assessment	14	0.14%	10	0.1%	4	0.04%





Appendix Two: Semester one Exams Feedback from CAHSS Schools (14-05-20)

Business	In the Business School we are working through this as we speak. We are aiming to limit the number of closed book exams to only those courses that absolutely need them especially for PSRB requirements with our accounting accreditation bodies (approx. 6 of them). We have some very quantitative courses as well that ideally would be examined under normal closed book, timed exam conditions. We are currently proposing assessing some of the affected Sem 1 courses (especially accounting and Business Analytics) in the Sem 2 exam period for 20/21 to try to buy some time. It would be really helpful to be have this flexibility and to build in some slack for Sem 1 alternative assessments so that we can set take home exams/alternative assessments in Early January. Have there been any discussions about buying some time in Sem 1 at the end of the semester and delaying Semester 2 to give an assessment period in early/mid January. The 48hr exams appear to be working well apart from a few minor technical glitches.
Divinity	We have agreed to 48hr take home exams to replace the centrally scheduled written exams for almost all our courses in Semester 1. We are planning that we will not have centrally scheduled exams in December.
Economics	I think that if we had to, Economics would use the x+1 model for our December exams, including our Pre-Honours courses. We would have to make changes to how they are written, but our experience (so far *fingers crossed*) of the exam period has been fairly smooth, and we could probably run a robust December exam period for Honours and Pre-Honours on that basis if need be. No assessment at all would, I think, be resisted given the fact that we have made the online exams work for this

	diet, and with more time to prepare students there is no reason why we couldn't run the diet this way again.
ECA	Will have PSRB issues for ESALA and synchronous live performance for music that need to be addressed. No School wide perspective been tested yet.
HCA	Things are still very much under discussion at HCA but 48 hour exams seem to have worked well for the majority of our courses so far during this diet. We are encouraging course organisers away from exams in sem 1, especially at pre-honours although it is likely we will need some kind of exam for our language courses.
HiSS	We are encouraging course organisers away from any exams in semester 1, including 48 hour exams, but negotiations on this have not yet concluded. To clarify, we will still assess courses at all levels, but via coursework rather than exams.
Law	UG Law we will either be changing to coursework assessments or - where not appropriate - keeping the 48hr take home exams. We have been working on the assumption that there will be no on-campus exams in semester one.
LLC	Similar position to HCA – 48 hour exams have been okay, as has the course work option (which we prefer), so no particular issues. We do have the thorny question of the best way to conduct synchronous oral language exams.
MHSES	<p>There were no exams scheduled for PGT courses. In UG we adopted alternative assessments for all exams scheduled to take place. Students had to complete the assessment within the 7 days and those with schedules of adjustments had an extra 5 days.</p> <p>For Semester 1, a number of courses have changed their mode of assessment away from an examination but for those that have retained an examination, the CCAM entry now shows that it will be an exam or an online exam.</p> <p>We appreciate that there are concerns about the time students may or may not be spending on the examination. One the main reasons why the school adopted alternative assessments this semester rather than the 48 hour option was because we were aware that that format would place considerable pressure on students with any additional caring responsibilities which may or may not still be the case next academic year. We will enter next academic year with only a few exams for UG courses so the scheduling of open book exams should be able to avoid overloading students and scheduling back to back exams during the exam period.</p>

PPLS	We have changed the assessment for almost all of our courses next year to have no exams or otherwise strictly timed assessments (with the exception of a handful, mostly technical/formal courses like advanced logic and speech and language processing). The approach in many courses, especially at pre-Hons, is to have more pieces of coursework assessment to promote continuous engagement.
SPS	Course work or take home exam, may be open to exploring scheduling of take home exam during the diet but not consulted on this in the School yet.

Appendix Three: Comments from SCE Schools on 20/21 Semester 1 assessments - for Exam and Assessment Working Group

Judy Hardy, 14 May 20

Main themes

1. *Any lessons learned to date from the current exam diet.*
 - 1.1. Overall, exams are going relatively smoothly, although this has involved a great deal of work by technical, professional services and academic staff, e.g. setting up processes to support online submission, marking etc.
 - 1.2. The move from closed book to open book exams has generally gone well. It's too early to know the impact, if any, on mark distribution/pass rate.
 - 1.3. It's evident that keen students see the 48-hour window as the length of time they should work for in order to 'do a good job'. It's difficult to see how to avoid this without using the standard time+1hr format or similar.
 - 1.4. There have been some significant technical challenges using Learn for submissions and for marking, especially in Schools that require students to scan and upload solutions. Examples include:
 - Setting multiple submission deadlines (for students with adjustments) is non-trivial.
 - Cannot restrict students to uploading the required number of pdfs, e.g. one pdf for the whole paper, or one pdf per question, depending on markers involved.
 - Annotating student solutions is difficult, e.g. need maths, ticks/crosses, pointers etc. as well as text.

2. *Any preferred options for Semester 1 exams/assessments for pre-Hons, Hons and PGT (with the likely assumption that in-person exams may raise significant challenges).*
 - 2.1. Many Schools (but not all) are considering using more ICA and reducing the reliance on end of semester exams. A couple of Schools made the point that 48 hr take-home, open-book exams are, in effect, already coursework irrespective of the name.
 - 2.2. There's a general view that in-person exams will not be feasible in Sem 1, so online exams will be needed.
 - 2.3. There's a – largely implicit - assumption that all students will sit the same form of exam (so no 'hybrid' exams i.e. offered both in person and online!).
 - 2.4. There will be a need for both long format (48 hr or possibly 24 hr) and short format (standard+1hr) exams.
 - 2.5. Given the amount of effort that has gone into the current exams, and the relative success of these, Schools are not keen to make more major changes to the process.

2.6. There are mixed views on delaying Semester 1 exams to the May 21 diet.

- Possible pros include:
 - It would reduce the stress on students while they are acclimatising to hybrid teaching
 - We may not be back to normal even in Sem 2, so staff teaching in Sem 2 will need as much time as possible in Sem 1 to develop courses
- Possible cons include:
 - It would make the May diet very high stakes (and in some programmes a very high exam load) for PGT students
 - The lack of pre-Hons and School exams in May 20 means that pre-Hons students may have been 'coasting' for some time even by Dec 20
 - It's likely to overcrowd the May 21 diet.