

Fairfield School of Business

COVID-19; Exceptional Regulations and Procedures for Academic Year 2020 / 2021, and 'No Detriment' Policy

Version 2.2 – January 2021

As of the latest revision, these regulations have been updated in response to the UK Government's 'Stay at Home (National Lockdown) order, which is in force across the country to prevent the spread of a new, more infectious variant of the COVID-19 virus. Restrictions will be in place until further notice.

The following Exceptional Regulations set out FSB's approach to securing academic standards during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. It has been necessary to implement exceptional regulations during the pandemic to manage the delivery of Higher Education programmes in line with regulatory expectations for quality and standards, and to ensure students' academic experience continues to meet their reasonable expectations, regardless of any social distancing restrictions that are in place.

These regulations are counterpart to special regulations enacted by FSB's award validating partners, London Metropolitan University and Pearson, which set out changes to assessment rules that will be applied for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

FSB's existing policies and procedures and will remain in effect during this time, unless superseded by the regulations below; where a School policy or procedure is not included below, this indicates that there are no changes to it, and procedures already in place continue to apply. Once social distancing restrictions have been lifted and the situation returns to normality, the School will take a structured approach to restoring its normal policies and procedures.

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1. Authority

For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, FSB will preserve its normal mechanisms of governance and delegated authority. There will be no changes to the quoracy or terms of reference of committee meetings, which will be held remotely using video conferencing software.

As the pandemic situation has proven to develop suddenly and unexpectedly, the CEO of FSB will be empowered to take decisive action at short notice where matters arise concerning compliance with government directives or the safety and wellbeing of individuals. This prerogative will be used with discretion and such decisions will be reviewed by the Board of Governors retrospectively.

FSB delivers its higher education programmes under validation agreements with recognised higher education awarding bodies who set assessment and progression rules for the programmes offered by the School. Under these partnership agreements FSB is obliged to implement any exceptional regulations and algorithms for determining grades, progression status and award classification in accordance with our partners' specifications. Such adjustments will therefore differ between programmes and cohorts. However, FSB will continue to engage with both its university partners and its students to ensure that prescribed changes to normal assessment regulations are appropriate.

These Exceptional Regulations will be rescinded when the Board of Governors deems it appropriate to do so, or when FSB's partner award validating partners advise the School that exceptional regulations pertaining to validation have been lifted.

2. Guiding Principles and 'No Detriment' Approach

For the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, FSB will adopt a principled approach to decision-making which emphasises the following:

- i. **The safety of individuals** – as priority, ensuring that any risk of contagion with COVID-19 is minimised through adequate risk assessment and safe management of its facilities, including where required, the use of online programme delivery methods and admissions procedures.
- ii. **The continuity of higher education**; regardless of any changes made to programme delivery to accommodate social distancing restrictions, the School will:
 - continue to provide a high-quality academic experience, which supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes
 - continue to comply with consumer protection laws and protect students' interests in the event of changes made to programme delivery

- support the health and wellbeing of students and staff who become infected with COVID-19
 - support staff and students beyond any immediate outbreak control (i.e. health and wellbeing, mental health, hardship, or limited access to a suitable home study environment)
- iii. **A ‘No Detriment’ approach to assessments**; this means that FSB, and its award-validating partners will make sure that no student will be academically disadvantaged by the current situation. On some programmes this may necessitate temporary adaptations to assessment rules, grade calculating algorithms and procedures for considering mitigating circumstances.
 - iv. **The integrity of awards**; the School will work with its award-validating partners to preserve the integrity of the awards it offers; FSB will ensure that programmes that must be delivered partially online continue to align with regulatory expectations, chiefly those set out in the *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, and other external reference points.
 - v. **Timeliness of notifications to students**; changes to learning opportunities will be communicated to students without undue delay and no later than **2 working days** after such changes are decided by, or notified to the School; where such decisions affect individuals’ safety or wellbeing, this will be **1 working day**.
 - vi. **Continued student engagement** - FSB will ensure that students are consulted individually and collectively about any necessary changes made to their learning experience; this includes any changes prescribed by award validating partners.
 - vii. **The use of external expertise** - FSB will ensure its response to the ongoing public health crisis reflects sector best practise and will make use of guidance and resources from regulators and higher education industry bodies. The School will continue to provide COVID-themed CPD activities for its staff, which is relevant to their duties. FSB will consult changes made to its learning opportunities with its advisory partners.

3. Management of Facilities

The School’s approach to managing its facilities safely and effectively during the pandemic is set out within its **Outbreak Management Plan (OMP)**, which establishes a framework for responding to the risk of individuals becoming infected with COVID.

FSB will operate its teaching facilities and support centres in accordance with prevailing social distancing regulations and COVID-Secure standards published by the Health and Safety Executive. The School’s response to any changes in social distancing policy and operating restrictions will be determined by an extraordinary meeting of its Executive Committee in response to government policy announcements immediately after they occur.

The School will take a discretionary approach in determining safe and practical staffing levels required to maintain essential facilities and services, where Government or DfE guidance stipulates that such facilities should remain accessible to students.

Building occupancy restrictions, physical distancing, safety signage, PPE and enhanced sanitation measures are stringently applied by campus Deans and overseen by the School's Executive Management. All staff, students and visitors will receive comprehensive COVID-19 safety inductions. The movement of individuals between campuses and office facilities has been temporarily prohibited to remove any risk of cross-contagion.

Any individuals in who are, or live with someone who is at a high clinical risk of serious illness with COVID, will have the option of working or studying remotely until the situation has stabilised nationally; such arrangements will be agreed on a case-by-case basis with regard to an individuals' circumstances.

4. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Whilst social distancing restrictions remain in force, there will be circumstances in which teaching and learning, and assessment activity cannot take place as scheduled. FSB will provide suitable alternative arrangements for students to minimise the impact to their scheduled learning, teaching and assessment.

Changes commensurate with the level of study will be applied to teaching delivery, assessment strategies (including the establishment of alternative assessments), and submission deadlines, in order to mitigate the impact of the circumstances.

Examinations, practical assessments and other assessments may be replaced with alternative assessments, where this is appropriate; FSB will agree such changes with its award validating partners.

Additionally, the School may adapt lesson delivery with enhanced use of break-out exercises and formative assessments to ensure students' engagement and assimilation of lesson content, where teaching is conducted online.

5. Changes to Assessment and Progression Regulations

The following section signposts temporary changes to the requirements for progression and determination of award classification that have been notified to FSB by its award-validating partners. Anyone who is unsure which regulations apply should contact the Registry at registry@fairfield.ac

LONDON METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY

The University has set out regulations pertaining to assessment and progression applicable in a force majeure scenario, which can be read here:

[Exceptional arrangements \(Force majeure\) - Student Zone \(londonmet.ac.uk\)](#)

The University's normal assessment regulations can be read here; where there is any discrepancy between these and Exceptional Arrangements in force, the exceptional arrangements shall take precedence:

[6-Undergraduate-Assessment-Regulations.pdf \(londonmet.ac.uk\)](#)

A summary of changes to regulations can be read here:

[Academic-Regulations-summary-of-Changes-2020-21.pdf \(londonmet.ac.uk\)](#)

Students required to complete placements as part of their studies will be able to continue to do so. Where this is not possible because of COVID restrictions, then the FSB will work with LMU to find alternative ways for students to meet this requirement.

PEARSON / EDEXCEL PROGRAMMES (HND/HNC)

There are currently no changes to coursework assessment or grade calculations rules applicable to students on Pearson programmes.

Where a work experience/practice requirement is mandated within a qualification, it is expected all students will achieve this requirement in full. Where this is not possible due to the impact of COVID-19 restrictions, students will be able to progress to certification in the following circumstances:

- The student has completed the minimum required work experience/practice hours originally stipulated and all attempts to access further hours;
- The student has engaged with steps have been taken by FSB to support them to achieve the required work experience/practice hours, including part-time employment, bank and relief options, volunteering, work during holiday periods;
- Actions taken to secure the full requirement of work experience/practice hours have been recorded and are available for internal and external quality assurance

Students are permitted to meet this requirement through completing these hours in different work placement environments or the same workplace, providing these placements meet the minimum placement requirements as stipulated in the relevant programme specification.

6. Programme Monitoring and Review

Quality assurance functions relating to the timely review and development of programmes will continue as scheduled. The School will implement additional oversight to assess the effectiveness of online delivery methods; this will include comparative review of student performance data, reports from the School's Teaching and Learning Forum, impressions from targeted survey exercises and technical reports on remote delivery infrastructure.

7. Operation of Internal and External Assessment Boards

Wherever possible, Internal and External Assessment Boards will continue to convene at the scheduled times and in accordance existing procedure.

The Boards may be conducted in person or via online conferencing software.

Assessment Boards will exercise caution about making decisions that would normally lead to the withdrawal of students. If a decision is not possible based on available information, it will be deferred until sufficient information is available.

8. Attendance Monitoring and Student Support

For the duration of any interim period of online or blended programme delivery, students' attendance in classes will be captured using the student portal (VLE). All students undertaking remote lessons must log into the portal during regular hours to have their attendance confirmed.

Students will be provided with a unique weblink, sent to their email addresses which they must follow in order to join their classes.

Class attendance will be monitored by the Attendance Officer, who will update the student record system accordingly. Students who do not attend their lessons online will be contacted by the School in the normal way and existing sanctions for non-attendance given in the School's *Attendance Monitoring Policy and Procedures* will continue to apply.

The School's student support mechanisms will be calibrated to intervene quickly where students may be at academic risk, particularly due to circumstances relating to the COVID pandemic; the School will signpost students to internal and external services, including remedial academic development opportunities, counselling services and local support agencies. Students' Personal Development Planning (PDP) and Review of Engagement and Academic Performance (REAP) will remain the primary means of prescribing support and setting and monitoring targets for students' development and achievement.

9. Mitigating Circumstances

There are no fundamental changes to the way claims for mitigating circumstances are processed at this time. However, where students may be suffering from new or exacerbated problems, caused by a change in circumstances related to COVID-19, they may be eligible for mitigating circumstances.

FSB will brief its Mitigating Circumstances panel to be considerate of the following:

- i. Unless hospitalised or severely ill, a student is unlikely to be able to obtain medical evidence of illness as NHS services are currently under increased pressure;
- ii. COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease) can be a very severe illness for some and require an extended period of recuperation, whereas some experience a comparatively mild infection and recovery quickly; the School will make no assumption about how long recovery should take;
- iii. A student is unlikely to be able to provide evidence of Information Technology (IT) short-comings due to remote access;
- iv. Students may not have access to the IT equipment necessary to complete a programme of online learning;
- v. Students with caring responsibilities for vulnerable person during the current pandemic may not be able to share information about that person and have limited means to evidence this.

In respect of the above, normal standards of evidence for mitigating circumstances will be relaxed. Any officer investigating a mitigating circumstances claim may however request evidence relating to individual cases which they deem can be reasonably provided.

For example, the School still expects to see evidence of the following:

- i. Students in high clinical risk groups due to underlying health conditions are likely to be able to provide evidence of those conditions;
- ii. A student should be able to provide evidence of travel which has resulted in the need to self-isolate in accordance with NHS and other medical guidance.

Mitigating Circumstances Panels will assess claims on the basis of evidence available to them and to consider a student's own account of impact.

Any decisions to not attend teaching, supervision, etc, where students are able to attend, and where those decisions are not based on advice published/recommended by the NHS or government websites, or due to reasonable concerns related to a student's underlying health would not be covered by the exceptional mitigating circumstances regulations.

Students and colleagues should be encouraged to act responsibly and avoid taking unnecessary risks. The NHS has published guidance regarding self-isolation and recommended actions and, as a general principle, any student taking measures to comply with that guidance should not fear additional disadvantage in respect of the FSB's handling of mitigating circumstances claims.

10. Academic Misconduct

The following exceptional regulations are additional to the School's published Academic Misconduct Policy and will be in effect until such time as social distancing measures in response to COVID-19 are lifted, and operations return to normality.

Where there is documentary evidence of academic misconduct:

(e.g. a high similarity index in a Turnitin report)

In such circumstances, normal procedures and sanctions described in the Academic Misconduct Policy apply and an online panel meeting will be convened.

Where academic misconduct is suspected but there is no documentary evidence:

(e.g. suspicion that a student has used a contract cheating service to produce an assignment for them, or the work is result of collaboration, to a greater or lesser extent with a friend or relative – particularly one who has already taken the course).

The School will use the following to detect and flag instances where there is likelihood, but no documentary evidence, that a student has submitted the work of another person as their own:

- Comparison with the quality of the student's previous summative submissions if these are available
- formative (informal) assessment activities already undertaken to gauge a student's ability and compare this with the work they submit for a summative assessment

It is understood that markers will not have the time compare every piece of work they mark to a previous assignment or formative assessment submission; markers should use sound judgement and familiarity with their students' abilities in deciding how and when to investigate an assignment submission.

Suspected instances of misconduct will be investigated using the following:

- **Online Viva Voce examination**, where the student will have the opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the subject matter and of the substance of their submission; The Viva Voce will be attended by the tutor marking the assignment and the module leader for that assignment. The student may not be accompanied at the Viva Voce.
- **An online Academic Misconduct Panel meeting**, where a Viva Voce examination gives cause for concern that work is not genuinely the student's own

The existing membership and terms of reference for Academic Misconduct Panels stand, and there is no change to the standard of evidence required.

11. Review of these Regulations

FSB's Exceptional Regulations will be reviewed by the Board of Governors and its Executive Committee at the start of each semester, for the duration that COVID social distancing restrictions remain in force, or as required by changing circumstances, or where FSB's award validating partners notify changes to the School. They will be rescinded when the Board of Governors deems it appropriate to do so, or when FSB's award validating partners advise the School that exceptional regulations pertaining to award validation have been lifted.

All changes will be reviewed and approved by the Board of Governors in the normal way.

Version 2.2. - Approved by Board of Governors

January 2021