

Section 50 Contingency plans for staff shortages that impact on assessment and examinations

50.1 Context

- 50.1.1 This plan presents a set of contingencies that may be implemented when **exceptional** situations arise that impact on the timely completion of assessment processes. It includes contingency arrangements for setting assessments, marking assessments, and making progression and award decisions for all programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. It deals only with circumstances that are affected by widespread staff availability; student absences are already covered under the Exceptional Circumstances Policy (refer to [section 13](#)).
- 50.1.2 In the event of contingency plans being implemented, the University will work with the Students' Union to facilitate student understanding of the plans.
- 50.1.3 Where relevant, this plan should be read in conjunction with the University's [Major Incident Framework](#) and the [Emergency Regulations for Progression and Award](#).

50.2 Principles

- 50.2.1 The contingency plans are informed by the following principles:
- The integrity of the assessment processes is preserved.
 - Students are not disadvantaged in terms of overall achievement or progression.
 - Academic standards are protected through the preservation of normal rules of conduct for the quality assurance of assessment, including the use of appropriate alternatives.
 - There is no compromise to the principles of fairness, equity, clarity, and consistency in relation to assessment and awards.
 - Independence (through appropriate use of external examiners) in assessment processes is maintained.
 - The role of bodies with deliberative oversight of assessment matters – for example, the Academic Board, the Quality and Standards Committee, School Quality Panels, the University Assessment Board and School Assessment Boards – is not compromised.

50.3 Circumstances under which contingency arrangements may be adopted

- 50.3.1 Contingency arrangements will only be implemented in exceptional circumstances and only where it is judged necessary because of the scale of impact on the timely completion of assessment processes. Contingency arrangements will not be implemented to address situations arising from individual staff absences which can be addressed through usual procedures.
- 50.3.2 Where staff are absent and/or unable to either set or assess work submitted for summative assessment within the period of time required to enable normal assessment or approval processes to occur.
- 50.3.3 Where circumstances affect staff, whose absence would prohibit the normal operation of examination processes including the School Assessment Boards, Special Cases Panel, and/or University Assessment Board.
- 50.3.4 Where external examiners are absent or unable to undertake their duties at a key time of year that affects progression and award decisions.

50.4 Approval process for implementing contingency arrangements

- 50.4.1 The Chairs of the University Assessment Board and of the Quality and Standards Committee shall approve the implementation of contingency arrangements in consultation with the Academic Registrar and the Regulatory External Examiner. The decision to implement contingency arrangements will be reported to the Academic Board as soon as possible.
- 50.4.2 Under this plan, Academic Board has delegated responsibility to the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee and Chair of the University Assessment Board to approve additional special measures and contingency plans to enable School Assessment Boards to carry out their business. If deemed necessary, the Regulatory External Examiner will be consulted.

50.5 Contingency arrangements

- 50.5.1 The Heads/Deans of School carry the overall responsibility for managing the delivery of assessment across their schools and will be proactive in achieving this, consulting with the Academic Registrar on regulatory matters and with the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee on matters of quality assurance and academic standards. Normal processes for the consideration of appeals, complaints, exceptional circumstances, and cases of academic misconduct will continue to apply.

50.6 Contingency arrangements for setting assessment

- 50.6.1 The Heads/Deans of School are responsible for establishing a secure process for setting assessment(s) in the event of staff absence(s). Where possible, the intention is for the assessment to take place within the normal time period, even if marking cannot take place in the original timescale. The following actions may be initiated by the Heads/Deans of School:
- a) To identify assessments affected and to delegate responsibility to a member(s) of staff with appropriate specialist subject knowledge to be responsible for setting the assessment, including examination questions where necessary. If this is not possible, then an alternative assessment/examination paper may be produced using past questions providing these are still relevant to the learning outcomes of the module and have not been released to students as exemplar/mock questions.
 - b) To agree an alternative form(s) of assessment for this period only, provided it meets the requirements of the module (in terms of assessing learning outcomes), is achievable within the reporting timescale and is fair to students (no unfamiliar assessment instruments will be used); this is approved by the Quality and Standards Committee's Programme Amendment Scrutiny Panel (PASP), a process which includes comments from the external examiner.
 - c) If neither (a) nor (b) can be achieved, then the Head/Dean of School shall recommend deferral of the assessment until the exceptional situation has passed. Assessments and examinations will be set as soon as possible after events have returned to normal. Students may therefore be requested to return to York St John University to complete assessments for a classified award.

50.7 Contingency arrangements for examinations

- 50.7.1 The University will make every effort to avoid cancelling or postponing examinations. Where this is unavoidable, due to circumstances beyond the University's control, the examination will be rescheduled at the earliest opportunity.

50.8 Contingency arrangements for marking assessments

- 50.8.1 The Heads/Deans of School are responsible for establishing a secure process for marking assessments and examinations in the event of staff absence(s). Where there is a requirement for 2 markers then this will remain the case under the contingency arrangements.
- 50.8.2 The following actions may be initiated by the Heads/Deans of School:
- a) To identify any assessments affected and, where possible, to assign marking to a member of staff with relevant subject knowledge and, if required, a second marker with knowledge of the subject.
 - b) If at least one alternate marker cannot be found, a substitute will be identified to mark the assessment as pass/fail so that credit can be awarded for the work. In this case the assessment will be marked in full once events have returned to normal.
 - c) In all cases where a mark has been awarded by a substitute marker(s), to ensure that processes are in place for the resulting marks to be analysed against previous years' performances and across comparable modules in the current year. Marks are then subjected to moderation if there is a significant difference in mean and/or median. The moderation process is set out in [section 24](#). This process should be undertaken within the School and before the School Assessment Boards to which a written summary of any moderation process should be submitted.

- d) To inform the external examiner of any changes made to the marking process including, for example, the reallocation of markers and the method of moderation. Independent advice may also be sought from the Academic Registrar and the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee.

50.9 Contingency arrangements for operating School Assessment Boards

50.9.1 Under the contingency arrangements School Assessment Boards will be quorate providing they consist of a member of Registry and at least the following:

- Chair (Head/Dean of School)
- 2 Associate Heads/Deans of School
- External examiner(s)

In addition, an administrator will be in attendance.

50.9.2 Where an external examiner is unable to attend the School Assessment Board then one of the following shall apply:

- The external examiner may send in their comments before the meeting and will be consulted after the meeting for their concurrence in the approval of School Assessment Board's decisions.
- Should option (a) not be available then a current external examiner from a cognate discipline may serve on the School Assessment Board or on a combined School Assessment Board subject to approval by the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee.
- Otherwise, and exceptionally (for example, when no current external examiners have appropriate expertise) the Chair of the Quality and Standards Committee may approve the appointment of a temporary external examiner to serve for the duration of the contingency arrangements. Existing conditions on appointments will continue to apply.

50.9.3 **Incomplete assessments:** The School Assessment Board may determine that a mark is awarded for a module notwithstanding the absence of a small portion of assessed work if, in its academic judgment, there is sufficient evidence available to determine the overall result for the module, or sufficient evidence that the learning outcomes have also been demonstrated elsewhere in the programme. School Assessment Boards may wish to consider whether there is sufficient evidence to determine that a module can be assessed on a pass/fail basis at this stage, with detailed marks being returned later. Such a step may be particularly useful for awarding credit to students to enable them to progress.

50.9.4 The School Assessment Boards will take place as close to the scheduled dates as possible with any adjustment to the dates being decided on in consultation between the SAB Chair and the Academic Registrar. The aim will be to set a date on which the progression and classification status of as many students as possible can be determined. Each student profile will be considered on an individual basis and whole student groups will not be held up because of partial information.

50.9.5 In the event of it not being possible to finalise all results at the rescheduled meeting of the School Assessment Board, and significant numbers of results remain outstanding, a further meeting of the Board will be arranged as soon as possible after the first meeting to deal with the remaining results. Any further business after the second meeting of the Board will be considered by Chair's Action or held over to the next scheduled meeting of the Board.

50.9.6 With the permission of the School Assessment Board, a student for an undergraduate programme will ordinarily be permitted to conditionally progress to the next level of study with 100 credits. A student progressing with 100 credits must successfully pass all the University progression requirements by an early reassessment deadline in October, or within 5 weeks of the progression point for non-standard entry points. (Refer to [section 31.6](#)).

50.9.7 It should be noted that the [University's Regulations](#) nevertheless **require** students to meet the published progression criteria to progress formally. In exceptional circumstances conditional progression on 80 credits is permissible with the approval of the School Assessment Board but should **not** be regarded as the norm.

50.10 Contingency arrangements for final year (graduating) students

- 50.10.1 Where it has not been possible to complete the setting and marking of assessments to enable a complete set of marks to be processed, then final year students will be issued with an interim profile of marks and grades. Where possible, credit will be given to all modules that have been assessed on a pass/fail basis so that a student may leave with sufficient credit for the award of their degree. In this case, classification may be deferred until marks can be secured through the normal marking processes once the exceptional situation has passed and when a final transcript will be issued.
- 50.10.2 Where there are implications for a licence to practise, the University may make an interim award based on the credits that the student has achieved. Recommendations for the achievement of professional awards will be made once all assessment outcomes are in place.

50.11 Impact of staff absence on research degrees and collaborative provision

- 50.11.1 The impact of staff absence on the examination of research degrees will require an individualised approach and close liaison with the School's Postgraduate Research Lead. The likely impact of any staff absence on such examinations should be identified at the earliest possible opportunity. The Research School will work with the relevant Postgraduate Research Lead to identify potential solutions, which may include postponing an examination if internal and external examiners are not available. The principles set out in [section 50.2](#) will apply.
- 50.11.2 It is recognised that some exceptional situations may also impact on collaborative provision, including where Collaborative Partner Representatives are unable to perform their roles. Collaborative partners will be informed of the University's contingency plans and asked to keep the University informed of any emerging situations where there may be a need to implement contingency plans. Heads/Deans of Schools' responsibilities for establishing secure processes for the setting and marking of assessments include relevant collaborative provision; procedures set out in the sections above will be followed. Where necessary, an alternative Collaborative Partner Representative will be identified for the relevant period. The Academic Registrar, and Director of YSJ Global (where necessary), should be consulted prior to any action being taken.