

Update on extenuating circumstances and exams (for undergraduates and taught postgraduates)

Dear students,

We would like to start by thanking you for your patience and understanding while we have been working on arrangements for exams and other assessments in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. We recognise that this has been, and remains, a very difficult time for you. We are grateful for your cooperation as we have been adapting as quickly as possible to these new challenges.

We are still planning to send detailed arrangements, including the exams timetable and revised extenuating circumstances process for **undergraduates and taught postgraduates** by Friday of this week. However, we wanted to send an update to provide some reassurance in the meantime.

When making decisions about our approach, we have been constantly mindful of the potential impact on both student wellbeing and academic performance. We are also very aware that this unprecedented current situation will be impacting our students in lots of different ways, which is why we feel it is important to offer flexibility with relation to exams and assessments.

Our aim is to give as many students as possible the chance to complete the academic year and achieve the academic credit they deserve so that they can smoothly progress their studies or complete their degrees on schedule.

However, we also recognise that not everyone will be able to do this. There are many different situations which may affect our students' ability to prepare sufficiently for, or undertake these 'take home' exams (for example, illness, self-isolation requirements, difficulties accessing learning materials, restricted internet access, caring responsibilities).

That is why we are putting in place a different and more flexible extenuating circumstances process, the details of which will be announced by Friday.

Given the range of different circumstances facing our student community, we feel you are best placed to determine the right approach for you. To enable you to do this, we will:

1. Issue extensions for coursework and dissertations on request and with no requirement for evidence of the reason for the request.
2. Permit any student to defer examination(s) on request, for any reason, and again with no requirement to provide evidence of the reason.
3. Permit any students to retake examination(s) on request without penalties or capping of marks, if you should feel that the outcome does not reflect your ability.

These exceptional arrangements are strongly supported by RUSU. I appreciate your patience as we work through the complex implications of these new ways of working to ensure we support you in the best way we can.

We genuinely feel the approach we are taking is in the best interest of our students, helping to ensure standards and currency of your degree programme, for example with employers and professional bodies, and your preparedness for work and further studies.

Some students have asked for us to put in place a 'grade average safety net', as has been the approach of some other universities. For the reasons outlined above and after careful consideration, and strongly supported by RUSU, we do not feel applying such a 'blanket' approach would be in the best interest of the majority of our students.

We hope this provides you with some reassurance about our approach. I would also like to remind you that we are continuing to offer a range of academic and pastoral support online for you at this time. Please see our [Essentials webpages](#) for further information and contact your Academic Tutor, Support Centre, or other relevant team for any queries or advice.

We will write again at the end of this week to provide further information about the arrangements for 'take home' exams, including the timetable, as well as the new extenuating circumstances process.

Thank you, once again, for your patience and understanding.

Kind regards,
Professors Elizabeth McCrum and Julian Park

Pro-Vice-Chancellors (Education and Student Experience)