

## **Procedures for Protecting the Interests of Students and Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) during Exceptional Events**

### **1 Principles**

This procedure explains the actions to be taken by The University of Manchester when an exceptional event disrupts the normal academic processes and procedures.

An exceptional event is an event which has the potential to have a detrimental impact on academic standards and/or the student/PGR experience and will be determined by the President and Vice-Chancellor. Please also refer to [the student terms and conditions](#). Exceptional events may include but are not limited to:

- An epidemic or pandemic
- Building not being available for their intended purpose (such as library, halls of residence, teaching buildings, research buildings/facilities)
- Industrial action and/or action short of a strike
- Anything else that is likely to have a significant effect on student/PGR examinations, progression, assessment and marking.
- An incident impacting significantly on one specific Faculty (e.g. widescale industrial action in the NHS impacting on the Faculty of Biology, Medicine and Health).

The defining feature is that students, PGRs and staff are prevented from completing required progression and/or assessment processes, as a result of serious interruptions to the University's business and within the normal timescales, in line with our academic regulations. In some instances, some elements may be delivered while others are not, contributing to the overall disruption.

The procedure is based on two primary commitments: the first is to protect the interests of all students and PGRs, and the second on fostering collaboration and support across the entire university community. In fulfilling these commitments, The University of Manchester commits to:

- 1.1 Make transparent student/PGR-centred decisions by collective agreement whilst ensuring a commitment to appropriate conduct, integrity, collaboration and collegiality.
- 1.2 Acknowledge and uphold the integrity and professionalism of all staff members, anticipating their continued fulfilment of regular responsibilities and duties as employees. It is understood that individual staff members may assess that the issues prompting industrial action could supersede their obligations to a current cohort of students/PGRs during such actions.
- 1.3 Take all reasonable and necessary measures to safeguard the rights and interests of our students / PGRs in the face of any 'Exceptional Events.
- 1.4 Facilitate the progression and completion of undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research courses within the standard timeframe, to the best of our ability.

### **2. Actions**

The University will put in place the following arrangements.

- 2.1 The President and Vice-Chancellor will invoke this procedure during an exceptional event, or in advance of an exceptional event which can reasonably be anticipated, at the request of either the Vice-President for Teaching, Learning and Students or the Associate Vice-President (Research).
- 2.2 A *University Examination Board* (UEB) will be set up with overall authority and responsibility for all assessment and examination processes across the University. In particular, the UEB will have the authority to agree student outcomes in situations where the relevant procedures or parts of them have, in the judgement of the President and Vice-Chancellor, become unworkable. The UEB will also have authority to agree all other matters relating to the progression of and award or non-award of degrees and other distinctions to students/PGRs who have been impacted by the exceptional event.
- 2.3 The University Examination Board (UEB) will have the following members:
  - President and Vice-Chancellor (in the Chair)
  - Deputy President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor
  - Vice-Presidents and Deans of Faculties
  - The Vice-Presidents with policy responsibilities for Teaching, Learning and Students and Research
  - Two professorial members of Senate to be nominated by the President and Vice-Chancellor
  - One Faculty representative, per Faculty, drawn from the elected membership of Senate.
  - The University External Examiner
  - Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer or nominee (Secretary)

The UEB will also be able to invite other members as necessary. Attendance can be virtual or in person, as agreed for each meeting.

- 2.4 The UEB will be allowed to agree changes or amendments to the arrangements for examination, assessment, progression and award or non-award of degrees and other distinctions, as follows, so long as none of the changes or amendments disadvantage students/PGRs:
  - The Undergraduate Degree Regulations,
  - The Postgraduate Degree Regulations (for the Degree of Master, Postgraduate Diploma and Postgraduate Certificate)
  - The Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations
  - Regulations for individual degree programmes, including higher degrees, and any other Regulations as appropriate.

- 2.5 The UEB will ensure that:
  - (i) A final result / outcome is agreed for each student/PGR for that academic year, and
  - (ii) Where it is possible the status of each student/PGR in relation to progression and, where appropriate, the award or non-award of degrees or other distinctions is agreed in time to meet all commitments to students/PGRs relating to assessment, progression and graduation.

- 2.6 In committing to the principle that no student/PGR is disadvantaged, the UEB will ensure at all times that the integrity of the assessment and examination processes is maintained and that results in that academic year are comparable with results in other years.
- 2.7 Where they do not already exist as part of routine business, *Faculty Examination Boards* (FEBs) will be set up by each of the Faculties with overall authority and responsibility for all assessment and examination processes within the Schools in that Faculty. In particular, the FEB will have the authority to agree student outcomes and classification for that academic year, and to agree all other matters relating to student / PGR progression and award or non-award of degrees, as well as other distinctions.<sup>1</sup>
- 2.8 The FEB will have the following members:
- Vice-President and Dean of the Faculty (in the Chair) (or nominee)
  - All Heads of School (or nominee) within the Faculty
  - The Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research
  - The Faculty Vice-Dean for Teaching and Learning
  - The Faculty lead for Postgraduate Research (or similar)
  - At least one External Examiner
  - The Director of Faculty Operations or nominee (Secretary)

The Board will also be able to invite other members as necessary. Attendance can be via video conferencing, audio or in person.

- 2.9 Each Faculty Examination Board will provide the University Examination Board with a provisional final decision for all students/PGRs in its Faculty impacted by the exceptional event, within an agreed timeframe (confirmed at the time the procedure is involved) together, where relevant, with recommendations about the progression and the award or non-award of degrees or other distinctions.
- 2.10 Faculty Examination Boards and the University Examination Board will operate under the agreed framework given to Boards of Examiners under General Regulation XII for assessing the form and content of examination papers, together with the authority to agree students' results.
- 2.11 A University wide 'No Disadvantage' Policy, or set of principles, may be considered appropriate depending on the timing of the disruption in the academic year. A recommendation would be made by the Teaching and Learning Strategy Group and/or Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group to Senate, if it was felt appropriate.

### **3. Alternative Assessment Arrangements if the interruption to delivery is for a prolonged time**

- 3.1 The Programme team can identify alternative assessment arrangements<sup>2</sup> for taught students providing the following principles are applied:
- The alternative assessment must show that the learning outcomes for the unit have been achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Faculties may establish FEBs without the need to invoke the Procedure for Protecting the Interest of Students' if it is felt that this would be of benefit for the general overview of examination boards across Schools, In those circumstances reports would be forwarded to the UEB for information.

<sup>2</sup> Which may need to be discussed with PSRBs as appropriate

- No student will be disadvantaged by the change of assessment and all assessment must be inclusive, taking into account access to resources for all learners. Schools must conduct an equality impact assessment on the alternative assessments.
- A review will be undertaken to ensure the needs of all students with Learner Support Statements are met.
- Alternative assessment may be undertaken remotely.
- Where access to campus is limited campus-based examinations will only be held where there is an explicit requirement of the PSRB. Examinations will in these circumstances only be held in order to satisfy accreditation requirements at a time that is deemed safe and appropriate. This may result in a delay to progression and award decision-making.

During exceptional events, the priority is to provide certainty to students and staff, therefore External Examiners should where possible be involved in decision making on the setting of alternative assessments, however, where this is not possible details will be provided to External Examiners by the programme team.

- 3.2 For taught programmes, where alternative assessments cannot be offered within a reasonable timeframe, the work of final year students will be reviewed by the School and the processes by which subsequent decisions on outcomes are made will be reviewed by the Faculty Examination Board to agree whether the programme learning outcomes have been achieved.
- 3.3 For taught programmes, the Director of Teaching and Learning (or equivalent) will oversee the coordination and preparation of all alternative assessment arrangements for their programme. These will be reviewed and approved by the relevant Faculty Vice-Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students (or nominee).
- 3.4 The Manchester Doctoral College Strategy Group may identify alternative arrangements for formal PGR annual/continuation reviews and viva examinations providing the following principles are applied:
  - No PGR will be disadvantaged by the arrangements; if necessary assessors/ examiners must take into account any PGR disabilities/special needs prior to undertaking the review/assessment.
  - Progression reviews must take any disruption into account and can be regarded as an opportunity for providing formative feedback rather than a summative judgement on the PGR's progress.
  - All participants of remote viva examinations have recorded their agreement to proceed; appointment of an independent chair is recommended.

#### **4. Sources of Support for Students / PGRs**

- 4.1 Students and PGRs are entitled to raise concerns as a result of 'Exceptional Events' through the normal [complaints and appeals](#) channels: [However, they would not be entitled to appeal on the grounds of procedural irregularity based solely on the operation of this procedure.](#)
- 4.2 When investigating complaints resulting from Exceptional Events, consideration should be given to how alternatives to the cancelled learning opportunities were

delivered, particularly in the context of the individual student's or PGR's specific learning needs.

- 4.3 Exceptional events that are widespread or have a significant impact may trigger a university wider coordination for reviewing and responding to complaints relating to the events.

## 5. Refunds and Compensation

- 5.1 The University will not offer a refund of tuition fees, unless an investigation of a formal complaint finds that a suitable alternative to cancelled learning opportunities has not been delivered. However, depending on the nature of the exceptional event, the University may consider making payments in recognition of distress and inconvenience.

- 5.2 This procedure should be read with reference to the Student Protection Plan and the Policy on Refunds and Compensation.

<b>Document control box</b>	
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