

**University of York**  
***Contingency Framework for Assessment and Examinations***  
**March 31st, 2023**

**1. Background**

This document sets out a framework for contingency arrangements and guidance for departments to minimise the potential disruption to students because of staff unavailability in relation to teaching, learning and assessment. This could arise from scenarios such as an outbreak of pandemic flu or other major health incident, industrial action by staff, or significant, prolonged disruption from any unforeseen circumstances.

The framework includes specific variations to current practices, and delegates authority to the Vice-Chancellor to act on behalf of Senate to initiate special measures where necessary to enable the business of Boards of Examiners to be accomplished. The Vice-Chancellor is also given authority to stand down the special measures, when the scenario in question has ended.

The framework is based on provisions first agreed by Senate in May 2006. These were updated and reaffirmed by Senate in 2009 and 2011. The content was updated again in 2012 to ensure correct cross referencing to other documentation and policies, including the new modular scheme assessment rules. It was updated again in 2014, after consideration by SCA and UTC, to reflect better the modular scheme assessment rules. Following discussion at Senate meetings in 2018, the policy was revised to include Special Contingency Arrangements (Section 4) and agreed by Senate in May 2019.

**2. Principles**

In the event of major disruption the University will be guided by the following principles:

1. Any disadvantage to students in terms of progression within programmes or overall achievement should be minimised as far as is possible in the circumstances.
2. The integrity of assessment processes should be ensured.
3. The standard of awards and the principles of equity, clarity, consistency and openness in relation to assessment and classification practices must be protected.
4. Students should continue to get appropriate advice at the right point during their programmes, such as regarding different progression routes, transfers to other programmes/institutions and withdrawal from programmes, based on available information.

Should the cause of the disruption be industrial action the University is committed to collegiality as the basis for managing professional relationships within the University community. The University will:

5. Endeavour by all proper and legitimate means to preserve within the University community a culture of mutual trust based on respect for shared values about the nature and purposes of higher education.
6. Operate on the basis that while individual staff may judge that the issues prompting strike action and/or “action short of a strike” override their obligations to a current cohort of students, the University at an institutional level has an obligation to safeguard the interests of all its students.

**3. General Contingency Actions**

The following actions apply unless and until the Vice-Chancellor declares a Special Contingency Situation (see section 4)

1. Heads of Department/Schools (or their nominees, or the Vice-Chancellor's nominees) are responsible for ensuring that assessments and examinations continue wherever possible. Further guidance is available from the Chairs of UTC and the Standing Committee on Assessment (SCA) on offering alternative forms of assessment and/or alternative arrangements for the marking of scripts. Any problems that the HoD or relevant nominee is unable to resolve should be referred to the Chairs of either UTC or SCA without delay.
2. Any delayed assessment or examinations should be rescheduled as soon as possible, and priority given to marking and processing marks. In some cases, it may be necessary to consider the setting of alternative forms of assessment or for examinations to be conducted at a distance, but the normal robust processes for off-site examinations should be observed (Guide to Assessment 5.12).
3. Meetings of Boards of Examiners should take place wherever possible, to make decisions about progression and awards. Departments are reminded that under Ordinance 6 the quorum for a single subject board is a minimum of three members, with at least one being an internal and one an external examiner. For a combined board the quorum must also include a representative of each department involved in offering the programme. Heads of Department (or the relevant nominees) should alert the Chairs of the Standing Committee of Assessment (by sending an email to the address [sca-chair@york.ac.uk](mailto:sca-chair@york.ac.uk)) if it is likely that a quorum will not be achieved.
4. If dates are not set for Boards to meet in reasonable time for information to be passed to the University to permit graduation or progression then the Vice-Chancellor (as Chair of Senate) may convene such meetings or declare a Special Contingency Situation (see section 4).
5. If an external examiner is not able or willing to carry out duties, a recent past external examiner may be approached to act, or a new external examiner may be appointed who meets the usual criteria. In the case of industrial action, external examiners should be reminded of their contractual obligations, where their work does not fall under the scope of the action.
6. Where a suitable internal examiner is not available for examining a research student's final viva, two suitable external examiners may be used. An internal observer will be required to assure the process but s/he need not be an expert in the field being examined. An external examiner or an alternative internal examiner may also approve corrections to a thesis. This is a variation to the Policy on Research Degrees, to facilitate the completion process for thesis candidates.
7. For the nomination of examiners for a research degree, in the event that the Chair of the Graduate School Board or the Chair of the Board of Studies is unable to act, any member of the Graduate School Board will have the power to make a nomination.

#### **4. Special Contingency Situation and Actions**

When, in the judgement of the Vice-Chancellor, the relevant procedures, including section 3 above, become unworkable, she/he has the authority to declare a Special Contingency Situation in which the following processes apply.

1. A University Board of Examiners shall be established with overall authority and responsibility in relation to all assessment and examination processes within the University, and in particular with the authority to determine how available student marks are used to determine final student marks. The University Board of Examiners will be fully empowered as a Board of Examiners as defined in University Ordinance 14 and section 18 of the University of York Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback. The University Board of Examiners once established shall determine all other matters relating to the progression of students and to the confirmation of awards of the University and other distinctions to students pursuant to their academic studies.
2. The University Board of Examiners shall have the following membership:

Vice-Chancellor (Chair)

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching, Learning and Students

The Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Teaching, Learning and Students

The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment  
The three Faculty Deans  
The three Associate Deans for Teaching, Learning and Students  
At least one External Examiner, appointed to the University BoE by the Vice-Chancellor, or the Pro-Vice Chancellor Teaching, Learning and Students  
A member of the Academic Quality Team (In attendance, Secretary)

The Vice-Chancellor has the authority to delegate to the PVC or APVC for Teaching, Learning and Students to Chair the University Board of Examiners. The Board will have powers to co-opt additional members as required. The Board may also request attendees from Student and Academic Services to provide advice about procedural matters.

The quorum shall be one representative from each Faculty and two additional members and the external examiner.

3 The University Board of Examiners shall be empowered to authorise changes or amendments to the requirements for examination, assessment, moderation, progression, awards of the University and other distinctions, as detailed in the Ordinances, Regulations and the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback.

4 The University Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that:

- (i) A final result is determined for each student for that academic year, and
- (ii) The status of each student in relation to progression and, where appropriate, the award or non-award of degrees or other distinctions is determined in a timely manner to meet the University's obligations to students.

5 The University Board of Examiners is responsible for ensuring that the scholarly integrity and rigour of assessment and examination processes is maintained and that results in that academic year are comparable with results in other years.

6 Where the University Board of Examiners determines that an individual departmental Board of Examiners can, despite the circumstances, fulfil its responsibilities to make the full range of decisions on awards, marks and progression, in line with all normal processes detailed in the University's Ordinances, Regulations and the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback, the University Board of Examiners will delegate responsibility to that departmental Board of Examiners to make decisions as normal.

7 Where any departmental Boards of Examiners in a Faculty are not able to function as normal (paragraph 6 above), the University shall establish a Faculty Board of Examiners for that Faculty. The Faculty Board of Examiners will operate as Boards of Examiners for all Departments/Schools in the Faculty that are unable to function as normal. The Faculty Board of Examiners will have delegated authority from the University Board of Examiners, to approve module marks, to determine students' progress to the next year/level of study and to approve final awards and any classification or other mark of differentiation of those awards.

8 The membership of each Faculty Board of Examiners shall be as follows:

The Associate Dean of the Faculty (Chair)  
The Heads of Department/Schools of the Faculty  
The Associate Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students of the Faculty  
Three other members of academic staff, co-opted by the Chair, from this Faculty  
At least one External Examiner, appointed to the Faculty BoE by the Dean  
A member of Academic Quality or Faculty Administration (In attendance, Secretary)

The Faculty Board of Examiners will have powers to co-opt additional members as required.

- 9 Each Faculty Board of Examiners shall provide the University Board of Examiners with a final result for all students in its Faculty according to a timetable determined by the University Board of Examiners, together, where relevant, with recommendations about progression and the award or non-award of degrees or other distinctions.
- 10 The University and Faculty Boards of Examiners will be furnished by Departments with all available information in relation to the assessment, examination and progression of students.
- 11 Faculty Boards of Examiners and the University Board of Examiners shall have assigned to them all the responsibilities and powers given to Boards of Examiners under the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback for assessing the form and content of examination papers together with statements of any other requirements and the authority to determine results.