



Scottish Sector Learning from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Full Report



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Summary

1 This report provides a snapshot of Scottish sector institution responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing out common practices and distinctive approaches. 13 themes in the report cover the main adaptations to quality processes, policy and regulation relating to teaching, learning and assessment practice, and some aspects of the wider student experience.

2 Evidence sources underpinning the report have included: the regular institutional reports to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) covering session 2019-20; institutional web pages; and a related (unpublished) SFC commissioned project report. The latter draws on Enhancement-led Institutional Review reports and structured interviews with institutional staff. While acknowledging the limitations of the evidence base, the approach of using these readily available existing evidence sources provided a way of collating information that did not draw on institutional staff or student time during a period of enormous challenge.

3 The reporting of the 13 themes starts with the higher order topics of strategy, policy and regulation, then moves to the core topics of teaching and learning, and assessment. Quality processes are considered including review/monitoring and programme approval processes and then wider topics on student support and engagement, and additional topics such as collaborative partnerships. A final theme identifies some institutions and their particular contributions to tackling the pandemic and is the only part of the report where HEIs are not anonymised. Anonymity has been maintained elsewhere as the report draws from unpublished sources.

4 The report concludes with some key learning points and associated reflective questions that institutions could consider individually and collectively.

About this report

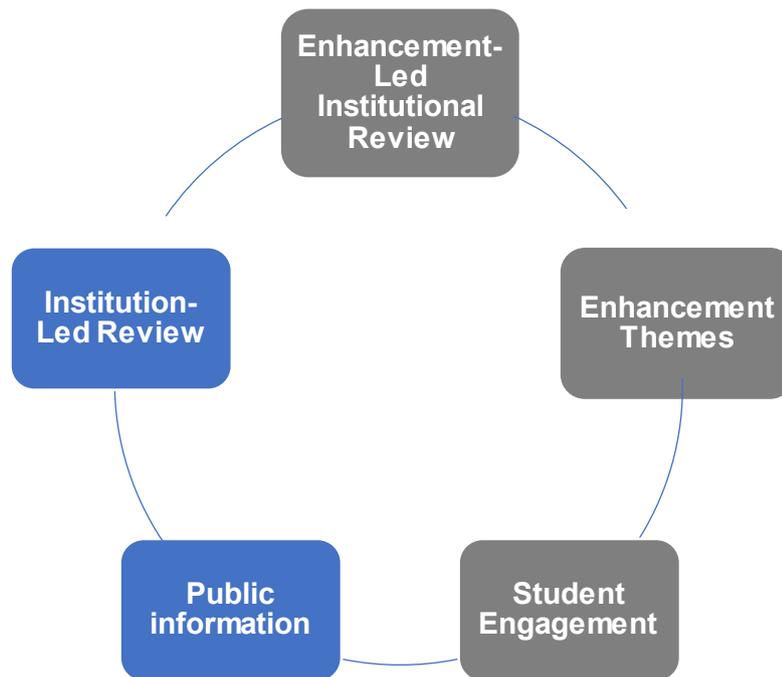
5 In reviewing the session 2019-20 institutional annual reports to the SFC, it was evident that institutions were providing considerable information on their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This was partly by design as the SFC had asked institutions to supplement their reports with additional information to help the SFC understand the impact of COVID-19 on the management of Institution-led Review (ILR) activity.¹ The timing of 2019-20 report submissions means that they captured actions relating to institutions' immediate emergency response and planning for the start of session 2020-21.

6 The SFC 2019-20 annual reports provided a rich information source and the basis of a desk-based project to identify some of the main adaptations to quality processes, policy, and regulation relating to teaching, learning and assessment practice, and some aspects of the wider student experience reported by Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs) in their response to the pandemic.

7 In addition to drawing on the SFC reports, this project and report draw on a second element of Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) (see Figure 1) - that is, public information. Institution-led Review and public information are highlighted in blue in Figure 1. All 19 Scottish institutions' web pages were explored to augment the SFC report information.

¹Annual reports on Institution-led Review (ILR) are submitted to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) by each Scottish higher education institution (HEI). The [SFC guidance](http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf) asks institutions to cover a range of topics in their statements: ILR outcomes; review of support services; student engagement in ILR; relevant contextual information; and key messages derived from monitoring and analysis of data including feedback from students www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/guidance_sfcgd112017/SFCGD112017-SFC-guidance-HE-institutions-quality.pdf

Figure 1: Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework



8 This report also draws on the ongoing challenges and good practice identified through a separate, but related, project commissioned by the SFC (unpublished report). Extracts from the SFC commissioned report are included at relevant points throughout this report. This commissioned work sought to review the approaches and mechanisms employed by HEIs in the Scottish sector to assure the quality of the student learning experience and academic standards in light of the move to digital learning in response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The 2019-20 institutional reports to the SFC formed an important part of the evidence base for this commissioned work along with structured interviews with HEIs and covered HEIs' responses in three timeframes: emergency actions in response to the pandemic (spring 2020); learning from the emergency response and preparations for the 2020-21 academic year (academic year 2020-21); and longer-term implications (planning for the 2021-22 academic year and beyond).

9 The SFC's commissioned project also drew on reports from Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR) - another element of the QEF. ELIR reports were not scrutinised separately as part of the research activity for this report, but do inform it.

10 While the information in HEI web pages is valuable, we acknowledge that drawing conclusions from this source alone is problematic because the coverage and level of detail in the public domain varies greatly between institutions and remains very fluid as the sector continues to adapt to the latest Scottish Government guidance on easing the lockdown. We also recognise that the detail in the 2019-20 institutional SFC annual reports varied between institutions so it is likely that this report identifies practice at particular institutions which is also prevalent in others but of which we are not aware. The advantage in using existing, readily-available evidence sources was in limiting any burden on institutions in providing additional information at a time of extreme pressure and challenge within the sector.

11 A thematic analysis of the information sources identified 17 themes; 13 are covered in this report. The four not reported were considered to have insufficient material - these were admissions and recruitment; enhancement; external surveys; and key performance

indicators. Common practices and distinctive approaches to changes in learning, teaching and assessment and associated quality assurance processes, governance and regulations, and some aspects of the wider student experience are reported for the other 13 themes. The order of reporting of these themes, as per the table of contents, is to start with the higher order strategy, policy and regulatory topics, then move to the core topics of teaching and learning, and assessment, then to quality processes and finally covering wider topics on student support and engagement and other topics such as collaborative partnerships. We have concluded with a section that identifies some institutions and their contributions in tackling the pandemic and is the only part of the report where HEIs are not anonymised.

12 A conclusion section draws out key learning points with a call to action through a number of questions. The summary section provides an overview of the report.

13 The term 'digital' has been used in this report to be consistent with the unpublished SFC commission report.

Institutional policy towards the pandemic

14 Academic year 2019-20 saw an unprecedented volume and pace of change as higher education institutions responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the policies and supporting arrangements adopted by institutions for particular aspects of their provision are discussed elsewhere in this report. This section describes the principles used by institutions to underlie their decision-making, and some of the actions taken to put principles into effect.

15 Institutions typically recognised, at an early stage in the pandemic, the imminent challenge to their provision of learning opportunities and responded by making clear statements of their approach to supporting learning in new circumstances. Such statements typically emphasised the need for staff and students to alter behaviours in alignment with legislation and, with governmental guidance, set out the institution's policy intentions in respect of the manner and timing of forthcoming programme delivery, and provided context for subsequent changes to the manner and timing of delivery over subsequent months.

Pledges

16 Some institutions made public statements, often referred to as 'pledges', affirming the conduct to which they committed themselves or to which they expected their students to commit themselves. Perhaps the strongest such pledge came from an institution which made five commitments to its students, specifically: a safe and secure campus environment; a first-class learning experience; an active student life; ongoing advice and support; and a welcoming and inclusive environment. Another institution asked its students to commit themselves to a pledge, also with five components, relating to following guidance from the Scottish government or from the institution and to behaviour on the institution's campuses and facilities, noting that refusal to follow guidelines may lead to disciplinary action.

Principles

17 The analysis by QAA Scotland of institutions' session 2019-20 annual reports to the SFC found that: 'The impact of COVID-19 on Scottish higher education has been significantly affecting provision delivered in Scotland, the rest of the UK and internationally. The HEI annual reports showed that institutions have responded positively and rapidly, implementing changes to learning, teaching and assessment, quality processes, regulations and policy'. Some institutions made explicit statements, in their annual reports or in their websites, of the principles they had adopted in order to guide their decision-making. Such principles typically related to matters that included: alignment with legal requirements; personal safety on institution premises; academic and welfare support for students; fairness

of assessment instruments; and the continuing quality of educational provision. For instance, one institution, aware of the difficulty inherent in reconfiguring some of its provision to digital delivery, affirmed in its online guidance to students that its response would be guided by three core conditions. These were that provision should be safe, legal and educationally viable and, in turn, these conditions led it to a set of principles relating to the continuation of practical work and to principles of programme delivery for its programmes more generally. Another institution noted in a meeting of the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC) that the words 'resilience, parity, quality' formed a simple framework to support the development of innovative solutions.

18 The SFC report identified the following as ongoing/future challenges:

- adapting to continuously changing circumstances, exacerbated in larger, more complex institutions and those with overseas campuses
- the tension that can arise in balancing staff autonomy with a consistent student learning experience
- lack of clarity and flexibility in longer-term approaches to policy and process development.

Governance

19 While it is likely that many or all institutions have taken steps through their governance framework to identify priorities and allocate lines of responsibility for decision-making in response to restrictions imposed during the pandemic, some institutions drew attention in their SFC annual reports, in their websites, or in a meeting of SHEEC to the institutional oversight of alterations to normal ways of working. In addition, some institutions described priorities identified and actions taken within the governance framework to guide and oversee the institutional responses.

Governance structures

20 Some institutions reported that their existing governance frameworks continued to be used during the period of the pandemic. For instance, at one institution the Executive Team has continued to have oversight of the mode of delivery for learning and teaching, taking into consideration the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff amongst other factors in planning the transition to blended learning.

21 However, some institutions identified changes to governance frameworks, typically in the form of the creation of a group of senior staff with specific responsibility for oversight of changes to policies and working practices during the early phase of the pandemic. At one institution, a Task and Finish Group - chaired by a Deputy Principal and comprising senior staff members and student representatives - has managed the institution's learning and teaching-related response to the pandemic, with delegated responsibility from the University Executive for planning and decision-making for 2020-21 in relation to all of the institution's taught provision; the institution emphasised, in the meeting of SHEEC in April 2020, its view that a single institution-wide, decision-making channel, which meets weekly, formed an effective response mechanism. By contrast, another institution found it effective to establish three COVID-19 recovery groups (with responsibilities for learning and teaching, for quality and standards, and for estates and buildings) within a structure based on principles to ensure standards and consistency supported by a formal approvals process for any matters not encompassed by the principles. A different institution based its decision-making on a Crisis Management Team which met daily. A further institution noted that it had sought the views of external members of its Senate sub-committees on its decision-making process,

and that these members had commented positively.

Actions

22 Actions taken at governance level have been primarily in relation to the identification of underlying principles leading to the setting of priorities and the establishment of associated workstreams - for instance, as described by some institutions in their SFC annual reports, in a meeting of SHEEC or in web pages.

23 The fullest available description of actions taken at governance levels is from an institution whose web pages set out its approach to learning, teaching and assessment through its framework for 'Responsive Blended Learning', as well as its process for approving the framework and other programme and course modifications arising from the pandemic. The institution's Task and Finish Group progressed its activity through eight workstreams, with a cross-cutting student engagement theme, relating to 'Responsive Blended Learning', school developments/delivery, induction and student support, timetabling, policies and registry systems, information systems/learning technology, campus reopening and communications.

24 With a view to ensuring the safety of staff and students using its premises, and as part of its 'Safe Campus' project, one institution established an Outbreak Response Plan identifying in detail the internal responsibilities for actions to be taken in the event of a COVID-19 outbreak on any of its campuses in Scotland.

25 Another institution, in its SFC annual report, drew attention to the need to address policies for ethical approval of research activities during the pandemic; its Research Ethics Committee agreed revised criteria for the approval of non-clinical research involving human participants, including provision for the requirement that data collection must be paused in circumstances where data collection cannot be undertaken remotely.

Academic regulations

26 Most institutions have not drawn attention to any need to alter their academic regulations during the period of the pandemic. However, some institutions described alterations to their normal approaches because of the circumstances of the pandemic. In each case, these alterations were approved by the senate of the institution concerned.

27 At one institution, alternatives to formal examinations and temporary modifications to assessment regulations were intended to ensure the maintenance of academic standards while supporting students to achieve their learning outcomes during the institution's shift in delivery.

28 Another institution adjusted its approach to academic decision-making from June 2020, enabling it to take decisions on the achievement and progression of students based on a set of eight guiding principles; the institution expressed a high degree of confidence that its approach was aligned with guidance from QAA.

29 A third institution also adopted a set of eight principles to govern academic decisions by Boards of Examiners in 2019-20, and expressed the view that the latitude already permitted to Boards of Examiners in applying its regulations would enable these principles to be applied. The institution subsequently amended its general assessment regulations in respect of assessment undertaken in 2020-21, enabling its Boards of Examiners further scope to take action if they believed that the performance of individual students or of cohorts of students had been affected by the circumstances of the pandemic. It also offered helpful guidance to Boards of Examiners on arrangements for conducting their business by digital means during the pandemic.

Teaching and learning

Pivot to digital learning

30 While it is likely that every institution was obliged to make alterations to planned schedules of programme delivery, some institutions acknowledged, either on their web pages or in their annual reports to the SFC, the changes made to their timing of delivery, whether by delaying the start of the academic year or by adjusting the pattern of delivery within the year. Steps taken to mitigate the absence of in-person teaching included: cancellation of all classes for a week to enable staff to adapt to digital delivery; allowing students to come to the institution's premises for short periods; delaying the start of teaching, or arranging staggered start dates for different student groups in academic year 2020-21 to allow staff to adapt Semester 1 to digital delivery; reordering the delivery of material to facilitate practical work; and arranging for multiple deliveries of digital classes to accommodate students living in different time zones.

31 While all institutions adapted programme delivery away from 'in person' towards some form, or a variety of forms, of digital delivery, most institutions acknowledged that they mitigated their chosen form of digital delivery by enabling physical access for specialisms not suited to digital learning. A variety of terms have been used to refer to digital delivery, including 'online learning', 'blended learning', 'asynchronous learning'. Consistent use of a single taxonomy, such as QAA's guidance on building a taxonomy for digital learning, might be helpful to avoid the potential for confusion.²

32 Digital learning took a variety of forms. While information about the forms used across the sector is inevitably incomplete, most institutions drew attention to live online sessions, and some affirmed the availability of pre-recorded sessions. Although only four explicitly drew attention to enhanced use of their virtual learning environments (VLEs), it is probable that most or all institutions used their VLEs to strengthen communication and facilitate access to IT tools. Some institutions made clear public statements on how teaching and learning methods may change, and others may have done so only within their intranets. Adaptations publicly described include: a mix of various types of live and pre-recorded activities; the use of different types of digital learning and supporting technology for a range of purposes; and the 'reconceptualisation' of studio work. Some institutions drew attention to the need to ensure that requirements of professional bodies for continuing accreditation of qualifications continue to be met.

33 Detailed examples of innovative practice were available from two institutions. At one HEI, the School of Mathematics converted its undergraduate programme within 14 weeks to a 'hybrid learning' model with a blend of digital and on-campus elements by adapting teaching, student support, technology, estates and communications in an intensive project in which undergraduate and postgraduate students participated. Another HEI established an institution-wide approach through its 'Responsive Blended Learning' framework, providing detailed and comprehensive guidance for staff on how to adapt their work, as well as detailed guidance on institutional processes for approval of changes to programmes to be delivered within this framework. This was accompanied by a series of informative webpages for students to build student confidence through clear and supportive advice on how to adapt to digital learning alongside contextually appropriate face-to-face learning opportunities.

34 For some institutions, conversion to digital learning using digital technologies went with the grain of existing strategies for the development of learning opportunities. Examples are the 'Going Digital Framework', building on the use of existing digital technology by establishing a set of pedagogic principles intended to guide curriculum design, assessment,

² www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/guidance/building-a-taxonomy-for-digital-learning.pdf

student support and staff development; and the recent investment in digital technologies at another HEI arising from its increased commitment to supporting digital learning.

35 Several areas of good practice were highlighted in the SFC report on institutions' pivot to digital learning:

- The fast pace of institutions in developing or upgrading their institutional digital infrastructures
- The development of innovative practices to support specialist subject areas, particularly the creative industries. As physical, in-person performances could not continue following the national lockdown, one institution developed a digital performance platform, which showcased students' productions for a local, national and international audience. Feedback from students, staff and audiences on the platform has been resoundingly positive and the institution is exploring ways that the digital platform can be used to complement in-person productions in the future.
- To support academic staff to move their teaching online, all institutions' relevant professional services teams created comprehensive training for academic staff to improve their skills relating to digital delivery and this was shared between institutions. This included: the delivery of bespoke upskilling support to different subject areas; the development of online training modules for staff teaching; the creation of a central institutional hub of resources and guidance on teaching and assessing online; and cybersecurity training.
- The development of institutional pedagogical principles or frameworks of good educational practice online complemented a sector-wide strengthening of institutional technological capability and infrastructure. These principles and frameworks support a consistent pedagogical approach to digital provision across each institution. Institutions have customised their principles or frameworks for their unique institutional context, programme portfolio and student demographics.
- All institutions emphasised the positive work of their academic and professional services staff in supporting the effective transition to digital provision. Staff went above and beyond their usual remits to move learning, teaching and assessment online at pace. Students, institutional senior management, external examiners, PSRBs and external sector organisations have emphasised the extraordinary role played by academic and professional services staff in ensuring that the move to digital provision was successful. Many institutions shared that a greater sense of community and teamwork among staff had developed in response to COVID-19.

Evaluation

36 In general, institutions have not yet had opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies towards teaching and learning during the pandemic. However, there are examples of practice which have apparently been effective in enabling digital learning, such as the 'Adapt, Support, Implement, Deliver' model for hybrid learning, which has enabled rapid conversion of traditionally-delivered learning materials to digital delivery; and the 'Definitive Human' software to support the training of undergraduate medical students in Scotland by improving their understanding of the composition and structure of the human body.

Supporting students

37 There are examples of comprehensive and helpful guidance to students on how to adapt to digital delivery, on how to access technology and about adapting behaviour and expectations; these include guidance on 'Responsive Blended Learning' and on 'Netiquette', and 'Blended Learning Guidance'.

38 In establishing technology and ways of working to support digital learning, several institutions have drawn attention to the risks of students being unable to access learning opportunities through lack of technology or lack of confidence in using it. In response to this danger, one HEI has set up a task force on digital poverty/exclusion to tackle lack of skills and connectivity; another HEI has committed to expenditure to support students experiencing digital exclusion. One institution additionally drew attention to the need to ensure that students with Individual Learning Plans continued to be supported during the period in which digital learning is taking place. QAA Scotland is publishing further work on digital poverty through its [Enhancement Theme](#) activity.

39 The SFC report identified digital poverty as a serious issue and one that is linked to poverty more broadly. For those who do not have reliable access to devices, connectivity or study space, physical spaces on campus can be essential. D/deaf students and staff have arguably been disproportionately impacted. For example, commonly-used platforms such as Zoom rely on sound to highlight the person talking, and turning off video to improve the quality of a call is not an option. While video captioning can make digital provision more accessible to this community (and others), live captioning is not always reliable.

40 The SFC report also identified institutions' intention to use learning from the pandemic to enhance future practice including: the development of student performance platforms; embedding blended and/or digital provision in institutional strategic approaches to learning, teaching and assessment; upgrading technological infrastructure; and maintaining digital access to student support.

Work-based learning

41 Noting that work-based learning is a significant, and in some cases essential, part of some programmes, some institutions acknowledged the need to take steps to support students undertaking work placements. Examples of measures in place included working with employers to maintain the number of placements offered or to expand access to virtual placements, the provision of alternative study arrangements if an employer is unable to support home-working, the use of risk assessments to inform decisions about whether a placement may go ahead.

42 The SFC report highlighted that many institutions are having to address questions about how to blend the best of in-person provision with the best of digital provision, particularly given that some students have strong preferences. It is not yet clear what impact blended learning will have on student expectations, student engagement, parity of experience across different modes of study, the cohesiveness of the student community, the campus, and students' readiness for the workplace. Questions remain about which changes to provision should be retained (and the pedagogic rationale for doing so), which valuable elements of in-person provision are at risk of being lost, and the effect of digital provision on environmental sustainability.

43 An issue commented on by several institutions in the SFC report was that the issuing of government guidance had at points been very late. This has been an impediment to planning, particularly for disciplines that require access to lab or studio space, or practical experience for professional accreditation.

Assessment

44 Following the first national lockdown in March 2020, all institutions put modified assessment arrangements in place within a short period of time. They aimed at allowing institutions to assess students rigorously, complete the assessment process for the academic year 2019-20, and make sound progression and award decisions without disadvantaging students. Institutional responses to the pandemic took account of the fact that the majority of teaching had been delivered for that academic year and assessment decision-making processes could therefore refer to assessment taken before the pandemic.

45 Following the ease of lockdown in the summer of 2020, institutions had more time than in 2019-20 to determine their assessment arrangements for the academic year 2020-21. Teaching and assessment for 2020-21 had been designed in the context of the pandemic, recognising the need for the majority of learning and assessment to take place digitally. All institutions agreed measures to ensure that students had an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities in assessment, and to prevent the pandemic from having an unreasonable impact upon degree outcomes.

46 The SFC report highlighted that the introduction of alternative assessments has been broadly positively received by students and staff across the Scottish higher education sector. Institutions have introduced alternative assessments in the form of take-home, time-limited exams; virtual oral and written examinations; online presentations; and recorded or live online performances. In many cases, the introduction of alternative assessments has been a positive step towards providing necessary flexibility for the learning support needs of individual students and particular student communities. Nevertheless, the shift away from closed-book examinations has posed some challenges relating to academic integrity (see paragraph 82).

'No detriment' approaches and fair assessment policies

47 Most institutions reported that they adopted a 'no detriment' approach or fair assessment/no disadvantage policies to the assessment of students for the academic year 2019-20 and these approaches were usually time-limited to that academic year. 'No detriment' approaches typically applied to all students regardless of their circumstances; however, their application was usually more limited for programmes with professional/statutory/regulatory body (PSRB) accreditations which required assessments to continue in some form, mainly digitally.

48 While the 'no detriment' approach was not a uniform approach and meant, to some extent, different things in different institutions, it typically sought to mitigate the impact of the cancellation of teaching and assessment activities or the conversion to digital assessment. A more compassionate approach to cases where student performance had dropped meant making reasonable adjustments to the way module and degree outcomes were considered by Assessment Boards. Approaches often focused on an apparent guarantee of a grade no poorer than average previous performance.

49 For example, in 2019-20 at one institution, the Boards of Examiners considered module results and calculated degree outcomes in the context of the pattern of results of current and previous graduating years. This meant that Boards of Examiners were able to identify if groups of graduating students, or individual results for impacted modules, were anomalous, and lower, than they had been previously. Boards of Examiners had the option to adjust (raise) marks if a module mark for an impacted module was poor in comparison to unimpacted modules. A module mark could only be improved - it could not be lowered - through this process. The new module mark was then included in the calculation of the degree. Marks could also be excluded from further calculations - for example, if a student's

module mark for an impacted module was poor in comparison to other modules, it could be excluded from the calculation of their overall degree classification. The credit was still awarded, but the module mark was not changed.

50 Similarly, a second institution reported that in the academic year 2020-21, Progression and Award Boards' reviews of students' profiles ensured that any impact the pandemic may have had on overall performance was identified, and appropriate adjustments made, if necessary. Boards looked at individuals and cohorts in a holistic way, assessing whether any potential impact of the pandemic resulted in lower-than-expected performance for an individual, ensuring that the performance of the cohort overall was comparable to previous years. Scrutiny of honours degree classification profiles for each discipline was reviewed at institutional level.

51 Some institutions specified a minimum volume of assessment that had to be completed and passed before the 'no detriment' approach applied. For example, at one institution the policy resulted in a change to the absolute minimum amount of assessment that had to be completed in order for the institution to award a degree or for progression. This was set at 65% across all assessment that would normally count towards the final award. Under the 'no detriment' approach there was also a substantial change to the way that reassessments (resits) operated and were offered to students in respect of all examinations or assignments in place of examinations with many more students being entitled to resit examinations where their performance had been affected.

52 While 'no detriment' approaches tried to mitigate the impact of cancelled assessments or modified assessment arrangements on student performance and outcomes, fair assessment/no disadvantage policies were designed to adjust the whole assessment process to remove disadvantage. At one HEI, the approach aimed to eliminate disadvantage through reviewing the assessment of each module, considering whether the number and type of assessments and the approach to marking could be streamlined or simplified while maintaining academic standards, that is, eliminating any over-assessment of particular learning outcomes.

53 The continuation of assessments digitally in 2020-21 necessitated refinements to previously amended assessment policies and approaches in some institutions. For example, one institution modified its 'no detriment' approach to assessment. While in 2019-20 its 'no detriment' policy was applied to all students regardless of their individual circumstances, in the following session the institution considered that a policy that was more responsive to individual circumstances was required, recognising that students continued to be affected by the pandemic but some faced greater difficulties than others.

54 In the SFC report, the implementation of 'no detriment' policies and approaches, or similar supportive approaches, have been identified as particularly good practice by institutions. These policies are part of a 'human or supportive approach' that many institutions have used to describe their transition to emergency digital provision. Most institutions continue to operate these policies in addition to blanket policies or self-certification of extenuating circumstances. Institutions expressed the view that 'no detriment' policies and approaches do not undermine academic standards and the quality of digital provision; rather, they recognise the potential impact of continuing COVID-19 restrictions on student attainment and performance. Every institution that continues to operate a 'no detriment' or 'no disadvantage' policy has stated that they will undertake annual reviews to determine whether this approach is still appropriate.

Assessment of undergraduate students

Progression of first and second-year students

55 In 2019-20, assessments at all institutions, particularly for first and second-year students, were either cancelled during lockdown or, where they were necessary (for example, resits), face-to-face assessments were replaced with digital alternatives (see digital examinations - paragraphs 74 and 77). Approaches to progression decisions were both pragmatic, enabling the conclusion of the assessment cycle, and in favour of students.

56 For the seven institutions for which information is available on progression of first and second-year students, on courses without any PSRB or other special requirements, their approach typically involved a combination of automatic progression into the next year based on passed assessment in the first half of the academic year with the application of more generous condonement rules. However, students who had failed assessments that had taken place in the first half of the year usually had to undertake resits.

57 This was the case at one institution where first and second-year students were allowed to progress to the next year of their studies without the requirement of a final examination. However, students who failed modules which were fully assessed in semester 1, and did not have the necessary credits to progress to the next year, needed to resit those modules, as normal, at the first available resit opportunity.

58 At another institution, first-year students were permitted to progress automatically to second year. For second-year students who expected to progress to the next year of study and for entry to honours decisions, schools determined progression based on the assessment taken to date and any outstanding coursework due for submission. Decisions took into account performance across first and second year as appropriate, and in such a way as to ensure that students were not disadvantaged. Students who did not meet the progression requirements on that basis, either because of approved medical absence during the year or because the grade was below the progression threshold, were advised of the arrangements for assessment later in the year which involved an alternative digital assessment.

59 Similarly, at a third institution first and second-year undergraduate students studying at Level 7 or 8 did not have any semester 2 examinations and all semester 2 courses were given a pass result, and were not subject to being reassessed.³ Pass grades were also awarded to Year 3, 4 and 5 students taking Level 7 and 8 courses, and to students who were resitting or repeating Level 7 and 8 courses in semester 2, as well as students taking Level 7 and 8 courses for the first time. Students were assigned one of the standard progression/resit decisions based on student performance in semester 1. Those who had pass alpha grades from semester 1 were automatically progressed as they had pass grades for semester 2.⁴ Students had to retake semester 1 assessments/examinations if their results showed that a resit was required.

60 Another HEI adopted a similar approach. For all Level 7 and 8 modules, students automatically received a pass grade for the module and academic credit, but no overall mark for the module. Programme Assessment Boards made progression decisions based on performance in trimester 1 and students who failed any modules then were required to resit them.

61 With regard to condonement, one institution reported that, in 2019-20, its rules allowed the condonement of one 20-credit marginal fail module with some exception for

³ Levels are those used in the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework*

⁴ Alpha grades are denoted by letters rather than numbers, for example A, B, C

modules with PSRB or programme outcome requirements. If students had more than one unit of assessment within a module, and one of these was a marginal fail, the aggregated minimum pass level was reduced from 0.875 to 0.75. The grade point average for students in first to third years was based on the best 80 out of 120 credits for the academic year.

62 One institution applied compensation and/or condonement to individual modules, where permitted, if a student had failed the module. In session 2019-20 only, this applied to all grades of failure and not only for marginal failures. Where a student had failed a module, and it could not be compensated or condoned, usually due to PSRB rules, they were given another opportunity to take the assessment, as a first attempt with no penalty applied, that is, the full range of grades were available and the module was not capped.

63 For the academic year 2020-21, one institution reported that it had amended the requirements for progression from first and second years, reducing the need for students to undertake reassessments in the summer for failed courses. Where a student failed up to 40 credits of 'outside' courses (that is, courses which were not core to their programme of study), they could be awarded credit for the failed courses 'on aggregate'. This meant that where a student had passed their other 80 or more credits and had an average for all courses completed that year (including the failed courses) of more than 40%, they could be given the credit for the failed courses. Where credit had been awarded on aggregate for a course, students did not need to resit failed assessments. Some schools, which set additional requirements for progression into third year (for example, a requirement to pass some courses at 50% at the first attempt), relaxed those requirements.

Progression of Year 3 and 4 students

64 Information on the progression of third and fourth-year students was available for five institutions. The sample indicated that, in order to progress, students had to complete assessments in the form of digital examinations or alternative forms of assessment; this was the case at two institutions.

65 At one HEI, continuing students progressing to Year 4 and 5 had to retake semester 1 and 2 assessments/examinations if their results showed a resit was required. Resit examinations and resit assessments were replaced by take-home examinations or alternative forms of assessment.

66 At another institution, in particular circumstances, replacement examinations or additional assessments were required for students to progress to the next year or complete their qualification. These circumstances included insufficient existing assessment data to make a judgement on student performance and in cases where students had failed assessments within semester 2 and marked assessment was less than 50% of the planned module assessment.

67 One institution amended its requirements for progression to the third and fourth year, and for the award of degrees in fourth or fifth years for 2020-21 - allowing students to gain credit for a larger volume of failed courses. In session 2020-21, where a student failed up to 60 credits in the third, fourth or fifth year, they could be awarded credit for the failed courses 'on aggregate'. This meant that where a student had passed their other 60, or more, credits and had an average for all courses (including the failed courses) of more than 40%, they could be given the credit for the failed courses. Marks for failed courses were included in the calculation of classification unless they had been discounted due to the upholding of special circumstances.

Degree classifications of graduating students

68 Information was available from four institutions on changes made to the process of degree classification. Changes to process focused on the relaxation of compensation/condonement rules, the abolition of requirements for minimum grades in final-year projects/dissertations and the expansion of the borderline range for classification.

69 For example, at one institution the award calculation in 2019-20 was based on the best 200 out of 240 credits completed at third and fourth years. For Integrated Masters students, the award calculation was based on the best 200 out of 240 credits at fourth and fifth years. Another HEI raised the limit for the use of compensation and/or condonement from 25% to 50% for the years of study that contribute to the honours classification.

70 One institution stated its usual rules for degree classification would not apply in 2020-21. Normally, an honours degree would be awarded only where a grade of at least 'D3' was achieved in the dissertation or project but this requirement would be removed for students completing in 2020-21. The grade awarded for the dissertation/project would still be included in the calculation of the final grade point average.

71 Another institution expanded the borderline range for classification from 2% to 3% for the academic year 2020-21 to ensure additional consideration was given to students whose performance was close to a higher class. Boards of Examiners who determine classification would consider whether any student falling within 3% of the higher class qualified for an upgrade to the higher class, on a case-by-case basis. Most students who were due to graduate in 2020-21 completed courses in 2019-20 which counted towards their honours classification. Under the 'no detriment' rules in place for courses in semester 2, 2019-20, some course results might be discounted for classification purposes where Boards of Examiners were able to discount affected components of assessment when calculating results for courses. These course results would count towards classification as normal. Where this was not possible, because the affected assessment was needed to demonstrate the learning outcomes for the course, the Boards of Examiners would discount the course result if it was lower than the student's average for other courses counting towards classification. Students who were studying on an optional year abroad in 2019-20 would receive a degree classification based solely on their results for courses completed in their final year, as normal.

Programmes accredited by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)

72 Some institutions provided information on courses that are subject to PSRB requirements. HEIs' approaches to assessment and progression for such programmes had to accommodate requirements such as the need to fully complete assessment in some, or all, elements of a degree programme, resulting in variations to their assessment approach at all levels. HEIs' changed practices included holding time-limited digital examinations or alternative assessments and restricting the application of compensation and condonement rules. For example, one institution's condonement of one 20-credit marginal fail module in 2019-20 did not apply to modules with PSRB requirements. At a second HEI, where a student had failed a module, and it could not be compensated or condoned due to PSRB requirements, students were given another opportunity to take the assessment, but any normal penalties such as capping of components still applied. Similarly, on some professional or accredited programmes at another institution, credit could not be awarded in the normal way, which had a potential impact on students' ability to complete their programmes. Where a student failed more than 60 credits in a year and did not have special circumstances, they were unlikely to be able to continue on the honours programme, but may be eligible to complete an ordinary or general degree.

Assessment of taught postgraduate students

73 Five institutions reported on the impact of the pandemic on assessment of postgraduate taught students in 2019-20. Modifications typically involved the replacement of face-to-face examinations with digital examinations or alternative forms of assessment.

74 At one institution semester 2 examinations were deferred to the summer of 2020. Planned in-person examinations were replaced by take-home examinations or alternative forms of assessment. Postgraduate students taking Level 7 and 8 courses were not required to undertake an examination as all Level 7 and 8 examinations were cancelled and a pass grade was allocated. All postgraduate taught students were permitted to progress to their dissertation.

75 Examinations for the majority of Level 9, 10 and 11 modules at another HEI took place digitally at the start time published in the examination timetable. The examination papers were made available digitally. Examinations were marked as 'open book' assessments.

76 One institution amended progression requirements for 2020-21 postgraduate taught programmes by allowing students to progress based on a smaller than usual volume of credits. In order to progress from the taught component to the dissertation/research project, students needed to achieve marks of 50% or more in at least 60 credits and achieve an average of 50% across the 120 credits of taught courses. Some programme requirements related to specific courses which needed to be passed at 50%. Marks for all courses (including any failed courses) would be included when calculating eligibility for Merit or Distinction unless they had been discounted due to upheld special circumstances. The institution also amended the requirements for students to achieve Merit or Distinction and expanded the borderline range from 2% to 3%. This would apply both to the taught and dissertation/project components. Where a student achieved a higher class in one component, and a borderline mark in the other component, they would be automatically upgraded to the higher class of award.

Digital examination delivery

77 Eight HEIs reported on the use of digital examinations and alternative assessments either as a replacement for cancelled in-person examinations in 2019-20 (four institutions) or as the assessment approach of choice for 2020-21 (six institutions). Online examinations for 2019-20 were mostly take-home examinations based on a version of the original examination paper, or an alternative - taking into account students' limited access to specialist equipment and software. Examination papers were typically made accessible to students via the virtual learning environment (VLE). The timescales for completion were normally relatively short (24 hours). One institution, not bound by PSRB rules, allowed seven days for completion, indicating that this provided flexibility for students working in different time zones. Later, this was changed to be more consistent with sector practice.

78 An account by one institution gave an indication of the scale of the operation and the support students required. The HEI reported that in May 2020 there were 1019 examinations, and all were completed digitally. All examinations were successfully delivered in a format rarely used before, never on this scale, and with good engagement from students. There were very few helpline calls because of problems (609 - less than one per examination) and this was a far smaller number of queries than usually dealt with by invigilators and staff during on-campus examinations. Some students encountered difficulties with technology resulting in increased digital support and guidance during assessment to help them with digital submissions or undertaking examinations digitally.

79 For the academic year 2020-21 the approach to digital examinations delivery

typically involves take-home examinations - that is, the examination is taken alone by students in their own space (for example, at home or at designated spaces in the institution library) by downloading the paper and uploading answers under 'open book' conditions. This means that students have access to notes, course material and the internet during the examination.

80 The time permitted to complete a typical two to three-hour paper digitally ranged from eight hours at one institution to a 23-24 hour completion window at others. Some examinations with PSRB requirements were time-limited and of shorter duration. Students were not usually penalised if they were experiencing technical issues which could not be mitigated within the timeframe of the digital assessment but were expected to use the institution's mitigating circumstances process to have this taken into account.

81 In addition, some institutions intended to use closed book examinations where materials could not be accessed for the duration of the digital assessment. One HEI highlighted individual library study spaces where students could, subject to agreement, undertake their digital assessment. Expectations for digital assessment could involve typed answers but could also involve handwritten or hand-drawn submissions. Students in need of additional support to access and/or operate particular equipment or resources, such as software, would be required to make their department/school aware of this. Software packages were available to download free from the institution.

82 In the SFC report, several institutions noted that the necessary transition away from closed-book examinations had exacerbated the problem of essay mills.⁵ Institutions are also giving careful consideration as to how to maintain fairness while moving away from blanket approaches such as 'no detriment' policies.

Mitigating circumstances and extensions to assessment deadlines

83 Five institutions reported that they made changes to their mitigating circumstances policies to take account of new circumstances that might prevent students from completing their assessments or might impact their performance unduly. Changes typically involved: the expansion of the range of circumstances covered; the waiving of evidence submission for pandemic-related causes; and extended flexibility in relation to assessment submission dates.

84 For example, one institution expanded its Mitigating Circumstances Policy for 2020-21, which now allows students an additional two 48-hour extensions on coursework deadlines without the need to provide evidence. Similarly, another HEI adjusted its 'fit to sit' policy to support extensions and deferrals, expanding the grounds to include access to IT and family circumstances as well as amending the mitigating circumstances process to enable self-certification.

85 At a different institution, the usual position is that students can request an extension to an assessment submission deadline of up to five working days. For the remainder of the 2020-21 academic session, students may request an extension of 10 working days for coursework. The institution assured students that staff will be as flexible as possible in granting these extensions within the constraints of the particular assessment and programme; however, in some areas there will be limits on the length of extension that can be offered. Similar provision is being introduced for dissertations and projects. The institution also reports a number of other measures recognising that while projects have been designed to be achievable within the particular restrictions associated with the pandemic, some

⁵ QAA's work on academic integrity may be of interest: www.qaa.ac.uk/membership/highlights-from-last-years-membership-activities/academic-integrity

students will have experienced further challenges as the project progressed, either because of their personal circumstances or because of unanticipated difficulties associated with the research itself. The institution is offering additional flexibility in relation to the submission date, where possible, which may mean that the submission date is extended for a whole class and/or flexibility is offered for students individually to ask for more time where they need it. This includes asking for an extension of 10 working days in the same way as for coursework. For students who have experienced particularly severe or long-lasting disruption to the work on their dissertation/project, it may be possible to defer submission until the summer.

86 One institution reports that for tutor-marked assignments students can request an extension from the tutor of up to 21 days. Longer extension requests must be discussed with the tutor, or student support team in the tutor's absence. Extensions to the final-module assessment are more restricted. Students can request an extension of up to the eighth day of the month in which the module ends with the arrangement being in place until at least 31 December 2021. In addition, students unable to undertake digital examinations or submit any part of their end-of-module assignments or end-of-module tutor-marked assignments due to exceptional circumstances, may be permitted to postpone to the next available opportunity (discretionary postponement). While the institution will continue to acknowledge the effect that the COVID-19 pandemic may be having on students' study, they should still inform the institution if their performance, either on a specific assignment or across the overall module, has been particularly affected. In both cases, students are not currently required to submit any evidence when requesting a postponement and students can submit special circumstances up to four days after the submission cut-off deadline for the digital examination, end-of-module assignments or end-of-module tutor-marked assignments. This arrangement will also remain in place until at least 31 December 2021.

87 Another HEI also removed the requirement to provide formal documentation with applications for special circumstances. Students do not need to provide medical evidence in support of applications relating to health concerns and do not need to provide formal documentary evidence (for example, from government or external agencies) to support other types of application. Instead, students are expected to provide a clear description of the circumstances and their impact, and supporting evidence from other sources - for example, institution staff - wherever possible. The institution has also expanded the range of circumstances covered by special circumstances to reflect the impact of COVID-19.

Changes to Assessment Board practices

88 For all institutions, assessment board practices changed and details of changes to the application of progression and degree classification rules have been discussed above. In principle, Assessment Boards were empowered to use their academic judgement, based on the changes made to policies and additional guidance provided by institutions, to take best actions in order to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on students.

89 For example, at one institution the Boards of Examiners considered module results and calculated degree outcomes in the context of the pattern of results of current and previous graduating years. Boards had the option to take a range of actions to mitigate pandemic impact including mark adjustment and exclusion of poor module grades from the degree classification. A similar approach was taken by another HEI where adjustments to poor module performance were made and, at a third institution, the evidence available to Assessment Boards was expanded to include data of previous performance when determining both progression and final award. Assessment Boards were asked to apply the discretion within the Academic Regulations to adopt an approach of leniency and latitude.

90 One institution also substantially modified the award of course grades with any

grade that would have negatively impacted overall performance being discounted when calculating grade point averages. At a second institution, where there was incomplete assessment information in relation to semester 2 for Levels 9 to 11, the institution invoked a special circumstances regulation where Boards of Examiners were authorised to make judgements and decisions on the basis of such information as was available to them. It became mandatory for all Examination Board minutes to confirm that exceptional decision-making was made.

91 At another institution where the flexibility provided by the institution's existing published regulations, including those set out in the regulations governing assessment and the operation of Boards of Examiners could not be invoked, Boards of Examiners operated under emergency interim regulations and supporting guidance, as approved by the institution's senate. A record was kept by Boards of all actions taken, and any mitigations and adjustments agreed by Boards of Examiners.

Quality processes

92 While all institutions continued to carry out their normal processes for the assurance of the standards and quality of their provision during the period of the pandemic, every institution made some alterations to procedures with a view to accommodating changes in circumstances. Institutions' annual reports to the Scottish Funding Council draw attention to effects on processes including preparation for and the conduct of Enhancement-led Institutional Reviews, Institution-Led Reviews, annual monitoring, programme approvals and external examining; such effects included delays, rescheduling and changes to the conduct or scope of activities, typically accompanied by policies to limit the duration or scale of changes to processes. It is likely that there have been additional effects on quality assurance processes or on their timing which have not yet been identified in annual reports and which are not publicly visible on institutions' web pages.

93 The SFC report highlighted that existing institutional quality assurance and enhancement processes demonstrated a considerable level of robustness and ability to respond flexibly to challenging circumstances. While processes may have been amended or streamlined to support the move to digital provision, no institution had to wholly refit or create new quality assurance processes to reflect the emergency shift to remote learning and teaching. Existing processes allowed for institutions to build in opportunities for staff and student reflection on their digital learning and teaching experience.

Enhancement-led Institutional Review

94 The ELIR visits for institutions which had been planned to take place in March 2020 were postponed because of the onset of the pandemic, and were rescheduled to take place in October and November 2020 in a digital format; in advance of the visit, and to assist the ELIR review team, institutions were invited to prepare an update paper describing steps taken to ensure that learning and teaching activity and quality assurance continued during the pandemic. All institutions expressed their readiness for an online event.

Institution-Led Reviews

95 The analysis of institutions' SFC annual reports for 2019-20 carried out by QAA Scotland noted that 30 of 106 planned ILRs were rescheduled because of the pandemic, and that, for the 28 reviews that took place post-lockdown, institutions moved quickly to alter processes, sometimes in a matter of days. The main adaptation was to accommodate digital meetings although other changes were also implemented. In order to assist preparation for digital meetings, one institution developed practical guidance which was subsequently published on its web pages and shared with colleagues in the sector in liaison with QAA

Scotland.

96 Institutions are normally required to carry out ILRs of each subject area in a six-year cycle. However, following discussion with and approval by the Scottish Funding Council and QAA Scotland, a total of 19 reviews were postponed and rescheduled beyond the six-year period. There were no risks identified by these institutions across the review activity that were not mitigated.

97 The analysis of institutions' SFC annual reports found that ILR activities continue to be thorough, despite the challenging circumstances, providing institutions with assurance that academic standards are being achieved and that the quality of the student experience is high and continues to be enhanced. It noted also that this view concurs with the outcomes from ELIR reviews.

98 The negative consequences of the pandemic on ILR were reported as being the bunching of review schedules in following years and additional work in preparing, organising and managing reviews. However, some benefits were also noted; some institutions drew attention to an increased level of student engagement in the process, attributed to greater student confidence in participating in digital meetings than in face-to-face meetings. Other contributory factors noted in the SFC report were more flexible scheduling of meetings and the ability to attend meetings without travelling to the institution. One institution took advantage of the need to adapt its ILR procedure by piloting a new method in a rescheduled review. Many institutions expressed an intention to review the success of digital periodic institution-led review processes with the aim of retaining the digital mode of review events in the future.

Annual monitoring

99 The SFC annual reports for each institution except for one included a description of the normal annual monitoring processes currently in use and, in some cases, a summary of changes made to the normal arrangements for annual monitoring in 2019-20 in response to the pandemic. All other institutions either made no mention of any changes to arrangements or confirmed that normal arrangements continued to apply.

100 Of the institutions which adapted their arrangements in response to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, two made alterations to the responsibilities of internal committees: in one case this entailed a desk-based analysis of reports in place of consideration by senior committees, while in the other case a special meeting of the most senior committee was to be held, with a view to informing changes to the institution's approach in 2020-21.

101 The most common adaptation to normal processes was to maintain current processes but with shortened reports focusing on areas seen as being key. Typically, these related to the maintenance of academic standards and the effectiveness of steps taken to maintain the quality of the student experience. Additionally, in order to lessen the burden on staff, two institutions adopted extended deadlines for the preparation of reports. One institution, however, shortened the deadline for reports in order to allow them to inform its plans for dual-delivery (digital and in-person delivery) of programmes in 2020-21, while another institution adopted an alternative process which omitted its normal requirements for reports at programme level.

102 Institutions offered consistent rationales for changes made to annual monitoring arrangements, drawing attention in particular to the aims of allowing more time for staff to focus on delivery and on the student experience during the pandemic, of allowing time to learn from the effects of the pandemic on the student experience, and to inform planning for future annual monitoring arrangements.

Programme approval

103 Most institutions reported either that no changes to programme approval processes were needed or made no mention of this, and no institution drew attention to any risk to standards and quality arising from continuing use of its approval processes during the period of the pandemic. However, in their annual reports, some institutions reported changed procedures or timescales for the approval of new programmes or of changes to existing programmes, the latter being of particular relevance to arrangements for programme delivery or modes of assessment during the period of the pandemic. Alterations to procedures included: blanket approvals for limited temporary adjustments to delivery in 2020-21; an additional review of programme changes in July 2020 outwith the institution's normal schedule; a review of all programmes in March 2020 to identify and implement any immediate short-term modifications necessary for digital delivery or assessment in semester 2; and the introduction of a temporary, expedited process for approving changes accompanied by detailed and comprehensive guidance on the application and use of this process.

104 In addition, the meeting of SHEEC in April 2020 noted actions taken by some institutions in respect of arrangements for approving module and programme changes which had worked well. These were: the establishment of an emergency approvals group to approve in-session module and programme changes; the establishment of a small educational management group to approve programme changes, and the establishment of an academic contingency group to develop guidelines and approve changes to regulations for adapting assessments.

External examining

105 No institution drew attention to any risk to standards and quality arising from continuing use of its normal arrangements for external examining during the pandemic, and most did not report any change to these arrangements. Some institutions drew attention to changed advice and guidance to external examiners, reflecting an adapted role for examiners in the light of changes to assessment practices. One institution provided particularly clear and detailed guidance for external examiners in respect of their roles during the pandemic. Some institutions made changes to the reporting templates used by their external examiners in order to invite examiners specifically to comment on the security of standards during the period of the pandemic. Another institution appointed an existing external examiner in each school as a Senior External Examiner for a period of five months, to provide oversight and external advice to the school through the review and approval of the school's plans for digital delivery.

Student support

Approaches to student support

106 Recognising the risks to students' wellbeing and academic progress arising from the pandemic, institutions have typically taken steps to enhance and communicate arrangements for supporting students. The approach of many institutions appears to have been well expressed by the institution which affirmed that it was committed to providing a full range of pastoral and academic support to all students, whether studying digitally or on-campus. Adaptations made to institutional policy and approaches to student support are reflected in the reference by one institution to a range of extraordinary measures and policies to support students in the face of unprecedented disruption to their studies.

107 In their SFC annual reports, some institutions drew attention to revised approaches to policy, practice or allocation of resources in response to the pandemic; although other

institutions made no mention of such alterations, none stated that they had made no changes to arrangements for student support. Such revisions included descriptions of reflection, overview and coordination at institutional level, of collaboration with student representatives in forming the institution's approach, of planned use of digital technology to ensure continuity of support, and of giving priority, sooner than planned, to an aspect of institutional strategy relating to student support. Two institutions additionally drew attention to the steps they had taken to foster a greater sense of community during the pandemic, through gathering ideas, essays, artworks, poetry, positive stories of supporting others in a 'Lockdown Journal', through a 'Be Connected' programme of social, health and wellbeing, learning and cultural activities and resources designed to help and support the physical and mental wellbeing of both staff and students. As a measure of the success of its strengthened arrangements for student support, one institution noted that its students' association had this year received a record number of nominations for awards to academic and support staff which it regarded as providing strong evidence of a widespread culture of student support.

108 Institutions' web pages have offered reassurance to students that support services continue to be available during the pandemic, albeit with altered forms of access. Typically they affirm that support for matters relating to academic provision, welfare, finances, and health are available from the institution's normal sources - whether digitally, by telephone or by email - and provide clear contact details for students to use.

109 The SFC report noted that most institutions moved their student support services online in response to the national lockdown in March 2020. Students have responded positively to this transition as many find support services more accessible in a digital environment. However, some institutions did receive negative student feedback about the process taken to moving these services online. Institutions identified the following service areas to be particularly effective in supporting the student learning experience in a digital environment: counselling provision for students; personal, pastoral and academic tutoring; student learning services; and employability platforms.

110 All institutions praised the dedication and resilience of academic and professional services staff during what has been an exceptionally demanding time. An ongoing challenge highlighted in the SFC report is the clear and widespread concern about the ongoing need for skills development, sustainability of workloads and staff wellbeing.

Supporting learning and study

111 Most institutions offered guidance to students seeking academic support for their studies. While this often consisted of simple but helpful reminders of the roles of staff - both academic and professional support - and of how to contact them, some institutions also drew attention to additional services including, for instance, a 'Scan and Deliver' service enabling students to request electronic versions of printed materials, mid-year progression reviews for each student with follow-ups by support teams if needed, guidance on preparing for digital examinations, and support for study skills and mathematics skills through video conferencing and digital workshops.

112 Recognising potential difficulties in studying from home, some institutions provided support intended for students whose circumstances may make home study difficult. On their web pages, some institutions provided extensive advice on practical aspects of studying from home. Some, whose campuses were otherwise closed to students, provided study spaces and access to IT equipment for students who could not study at home. One institution affirmed that temporary suspension of studies was available to students who were unable to study effectively due to personal circumstances.

113 Good practice identified in the SFC report was the introduction, by some institutions, of online peer mentoring systems to support students in the transition to digital

provision. Creating opportunities for connection among student communities in a digital environment has been a priority for all higher education institutions in Scotland. Online peer mentoring systems provide students with opportunities to connect with other students and learn from their experiences. All institutions who had implemented these systems articulated a desire to continue with them in the future.

Welfare and other support

114 In addition to academic support, most institutions have publicly emphasised the availability of welfare support and, in particular, support for the mental health of students. Affirming the priority given to the mental health and wellbeing of its students, institutions' web pages typically refer to counselling and wellbeing support as being available during the pandemic by means of video calls, telephone calls or email.

115 A number of institutions draw attention to particular features of its welfare support. One institution, in addition to digital support for individuals, has established supplementary services available to all students including a daily digital drop-in with advisers from its Disability and Wellbeing Team; a digital cognitive behavioural therapy programme; a series of interactions in social media run by a member of the Disability and Wellbeing Team; and advice on habits and routines likely to promote good mental health including advice on sleep and on physical activity. To support students who are self-isolating, the institution has also established a 'buddy scheme', where members of staff pair with self-isolating students to make daily contact by phone or by video call. Another institution has arranged for translation support to assist students with hearing disabilities to make effective use of technology for video calls, while a third institution is offering digital mindfulness-based therapy group sessions in addition to proactive wellbeing checks on students known to have mental health conditions and a digital mental health support service available to all students.

116 Institutions took proactive steps to support students facing financial difficulties while studying, and were themselves supported with additional funding from the Scottish Government.⁶ Some institutions on their web pages explicitly draw attention to the availability of discretionary financial support for their students - some with additional advice about the nature of financial hardship which such funds are intended to support.

117 An aspect of good practice identified in the SFC report was that every institution developed an induction package for incoming students in preparation for a blended or digital 2020-21 academic year. Induction activities included transition courses for students, micro-credential courses to develop academic and technological skills, and comprehensive pre-arrival support for new and continuing students. Institutions noted that online inductions were particularly effective in addressing issues of accessibility for students who were required to study remotely due to personal health concerns or national restrictions on travel.

Student engagement

Student involvement in decision-making

118 While all institutions have arrangements for including the student voice in their deliberative processes, some institutions made a point, in their SFC annual reports for 2019-20 or in meetings of SHEEC, of drawing attention to steps taken or planned to ensure that student representatives contribute to decision-taking during the pandemic. Typically, this took the form of the inclusion of student representatives in institution-level working groups responsible for planning responses to the pandemic. For instance, one institution, in giving effect to its commitment to ensuring that students remained at the centre of the planning

⁶ www.mygov.scot/student-discretionary-funds

process, appointed representatives of the students' association as full members of the group responsible for overseeing the process of planning for a safe return to campus, and the Principal and Student President held frequent digital drop-in sessions for students.

119 In addition, as described in the following paragraphs, numerous institutions have taken steps to ensure that arrangements for hearing and responding to the student voice through feedback mechanisms and through involvement in quality assurance processes have continued, with altered working practices when necessary.

120 Several institutions affirmed their commitment to ensuring continuing student involvement in quality assurance processes, particularly in relation to internal reviews. While student involvement was necessarily restricted to digital means, one institution noted that student involvement continued to remain positive and productive in these circumstances; some institutions noted unforeseen beneficial effects, by enabling the inclusion of students from a wider mix of geographical areas than in previous years or by an increased level of confidence on the part of student members in contributing to discussion.

121 Student representatives on SHEEC, in affirming the importance of institutions' continuing to engage with student representatives, noted that some institutions had achieved this through innovative use of digital tools, and acknowledged that student-staff liaison at programme level might need to be in an adapted format.

122 The following good practice was identified in the SFC report:

- the role of positive partnership working between the institution and students' association/union in ensuring an effective transition to digital provision
- institutions praising the efforts of sabbatical officers to represent students' interests and shape institutional decision-making processes at a complex and difficult time
- the significant role of student representatives in agreeing key institutional plans for moving teaching online; disseminating information to the student community; reviewing amendments to programme content, learning outcomes and modes of assessment; and championing student interests relating to digital poverty, accessibility and inclusion.

Gathering student views

123 The inception of digital delivery and assessment led some institutions to make alterations to their arrangements for gathering students' views about their experience; other institutions noted, however, that they were able to continue with their usual arrangements for gaining student feedback. While some institutions noted that they were able to continue with their usual surveys of students, others drew attention to changes to their usual regime of regular student surveys, typically by either supplementing or replacing their usual surveys with modified surveys addressing the student experience of digital teaching and assessment.

124 As examples of changes to practice in respect of student engagement, one institution did not run its usual module evaluation questionnaires in semester two of 2019-20, but instead ran two surveys intended to gather early and more detailed student feedback following the rapid shift to digital learning, teaching and assessment; and, in 2020-21, is providing additional training for class representatives which will cover how to engage with and get feedback from students studying digitally. Another institution did not run its usual 'Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey' but instead offered, through its students' association, a bespoke 'Speak Week' to enable students and staff to reflect on the pivot to digital learning and to enable staff to plan for 2020-21 in line with the student voice. A further institution developed and implemented a 'Staying Well Pulse Survey' relating to its changes

to teaching, learning and assessment changes in the transition to off-campus delivery, in order to establish how alternative arrangements have been working for students and to gauge student wellbeing.

125 Good practice highlighted in the SFC report was the use of short, targeted pulse surveys to gather student feedback on their experience of digital provision. Many institutions suggested that the use of pulse surveys or gathering of module or programme-specific feedback enabled them to respond quickly and proactively to issues raised by students.

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies

126 During the academic year 2019-20, there were 124 professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) engagements, accrediting over 329 programmes. 18 PSRB engagements were postponed, primarily due to the pandemic. One HEI agreed a virtual review process on a case-by-case basis with each of its PSRBs. In addition to rescheduling accreditation events, institutions have also consulted with PSRBs regarding learning, teaching, assessment and regulatory changes in response to the pandemic.

127 For example, one institution reported that it discussed its 'no detriment' policy with PSRBs, as necessary, to ensure that PSRB requirements continued to be met. As a result, the assessment waiver for the spring 2020 examination diet applied to most first and second-year students was not applied on professional degrees such as Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Medicine; instead, these examinations were deferred.

128 Another institution stated that it recognised the implications for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students in respect of PSRBs and their regulations governing professional accreditation, and the consequences for the graduate experience and employability. The institution participated in sector-wide discussions with these bodies, while also instituting procedures that distinguished between academic evaluation and professional accreditation.

129 A third HEI reported that its engagement with professional bodies has continued throughout, with recognition of the need to adapt in response to COVID-19 and the resultant impact on examination arrangements. Schools at the institution were asked to share the outcomes of discussions that took place with PSRBs in relation to mitigation plans for examinations, and arrangements for in-person examinations that were approved and implemented. Overall, the institution found that PSRBs were both accepting and supportive of decisions taken by schools to provide alternative arrangements for exams, provided that academic standards were maintained and programme learning outcomes met.

130 The SFC report noted that institutions worked quickly and effectively with multiple PSRBs to ensure that all policy and regulatory amendments met the requirements of the relevant professional regulatory body. Many institutions and PSRBs reflected positively on the introduction of innovative alternative assessments, which closely replicate professional experiences. One particularly successful example was the move online of objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs) for pharmacy students. As more pharmacies begin to provide online services, the online delivery of OSCEs were embraced by students, potential employers and the relevant PSRB as providing a unique opportunity for students to gain professional skills in an online environment.

Collaborative partnerships

131 Two institutions report in their 2019-20 annual report to the Scottish Funding Council on the impact of the pandemic, on the delivery and management of programmes with overseas collaborative partners, resulting in a move to digital teaching and assessment,

programme reviews being postponed and enhanced communication protocols being established with collaborative partners.

132 One of these institutions reports the rescheduling of programme reviews for provision in Asia and the Middle East, and the other stated that it worked closely with its partner in Africa to implement its plans to transition to digital education and to ensure the delivery of learning and assessment digitally when face-to-face teaching ceased in March 2019. This latter HEI also initiated enhanced protocols for communication. Assessment Boards for the partner were held in June 2020 and were one of the very first to be held virtually by the institution through its modified assessment arrangements. The institution reports that the Boards ran successfully, ensuring effective decision-making and robust student outcomes. In a different HEI, enhanced communication arrangements were also put in place for a partnership in the Middle East to include information regarding amendments to assessment regulations and associated policies. In turn, the institution received updates providing an audit trail of emerging local delivery arrangements. These arrangements have been replicated for other smaller partnerships and the institution notes that this has ensured consistency of approach and decision-making.

Communication

133 Enhanced communication with students and staff was an important feature of institutions' pandemic responses. Some institutions - in their web pages, in their SFC annual reports or in minutes of SHEEC - alluded to their approaches by means of general statements about the need for messaging, which is clear, frequent, timely and consistent. In addition, student members of SHEEC noted that where institutions had checked communications with their students' association, before they were issued, this had led to adaptations which helped smooth communications with students.

134 Practice in respect of communication was particularly visible on the web pages of an institution whose 'Updates for Students and Staff' page contains the sequence of 69 communications between March 2020 and March 2021, issued consistently by a single named senior member of staff and including frequent information on the current status of a wide variety of aspects of the institution's provision as well as reminders of statutory obligations and guidance on health and wellbeing.

135 Good practice identified in the SFC report was the creation, by institutional student learning services teams, of innovative and comprehensive training tools to support students in engaging with their learning and teaching in a digital environment. Online courses and workshops have been developed to support students to gain technological skills and study remotely. Additionally, many institutional academic quality and governance teams have taken innovative approaches to communicating complex information to students through the use of explainer videos, infographics and direct-to-camera videos. These tools have been particularly useful in communicating information about institutional 'no detriment' policies or approaches and degree algorithms.

Postgraduate research

136 Recognising the particular challenges faced by postgraduate research students, most institutions included information, advice and guidance specifically for such students on their public web pages. In addition, two institutions in their annual reports to the SFC described the support and guidance which they had made available to postgraduate research students during the pandemic. All affirmed the expectation that students' work should continue to be carried out digitally if it was possible to do so, and offered a variety of forms of support for postgraduate research students.

137 Some institutions described, either in their web pages or in the annual reports to the SFC, their arrangements for continuing communication with postgraduate research students and for ensuring continuation of supervision of their research. One such institution affirmed that each student's primary supervisor should continue to be the first point of contact during digital working, and established a site on Microsoft Teams to enable and encourage postgraduate research students to share ideas and resources. In one institution, the Doctoral School introduced a weekly series of webinars, meetings, workshops and discussions, taking place by video-conferencing, on topics relevant to postgraduate research students.

138 Some institutions, on their web pages, acknowledged that postgraduate research students may benefit from being permitted to extend their period of study and confirmed that they would consider requests for such extensions; all but one of these further stated that it may provide additional financial support for students in these circumstances. One institution, for instance, had established a process to enable students in their final year of supervised study to apply for funded extensions of up to six months, from which about 70 students were expected to benefit, and was planning to gather information allowing it to fully understand the effect of the pandemic on postgraduate research students at an earlier stage of their studies. The web pages of another institution provided signposts to guidance for postgraduate research students who had been contracted to carry out teaching duties, as well as suggestions for practical arrangements for supervision during the pandemic. A further institution, in its annual report, drew attention to the programme of training sessions which it introduced to support wellbeing and address various aspects of funding, personal effectiveness, and networking during the period when students were required to work from home.

139 Some institutions offered guidance to students particularly in relation to arrangements for assessment and the conduct of examinations. Typically, these arrangements covered the use of video-conferencing for viva voce examinations and confirmed that examining boards would take into account any mitigating circumstances arising from the pandemic. Additionally, one institution permitted postgraduate research students to submit theses electronically during the pandemic and provided detailed guidance on how to do so through the institution's virtual learning environment.

140 Recognising the importance of providing sources of information to students working from home, some institutions included helpful 'Frequently Asked Questions' pages on their web pages intended specifically to address issues relating to postgraduate research students. One institution provided an extensive web page specifically addressing the circumstances of the pandemic, with coverage of a wide range of matters relevant to research students including: applications for research funding; research ethics approval; support from the institution additional to that available in normal circumstances; arrangements for continuing support and monitoring of the work of research students; the effect of the pandemic on normal working practices of students and staff; arrangements to support postgraduate research students who have been asked to volunteer to assist the NHS; and arrangements to support those who are beginning their studies.

External engagement and research

141 Several higher education institutions in Scotland have contributed to world-wide efforts to understand factors influencing the spread of COVID-19 and to alleviate its societal and economic effects. These contributions have typically taken the forms of either research into prevention and treatment of the disease, comment and analysis of the societal impact of the pandemic, or the development of practical steps towards assisting individuals and organisations to deal with its effects. This section describes some examples of such work.

142 The University of Dundee, in collaboration with the European Molecular Biology

Laboratory, has contributed to research into the virus by using electron microscopy to create some of the largest and highest resolution images of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, showing the formation of viral particles in a tissue model of the human gut. A further project at the university, supported by funding announced from the Scottish Government, has helped to identify those most vulnerable to severe symptoms by analysing proteins in white blood cells, enabling early prediction of patients likely to need intensive care treatment.

143 The University of Glasgow Centre for Virus Research (CVR) is working in partnership with colleagues across the UK on a range of research areas related to the coronavirus, including working on the new variant first discovered in the UK and study of the effects of emerging mutations of the virus.

144 Researchers at Glasgow Caledonian University have published a wide range of commentary and analyses of the effects of the pandemic on wider society in Scotland and beyond. Topics include, for instance, an analysis of the negative effect of restricted social interaction on individuals' cognitive functions and mental health, and commentary on the opportunities for universities to contribute to changes in economies and society following the pandemic. The University's Safeguarding Health through Infection Prevention research group has organised events to highlight the importance of hand hygiene in schools in Glasgow and by launching a study on hand hygiene in Cameroon with the potential to reduce the spread of infections in hospitals across Africa.

145 The 'Expert Insights' project at the University of Edinburgh has formed comment and analysis on a wide range of aspects of the pandemic and its effects on society and individuals. The range of comment includes, for instance, strategies for the development and use of vaccines, the effect of the pandemic on migrants, the possibility of erosion of trust in institutions, the effect of interactions between humans and wildlife, and the use of inclusive technology. Additionally, the 'Our Health' project at the University has helped local community groups through: the production and distribution of newsletters; the creation of videos to support individuals at risk of isolation, loneliness and uncertainty; and the delivery of medicines and supplies to those in particular need.

146 Researchers at Edinburgh Napier University have studied care home practice and tracked public sentiment about the pandemic as part of a programme of research, supported by the Scottish Government aimed to boost understanding of the pandemic and its effects, and have also created an app designed to help local businesses and charities to organise home deliveries efficiently during the lockdown.

147 Researchers at the University of Stirling have begun a project intended to identify the effects of lack of social contact on the wellbeing of older adults, and to explore strategies that could enhance social engagement and physical activity. In addition, the University's Centre for Partnering, with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, has led a study of local authority procurement strategies, focusing on how procurement can deliver the biggest benefit for residents - whether for public health, social care or as a key economic lever to restart the local economy.

148 At Robert Gordon University, the portfolio of credit-bearing digital short courses which was made available to the public free of charge, was intended to strengthen businesses and to provide individuals with opportunities for professional skills development during the pandemic.

149 The SFC report also identified that students and staff from across the sector volunteered to support the frontline healthcare response. Many institutions also provided personal protection equipment for NHS Scotland.

Conclusions

150 Key learning points are detailed in the following paragraphs with a call to action for institutions to individually and collectively reflect on the associated questions.

151 At the time of collating and reviewing the report evidence, institutions had limited opportunity to reflect on the effectiveness of approaches and responses across their range of activity. We know that as the pandemic (and government guidance) has developed so have institutions' responses: taking account of feedback through their own institutional mechanisms on what worked and what did not, from benchmarking against practice at other HEIs and from using QAA guidance. How can institutions learn individually and collectively from their pandemic experience?

152 Institutions responded rapidly to the pandemic's challenge to the provision of learning opportunities, making changes in weeks and months that normally would have been planned and delivered over a much longer period. Decisions have been made and implemented in an environment of continuing uncertainty and often with little time to apply government guidance. What can we learn from the rapid decision-making and organisational structures that supported it, to facilitate future decision-making? How might the experience shape HEIs' governance structures? What data and evidence have helped institutions in their decision-making?

153 Teaching, learning and assessment have changed significantly during the pandemic. All institutions adapted programme delivery away from 'in person' towards some form, or a variety of forms, of digital delivery. For specialisms, and elements of programmes not suited to digital learning, in-person delivery was maintained in accordance with government guidelines. Other changes included adjusting the timing and pattern of delivery. Institutions' modified assessment arrangements aimed to assess students rigorously and make robust progression and award decisions without disadvantaging students. What efficiencies have been gained and lost, and what have been some of the unforeseen consequences of rapid change to teaching, learning and assessment? How will HEIs decide what changes will remain? What new delivery and business models might be developed from changes enforced by the pandemic?

154 An extraordinary amount of effort has been invested by staff and students over the duration of the pandemic in making, and adapting to, changes. What is the cumulative impact of this change on the learning experience and student outcomes? How do experiences and outcomes differ from pre-pandemic cohorts? What have we learned that might inform the debate about grade inflation?

155 Student feedback processes have been altered to enable rapid change - for example, some HEIs have used student 'pulse' surveys. What have we learned from changes to these processes that can inform future student feedback mechanisms? To what extent might those changes impact on the current redevelopment of the National Student Survey?

156 Scottish Government funding to institutions - to enable them to support students facing financial difficulties while studying - have been welcomed but there are areas where sector-wide investment would greatly help institutions to make digital provision more accessible and inclusive. These include video captioning and the licensing of electronic resources. What support can be provided at sector level to help institutions choose which resources might best support their students?

157 While all institutions continued to carry out their normal processes for the assurance of the standards and quality of their provision during the period of the pandemic, every

institution made some alterations to procedures with a view to accommodating changes in circumstances. Effects on processes included delays, rescheduling and changes to the conduct or scope of activities, typically accompanied by policies to limit the duration or scale of changes to processes. Overall, existing institutional quality assurance and enhancement processes demonstrated a considerable level of robustness and ability to respond flexibly to challenging circumstances. Processing and recording temporary course changes, in particular, was a major activity in the pandemic response. While some negative consequences of the pandemic on ILR were reported (for example, bunching of review schedules) some benefits were also noted: some institutions drew attention to an increased level of student engagement in the process, attributed to greater student confidence in participating in digital meetings than in face-to-face meetings, which was also evident during ELIR reviews. How can this enhanced student engagement be maintained and transferred to other areas of activity that depend on student feedback? What additional effects on quality assurance processes, or their timing, may not yet have been identified? What efficiencies from revised course change processes can be retained or adapted?

158 Scottish institutions have contributed to regional, national and global efforts to manage the pandemic. How can the sector use these positive messages and successes to counter the negative media coverage?

159 A unique aspect of the Scottish higher education sector is its sector-wide commitment to collaboration. In the SFC report, institutions emphasised that this collaborative approach to large-scale problem solving was particularly helpful in responding to emerging issues relating to COVID-19 and the emergency transition to digital provision. Academic and professional services staff were able to use established sector-wide networks and communities of practice to gather information on different institutional approaches to common issues such as the development of 'no detriment' policies, introduction of alternative assessments, and movement of institution-led review events to an online environment. Networking opportunities for quality leads and Vice-Principals Learning and Teaching proved particularly valuable. Staff at many institutions emphasised the benefit of this collegiate and collaborative approach to the development of robust institutional responses to COVID-19. How might the collective ambition in working together to share practice and find solutions be taken forward in future endeavours?

160 The SFC report highlighted the value of sector-wide resources and events, which provided opportunities for individuals and institutions to share practice with other sector bodies on the emergency transition to remote learning and teaching. Institutions particularly highlighted the value of QAA Scotland's [Focus On: Technology Enhanced Learning Resource Hub](#) and the [Learning from Disruption: Exploring What Counts in Higher Education](#) Conference in June 2020. QAA's wider [COVID-19 Support and Guidance](#) resources were also highlighted by some institutions during annual discussions as being very timely and useful.

Appendix 1: List of evidence sources

This appendix contains a list of all sources of evidence considered in preparing this report. The websites which are listed were accessed on 10 March 2021.

University of Aberdeen:

'Aberdeen U Campus Commitments brochure pages'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/documents/Campus%20Commitments%20brochure%20pages.pdf

'Aberdeen U Covid Survey Action Plan August 2020'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/documents/Covid%20Survey%20Action%20Plan%20August%202020.pdf

'Aberdeen U UoA-Community-Confidence'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/documents/UoA-Community-Confidence.pdf

'Assessments and no disadvantage due to Covid-19 - student update ~ News ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/news/14656

'Community testing, summer graduations, fair & consistent assessment, Easter rest days ~ News ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/news/14684

'Covid Campus Guidelines ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/covid-guidelines.php

'Fair and consistent assessment, Government advice, library update, bookable study space ~ News ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/news/14670

'Online learning, travel, accommodation, timetable, libraries and testing ~ News ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/news/14599

'Pledge ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/pledge-and-commitments.php

'Reducing workload pressures and supporting staff resilience and wellbeing - staff update ~ News ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/news/14633

'Update on action to reduce workload pressures - staff update ~ News ~ About ~ The University of Aberdeen'

www.abdn.ac.uk/about/coronavirus/news/14645

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Abertay University:

'Covid-19 Information'

www.abertay.ac.uk/coronavirus

'FAQs'

www.abertay.ac.uk/coronavirus/faqs/#StudentSupport (*link no longer active*)

'Using the Library'

<https://intranet.abertay.ac.uk/library/using-the-library>

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University of Dundee:

'Covid code of conduct - non-compliance guidance for students ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/corporate-information/covid-code-conduct-non-compliance-guidance-students

'Covid virus images shared for global science community ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/stories/covid-virus-images-shared-global-science-community

'Covid-19 and Semester 2 update (24 Feb 2021) ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/announcements/covid-19-semester-2-update-24-feb-2021

'Covid-19 update for students (14 Jan 2021) ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/announcements/covid-19-update-students-14-jan-2021

'Information for applicants ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/enquirers-applicants/support

'Learning and teaching facilities and Covid-19 safety ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/guides/learning-teaching-facilities

'Mitigating Circumstances~ coronavirus and industrial action ~ University of Dundee (2)'

www.dundee.ac.uk/guides/mitigating-circumstances-coronavirus-industrial-action

'No detriment - what does it mean~ ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/guides/no-detriment-what-does-it-mean

'Projects to study key Covid-19 issues ~ University of Dundee'

www.dundee.ac.uk/stories/projects-study-key-covid-19-issues

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University of Edinburgh:

'A change for the better~ The University of Edinburgh'

www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/a-change-for-the-better

'A close connection ~ The University of Edinburgh'

www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/a-close-connection

'A hybrid journey ~ The University of Edinburgh'

www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/a-hybrid-journey

'Adapt, Support, Implement, Deliver: How the School of Mathematics adapted to hybrid teaching ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/adapt-support-implement-deliver-how-the-school-of

'Adapting to hybrid teaching ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/adapting-to-hybrid-teaching

'Assessment ~ a package of measures to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/students/welcome-back/continuing-your-studies/exams-and-assessment

'Climate change concern unaffected by pandemic ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/news/2021/climate-change-concern-unaffected-by-pandemic

'CMVM Updates by date - College of Medicine & Veterinary Medicine Postgraduate Research - Wiki Service'
www.wiki.ed.ac.uk/display/CMVMPGR/CMVM+Updates+by+date

'Coronavirus (Covid-19) updates for staff and students ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19

'Expert insights ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/expert-insights

'Information about Semester 2 ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/current-students/semester-2 (*link no longer active*)

'Our Health helps local community groups better understand Covid-19 research ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/our-health-helps-local-community-groups-better-und

'Prospective students get help during lockdown ~ The University of Edinburgh'
www.ed.ac.uk/covid-19-response/our-community/prospective-students-get-help-during-lockdown

University of Edinburgh: 'SFC Annual Return'

Edinburgh Napier University:

'COVID-19 – changes to assessments and examinations'
www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/coronavirus/general-faqs/exams

'Edinburgh Napier AI technology delivers in troubled times'
www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/news/foodelapp

'Learning from home'
www.napier.ac.uk/study-with-us/undergraduate/ready-for-you/learning-from-home

'My Napier - Edinburgh Napier University'
<https://my.napier.ac.uk/latest-on-covid-19>

'My Napier - Edinburgh Napier University (2)'
<https://my.napier.ac.uk/your-studies/my-timetable/essential-on-campus-learning-and-teaching-in-trimester-2> *(link no longer active)*

'Prospective Student FAQs (Covid-19)'
www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/coronavirus/prospective-students-faqs

'University projects awarded £167k as part of Covid-19 rapid research programme'
www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/news/cso-covid-19-projects

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Glasgow Caledonian University:

'Covid-19 services ~ Library'
www.gcu.ac.uk/library/covid19services

'Fair Assessment Approach-converted'
www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/student/campuslife/covid19/FAIR%20ASSESSMENT%20APPROACH-converted.pdf

'Mitigating Circumstances ~ GCU'
www.gcu.ac.uk/student/essentials/exams/mitigatingcircumstances

'Researchers' response to COVID-19 ~ GCU'
www.gcu.ac.uk/research/covid-19

'Safe return to campus ~ GCU'
www.gcu.ac.uk/student/coronavirusuptodateinformation/safereturntocampus

'Timetable ~ GCU'
www.gcu.ac.uk/student/essentials/exams/timetable

'University Assessment Regulations TPG 20-21 FINAL'
www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/aqd/University%20Assessment%20Regulations%20TPG%2020-21%20FINAL.pdf

'University Assessment Regulations UG 20-21 FINAL'
www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/aqd/University%20Assessment%20Regulations%20UG%2020-21%20FINAL.pdf

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Glasgow School of Art:

'5 February ~ National Lockdown update'
[www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)/information-for-students/5-february-update](http://www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-(covid-19)/information-for-students/5-february-update) *(link no longer active)*

'8 January update~ Plans for January 2021'
[www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)/information-for-students/8-january-update-2](http://www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-(covid-19)/information-for-students/8-january-update-2) *(link no longer active)*

'gsa-covid-response-student-guide'

[www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)/covid-response-student-guide](http://www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-(covid-19)/covid-response-student-guide)

'our-response-to-the-coronavirus-covid-19-january-to-june-2020'

www.gsa.ac.uk/media/1805430/our-response-to-the-coronavirus-covid-19-january-to-june-2020.pdf

'Student FAQs'

[www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-\(covid-19\)/information-for-students/student-faqs](http://www.gsa.ac.uk/about-gsa/key-information/coronavirus-(covid-19)/information-for-students/student-faqs) (*link no longer active*)

'the-glasgow-school-of-art-coronavirus-outbreak-response-plan-september-2020'

www.gsa.ac.uk/media/1819193/the-glasgow-school-of-art-coronavirus-outbreak-response-plan-september-2020-.pdf

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University of Glasgow:

'Media_723352_smxx'

www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_723352_smxx.docx

'Media_729702_smxx'

www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_729702_smxx.pdf

'University of Glasgow Award of Degree'

www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_771832_smxx.pdf

'University of Glasgow Information for students and staff'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/faqs

'University of Glasgow No Detriment Policy'

www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_718432_smxx.pdf

'University of Glasgow Assessment Support'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_769201_en.html

(*link no longer active*)

'University of Glasgow Assessment Support more'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/students/academic/assessment

'University of Glasgow homeworking advice'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/seps/az/computers/homeworking

'University of Glasgow Information'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_714460_en.html

'University of Glasgow Information 14 March'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_715003_en.html

(*link no longer active*)

'University of Glasgow Information 19 March'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_716227_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 2 April'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_717629_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 22 Feb 2021'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_774685_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 27 May'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_723875_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 31 March'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_717249_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 5 June'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_726000_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 8 Feb 2021'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_773480_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Information 9 April'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/coronavirus/updatearchive/headline_718472_en.html
(link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow Library'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/updates

'University of Glasgow PG Study'

www.gla.ac.uk/postgraduate/news/howyoullbetaught (link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow PGR FAQ'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/research/covid-19researchfundingadvice/faqs/#d.en.722692

'University of Glasgow Recovery'

www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/news/coronavirus/uofgcommunity/recovery (link no longer active)

'University of Glasgow UG Study'

www.gla.ac.uk/undergraduate/news/howyoullbetaught (link no longer active)

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Heriot-Watt University:

'01_Getting-Started-in-Responsive-Blended-Learning_Students_v2'

https://ta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/01_Getting-Started-in-Responsive-Blended-Learning_Students_v2.pdf (link no longer active)

'02_Top-Tips-for-Students-Engaging-with-RBL'
https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/02_Top-Tips-for-Students-Engaging-with-RBL.pdf

'04_Student-netiquette-guide'
https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/04_Student-netiquette-guide.pdf
(link no longer active)

'08_Making-the-most-of-RBL_A-guide-for-students'
https://lta.hw.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/08_Making-the-most-of-RBL_A-guide-for-students.pdf (link no longer active)

'Academic approvals - Heriot-Watt University'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/academic-approvals.htm

'Annual Monitoring and Review - Heriot-Watt University'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/annual-monitoring.htm

'approvals-covid19-guidetochanges'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/approvals-covid19-guidetochanges.pdf
(link no longer active)

'approvals-covid19-rbl-diagram'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/approvals-covid19-briefingprogchanges.pdf (link no longer active)

'approvals-covid19-rbl-process'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/approvals-covid19-rbl-process.pdf
(link no longer active)

'assessment-2021-courseworksubmission'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/assessment-2021-courseworksubmission.pdf

'assessment-2021-safetynet-studentguide'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/assessment-2021-safetynet-studentguide.pdf

'assessment-2021-summary'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/assessment-2021-summary.pdf

'assessment-2021-types'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/assessment-2021-types.pdf

'examdoc10a'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/examdoc10.pdf

'examdoc10b'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/examdoc10b.pdf (link no longer active)

'examdoc13b'
www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/examdoc13b.pdf

'examdoc15'

'apparently no longer available, but equivalent content at

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/TSSandMC_2020-21.pdf'

'examdoc7'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/examdoc7.pdf

'examdoc-a'

no longer available but would be at

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/exam-guidelines.htm

'examdocb'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/examdocB.pdf

'examdoc-c'

no longer available but would be at

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/exam-guidelines.htm

'examdoc-covid19-procedures'

Unassigned

'External examiners - Heriot-Watt University'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/qa/external-examiners.htm

'externalexaminers-covid-19-note'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/academic-registry/assessment-2021-safetynet-examboardguide.pdf

'general-guide-19november2020final2'

apparently replaced by www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/doc/studentguide-general-aprilmay21.pdf

'Home - Getting Ready to Study Online - ISGuides at Heriot-Watt University'

<https://isguides.hw.ac.uk/studyingonline>

'quick-guide-totake-homeexams'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/students/doc/studentguide-quick-aprilmay21.pdf

'reviewschedule-changes'

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'Setting up a workspace - Getting Ready to Study Online - ISGuides at Heriot-Watt University'

<https://isguides.hw.ac.uk/studyingonline/workspace>

'Staying on campus - Heriot-Watt University'

www.hw.ac.uk/coronavirus/return/staying-on-campus.htm

'Student Handbook Template - Heriot-Watt University'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/academic-registry/quality/student-learning/student-handbooks.htm

'Study safe - Heriot-Watt University'

www.hw.ac.uk/coronavirus/return/study-safe.htm

'technical-Guide-december2020-final2'

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'TSSandMC_2020-21'

www.hw.ac.uk/uk/services/docs/learning-teaching/policies/TSSandMC_2020-21.pdf

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'20200325-all-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20200325-all-student-email.pdf

(link no longer active)

'20200409-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20200409-student-email.pdf

(link no longer active)

'20200526-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20200526-student-email.pdf

(link no longer active)

'20201123-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20201123-student-email.pdf

(link no longer active)

'20201211-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20201211-student-email.pdf

(link no longer active)

'20210113-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20210113-student-email.pdf

(link no longer active)

'20210226-student-email'

www.uhi.ac.uk/en/t4-media/one-web/university/about-uhi/20210226-student-email.pdf

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Open University in Scotland:

'Changes for modules starting from September ~ October 2020 ~ Help Centre ~ The Open University'

<https://help.open.ac.uk/covid-19/module-delivery-2020-21>

'Coronavirus (COVID-19) ~ Help Centre ~ The Open University'

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Queen Margaret University:

'Coronavirus Updates for Students and Staff ~ Queen Margaret University'
www.qmu.ac.uk/coronavirus/updates

'coronavirus-emergency-interim-award-progression-and-boe-regulations-approved-by-senate-9-september-2020'
www.qmu.ac.uk/about-the-university/quality/committees-regulations-policies-and-procedures/regulations-policies-and-procedures/updated-assessment-regulations

'COVID-19 (Coronavirus) FAQs ~ Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh'
www.qmu.ac.uk/coronavirus/faqs

'COVID-19 (Coronavirus) FAQs for applicants and offer holders ~ Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh'
www.qmu.ac.uk/coronavirus/faqs/applicants

'COVID-19 (Coronavirus) FAQs for students ~ Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh'
www.qmu.ac.uk/coronavirus/faqs/students

'Information for Applicants ~ September 2020 Start ~ Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh'
www.qmu.ac.uk/coronavirus/applicants

'Use of the LRC during the Pandemic'
www.qmu.ac.uk/study-here/learning-facilities/library/use-of-the-lrc-during-the-pandemic
Queen Margaret University: 'SFC Annual Return'

Robert Gordon University:

'Coronavirus - RGU Library'
<https://library.rgu.ac.uk/coronavirus>

'Counselling & Wellbeing ~ Support & Advice Services ~ RGU'
www.rgu.ac.uk/life-at-rgu/support-advice-services/counselling-wellbeing

'COVID-19 ~ Advice for Students, Staff & Community ~ RGU'
www.rgu.ac.uk/coronavirus

'COVID-19 ~ Assessment ~ Studying at RGU ~ RGU'
www.rgu.ac.uk/coronavirus/studying-at-rgu/covid-19-assessment

'COVID-19 ~ Learning and Teaching ~ RGU'
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'COVID-19 ~ Placements ~ RGU'
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'COVID-19 ~ Support ~ RGU'
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'RGU launches free short courses in response to the economic impact of COVID-19 ~ April 2020 ~ News ~ RGU'
www.rgu.ac.uk/news/news-2020/3053-rgu-launches-free-short-courses-in-response-to-the-economic-impact-of-covid-19

'The Inclusion Centre ~ Disability & Dyslexia ~ Support & Advice Services ~ RGU'
www.rgu.ac.uk/life-at-rgu/support-advice-services/the-inclusion-centre-disability-dyslexia

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Royal Conservatoire of Scotland:

'Covid updates 6~1~21 - Covid 19'
www.rcs.ac.uk/covid/2021/01/06/covid-updates-6-1-21 *(link no longer active)*

'COVID-19~ Update for our community (Sun 15 March) - Royal Conservatoire of Scotland'
www.rcs.ac.uk/covid-19-update-for-our-community *(link no longer active)*

'Previous Updates - Covid 19'
www.rcs.ac.uk/covid/previous-updates *(link no longer active)*

'UG~PG Students - Covid 19'
www.rcs.ac.uk/covid/ug-pg-students

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Scotland's Rural College:

'404 ~ SRUC'
<https://ww1.sruc.ac.uk/covid-19-update/faq-for-students-about-coronavirus/>
(link no longer active)

'FAQ for students about Coronavirus ~ SRUC'
<https://ww1.sruc.ac.uk/covid-19-information/faq-for-students-about-coronavirus/>

'Getting started at SRUC ~ SRUC (2)'
<https://ww1.sruc.ac.uk/getting-started-at-sruc/>

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University of St Andrews:

'Academic mitigation - Online learning and teaching - University of St Andrews'
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/online-learning-teaching/academic-mitigation

'Access to resources - Library - University of St Andrews'
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/services-and-support/access-to-resources

'Advice and support ~ Current Students ~ University of St Andrews'
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/students/advice *(link no longer active)*

'Current students - Coronavirus information - University of St Andrews'
www.st-andrews.ac.uk/coronavirus/students

'Introduction - Inter-Library Loans & ArticleReach - at University of St. Andrews'
<https://libguides.st-andrews.ac.uk/InterLibraryLoans>

'Online exam guidance - Exams - University of St Andrews'

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/exams/remote-exams

'Online learning - Online learning and teaching - University of St Andrews'

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/online-learning-teaching/online-learning

'Semester 2 - Coronavirus information - University of St Andrews'

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/coronavirus/semester-2 (*link no longer active*)

'Theses ~ Current Postgraduates ~ University of St Andrews'

www.st-andrews.ac.uk/pgstudents/academic/theses

'Thesis submission during Covid-19 outbreak ~ Current Postgraduates ~ University of St Andrews'

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'Coronavirus Updates and information on COVID-19 (coronavirus) ~ Coronavirus ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/coronavirus

'COVID-19 study~ Impact of social distancing on older adults ~ About ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/news/2020/05/covid-19-study-impact-of-social-distancing-on-older-adults

'COVID-19 update ~ Coronavirus ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/coronavirus/updates/title-112365-en.html

'COVID-19 update ~ Coronavirus ~ University of Stirling (2)'

www.stir.ac.uk/coronavirus/updates/title-112255-en.html

'How you'll be taught ~ Coronavirus ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/coronavirus/changes-at-stirling/how-youll-be-taught

'New research to put COVID-19 local authority spending in the spotlight ~ About ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/news/2021/february-2021-news/new-research-to-put-covid-19-local-authority-spending-in-the-spotlight

'Our approach to assessment and progression ~ Coronavirus ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/coronavirus/changes-at-stirling/our-approach-to-assessment-and-progression/#d.en.113183

'Seat Availability - LibCal - University of Stirling'

<https://stir.libcal.com/reserve/bookastudyspace>

'Stirling Campus Pledge ~ Coronavirus ~ University of Stirling'

www.stir.ac.uk/coronavirus/changes-at-stirling/stirling-campus-pledge

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University of Strathclyde:

'Blended_Learning_Guidance'

www.strath.ac.uk/media/1newwebsite/documents/Blended_Learning_Guidance.pdf

'Coronavirus postgraduate research student update 8 Apr'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/pgrupdate8april

'Coronavirus student updates'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/studentupdates

'Coronavirus student update 13 Nov'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update13november

'Coronavirus student update 15 Mar 20'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update15march

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www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update16march

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www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update18march

'Coronavirus student update 20 Aug PGR'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/studentupdate20august

'Coronavirus student update 23 Oct'

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'Coronavirus student update 24 Mar 20'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/updateassessmentsandexaminations

'Coronavirus student update 26 Mar 20 assessment'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update26march

'Coronavirus student update 30 March'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update30march

'Coronavirus student update 7 Jan 2021'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update7january2021

'Coronavirus student update 7 May'

www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/studentupdate7may

'Coronavirus student update 8 April'

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'Coronavirus Student update hardship fund'
www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/covid-19hardshipfund

'Coronavirus student update 7 May PGR'
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'FAQ PGR'
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'Strathclyde Pledge'
www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/thestrathclydestudentpledge

'Student information assessment'
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'Student information learning and teaching'
www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/learningteaching

'Student update 19 Feb 2021'
www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/update19february2021

'Student updates list'
www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/studentupdates

'Update 25 Sept'
www.strath.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/updatetwo25september

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University of the West of Scotland:

'Coronavirus Staff Updates'
www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/academic-year-202021/covid-19-information/coronavirus-staff-updates

'Coronavirus Student Updates'
www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/academic-year-202021/covid-19-information/coronavirus-student-updates

'Covid Winter Fund'
www.uws.ac.uk/money-fees-funding/other-financial-support/covid-winter-fund
(link no longer active)

'Learning & Teaching (2)'
www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/academic-year-202021/learning-teaching

'Research Students'
www.uws.ac.uk/about-uws/academic-year-202021/research-students

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'SFC Analysis of Annual Returns'

Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee:

'SHEEC Minutes April 2020'

'SHEEC Minutes Oct 2020'

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