

To: All students

Date: 25 January 2021

Subject: Exams and assessments in 2021 for Foundation, undergraduate and taught postgraduate students

Dear students,

This message is being sent urgently to all students and we recognise that this may include some who have recently completed their studies, as well as our postgraduate research students. Please ignore this message if you are not a current Foundation, undergraduate or taught postgraduate (Master's) student.

We hope you are settling back into your studies, whether remotely or on campus, this spring term.

We want to say how impressed we have been by the way our whole community has approached this year, both students and colleagues. As well as complying with all the safety measures put in place, contributing to the relatively low number of cases we have seen here at Reading, you have all worked incredibly hard to adapt to new ways of learning this year. We do not underestimate how difficult the adjustment has been and we understand you may be concerned about how the current circumstances may be affecting your studies.

Our commitment to you is that we will continue to work together to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on your university experience. This email provides further information about the arrangements we are putting in place to support you.

We would like to thank our RUSU Officer team for their role in representing students on our various university committees. In particular, the work of George Ingram, RUSU's Education Officer, and Rachel Osborne, RUSU's President, to gather and share student feedback about the assessment experience last academic year, as well as about blended learning more generally, is much appreciated and has helped inform our decisions.

Exams and assessments in spring/summer 2021

We have adapted our usual processes in a number of important ways, to give you the opportunity to earn the academic credit and recognition for your hard work. This means:

- the majority of coursework this spring/summer should be undertaken and submitted online, in line with existing deadlines;
- and
- the vast majority of scheduled summer examinations will be held as take-home online exams.

There will be a small number of exceptions where in-person coursework and exams are necessary, particularly for degree programmes with practical elements or professional accreditation requirements. Your School will keep you informed about these assessment arrangements for your modules. Please speak to your Module Convenor if you have any queries.

Your assessment support package for spring/summer 2020/21

The pandemic is affecting everyone differently and, for some students, there may be reasons relating to the pandemic that mean you have not been able to fully engage with your studies or assessment at times this academic year. The impact of the pandemic on individual assessments may

still be unforeseen and unpredictable. We are therefore doing all we can to ensure your academic achievements are recognised, taking into consideration any individual circumstances that may have affected your performance.

Our **assessment support package** has been developed to provide a series of flexible measures at individual, module, and institutional level. This includes:

1. An enhanced Extenuating Circumstances process for you, with two core features:

a) Relaxation of evidence requirement for specific scenarios

We recognise that there are situations related to COVID-19 where it may be impossible or very difficult to obtain evidence, and we have therefore agreed to waive the requirement for evidence where it cannot be obtained. This is effective from 4 January 2021.

You can apply for Extenuating Circumstances in the usual way using the existing form and should continue to provide evidence where at all possible. If you are unable to provide evidence, you must clearly explain this along with a description of your circumstances, as well as the impact that it is having on your assessments. This will help your School to understand how you have been affected when assessing your case, and decide what mitigation is appropriate or if we can provide other support. Please note, if you do not provide enough explanation of the circumstance or why mitigation is needed, your request may be rejected.

b) Post-results Extenuating Circumstances requests

In a change from our usual process, we are developing a new post-results Extenuating Circumstances process. We are finalising the details of these new arrangements and will share further information by the end of Week 6.

2. Adapting our coursework assessments

Our Schools worked hard over the summer and throughout the year to adapt their teaching for increased online learning. They are continuing to review and revise coursework to align with the course content that has and will be taught. Some coursework assessments may have to be revised because, as a result of the pandemic, students may have different access to work and other environments they had been asked to draw on in the assessments.

3. Module-specific measures

Schools have already taken action where necessary at a module level, for example by applying coursework deadline extensions or waiving late penalties where there are specific reasons to do so. They will continue to monitor forthcoming assessments and deadlines and consider whether further measures are necessary in response to the evolving situation over the coming weeks and months.

If you have any concerns about assessments on your modules, please speak to your Module Convenor.

This set of measures has been considered extensively given the changing situation during this academic year. It is different from last year's 'marks safety net' provisions because, unlike last year, we do not have any 'pre-COVID' assessment that we can take into account. It also reflects that, unlike the sudden and unexpected need to move quickly to online exams and assessment last year, we have had time to adapt both our teaching and assessment to reflect the blended the approach.

Given these different circumstances, we are confident that this year's arrangements will benefit all students who may be impacted, provide flexibility based on your own individual circumstances, and will help to ensure students are not unduly disadvantaged by the pandemic. Our assessment procedures will, of course, be kept under review as the situation changes over the coming months.

Take-home online exams

Overall, student feedback from RUSU's survey and through forums such as our Student Staff Partnership Groups has been very positive about last years' experience of take-home online exams, and we are using this feedback to inform our plans this year.

Take-home online exams are open-book, time-limited exams and allow a huge amount of flexibility to accommodate the different circumstances and needs of all our students:

- exams will be available for 23 hours in most cases, which means you can access and complete your paper at any time during this period, whenever suits you best – depending on your current time zone or around family life or any caring commitments, for example;
- students who would usually have additional time for in-person exams can take as much time as they need during the 23-hour window.

It is certainly not expected that you spend the whole 23 hours completing an exam, and a 'guide time' for how long to spend on each paper will be provided by your Module Convenor. We will make every effort to timetable exams so that you will not have more than one take-home online exam in a day. We will provide further guidance on preparing for and taking online exams.

For some specific exams there may be a time restriction in place, which means once you have started your paper online (within the 23-hour window), it must be submitted within a specified time. Again, your Module Convenor will let you know if this applies for any of your exams.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email, which we hope has provided some clarification, and for your continued understanding of the changes we have had to make this year. Please do continue to keep in touch with your School, through your Academic Tutor, School Director for Teaching & Learning (SDTL) and/or Support Centre (or Henley Helpdesk or ISLI Admin Team), as well as your [Student Reps](#), to raise any queries or concerns you may have.

Best wishes,
Elizabeth & Julian

Professor Elizabeth McCrum & Professor Julian Park
Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Teaching & Learning