
Studies affected by Covid-19?

Information for undergraduates and taught postgraduates

What to do if you're concerned that your ability to study and complete assessments is likely to be significantly affected by the impact of Covid-19.



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I'm concerned, what should I do?

If you feel that your ability to study and complete assessments during summer term is likely to be significantly affected by the impact of Covid-19, it's important to know that there are a number of options and University processes to consider. This document is to help you to find out more about what your options are so that you can be well informed and make the best decision for your individual situation.

Tell Someone

We recommend that, in addition to equipping yourself with this information and reading the relevant University guidance, you speak with your academic supervisor or a staff member in your department (e.g. department administrator, or TAP member for research students) about your options. The move to remote teaching and assessment may impact departments in different ways, and you may have particular questions or concerns about particular assessments or teaching, which your department may be best placed to advise on.

1 What is the Safety Net?

SAFETY NET

The safety net helps to take into account the possible impact of Covid-19 on your academic performance. It is in place to help ensure that the grade an individual student receives is as fair and accurate a reflection of a student's ability as possible. Essentially, the safety net is a way of guaranteeing in advance what your minimum final academic-year average will be, provided you qualify to pass the year in your summer assessments, by taking into account your prior assessment results if necessary.

coronavirus.york.ac.uk/for-students/ug-safety-net

1 Who the Safety Net DOES apply to

SAFETY NET

The safety net is for undergraduate students (except for First Year students) who intend to, and who are able to, undertake summer assessments. The safety net will automatically apply to undergraduate students who are in second year or above at this point, including integrated masters students, but not including HYMS (Hull York Medical School) MBBS students.

The safety net will also apply if you defer your assessments (via an exceptional circumstances claim) until a later date (eg the late summer assessment period, usually in August).

It is worth noting that all assessments and exams for first year students are cancelled and students will progress into second year without completing these assessments, and so the safety net is not applicable to first year students.

Who the Safety Net DOES NOT apply to

For the safety net to apply, you are still required to meet the progression requirements of the course (i.e. required pass marks). Therefore, the safety net will not apply to students who fail outright or do not complete summer assessments.

If you are unable to complete assessments for any reason, please read the information on Exceptional Circumstances and Leave of Absence.

The safety net does not apply to Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research students.

1 How will my grade be calculated?

SAFETY NET

Your safety net calculation will only be applied if this results in a better grade outcome for you than your actual summer term results.

The safety net score is calculated on the basis of marks for completed and marked work from this stage of your programme (usually this academic year), prior to the point at which physical teaching was suspended due to Covid-19 on 13th March. Where a student has not completed sufficient marked work this year to provide an accurate gauge of their academic performance (i.e. fewer than 60 credits), their average results from the previous stage/year will also be factored into the calculation.

You can find full details of how the calculation is completed here, with examples.

coronavirus.york.ac.uk/for-students/ug-safety-net

The website also includes an estimator which can give you a calculation of your safety net score.

shiny.york.ac.uk/safetynet/

1 Postgraduate Students: Why doesn't the Safety Net apply?

SAFETY NET

Postgraduate students sit their assessments at different times of the academic year to Undergraduates. The University has determined that this means that many Postgraduate students have not completed the right number of credits (90) for a safety net to be applied which provides a robust and valid representation of their study. In addition to this, because the majority of Postgraduate Taught students take place over one academic year, the University is unable to "top up" their credits by using an average mark from the previous academic year (as they can with second and third year Undergraduates).

The University has however, taken steps to take into account the potential impact of Covid-19 on upcoming assessments for PGT students. Greater flexibility will now be applied to the criteria for the award of a merit or distinction. A distinction will now be awarded where a student receives an average of 70% in their taught modules OR their Independent Study Module (ISM) and, similarly, a merit will be awarded where a student receives an average of 60% or higher in their taught modules or ISM.

Additional allowance will also be made for a failure at first attempt of a proportion of modules, providing that a minimum mark of 40% is achieved. Information about this approach to support academic achievement of PGT students can be found here:

coronavirus.york.ac.uk/for-students/pgt-guidance

While it has not been possible for the University to implement a safety net for Postgraduate Research Students (PGRs) they are continuing to work to ensure academic support and guidance is in place. Dedicated information for PGRs in relation to Covid-19 and academic studies is available at:

coronavirus.york.ac.uk/for-students/for-pg-researchers

What are Exceptional Circumstances?

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Sometimes things happen that can seriously impair your performance in an assessment or prevent you from undertaking the assessment at the scheduled time. If these events are unforeseeable and exceptional (i.e. serious and unusual) you can submit a claim form requesting an extension or deferral, otherwise known as a 'sit as if for the first time', to be put in place.

Due to the multiple and potentially varied ways in which Covid-19 may have an impact on students' ability to study, the process has been altered to accommodate this. The University will now take into account a far wider range of circumstances which would not normally be considered (e.g. issues relating to caring responsibilities, family, and access to the internet and suitable technology).

You can find more detailed guidance here on the ways this has changed. york.ac.uk/students/studying/progress/exceptional-circumstances/

A key difference to the new process is that there is no longer a requirement to visit medical or other professionals to obtain evidence in support of any Exceptional Circumstances claims. This recognises the difficulties that students might currently face in accessing professional support, and also the need to relieve the burden on medical and support services of providing supporting letters or other evidence for students. This means you will be able to self-certify and submit a claim without supporting evidence such as a doctor's note.

2 What are Exceptional Circumstances?

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Deadline- when should I submit a claim?

You should...

If possible, submit your claim in good time before your assessment. This will allow your department a chance to consider the claim and provide an outcome for you in a shorter timeframe.

If this is not possible, you can still submit a claim up to 7 days after the deadline for written coursework.

Online Exams – important information

You can submit a claim when you take an online exam if:

- you start your online exam but experience exceptional circumstances that affect your performance and are not able to complete and submit the exam
- you start your online exam and experience exceptional circumstances that affect your performance, but still submit the exam (including if you submit the exam late as a result of these circumstances)

In either case an ECA claim would need to be submitted within 7 days of the end of the exam submission window.

2 Completing an ECA form

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

To complete the form, go to

york.ac.uk/students/studying/progress/exceptional-circumstances/

Click the 'Exceptional Circumstances Application Form' link at the bottom of the page. You will then be asked to enter your student username and password to proceed to the online form.

In the form you will need to include a brief **description** of your individual circumstances and **how** these circumstances have impacted your ability to study or complete your assessments. Examples might include being physically unable to because of health symptoms, or due to having to prioritise family, caring responsibilities or employment. We would recommend that you also include examples of the practical impact which your circumstances have had on your ability to study. For example, if you are finding it hard to think clearly, concentrate, sleep, or manage your time, it is helpful if you can describe this. You should also include the dates at which this circumstance has been affecting you.

Possible outcomes:

Written coursework

You might be given an extension to the original deadline, or a deferral which means you can 'sit as if for the first time' in the late summer/ August assessment period.

Online exams

A deferral which means you can 'sit as if for the first time' at the next available opportunity. For undergraduate students, this is likely to be in the late summer assessment period (usually in August), though rescheduling of assessments for postgraduate students may vary.

Things to consider...

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

If you are unable to take assessments in the summer term, or are struggling to do so, then it is advisable to submit an Exceptional Circumstances claim at this point. If you wait until you receive your results your options are more limited and complicated as you would have to appeal against your results – this is a lengthy process and would also require you to provide good reason for not submitting a claim earlier.

If you are applying for Exceptional Circumstances with the possible outcome of undertaking your exams in August, will you be ready to complete your assessments by then? This may be a difficult thing to anticipate and you may not be sure yet.

It is worth noting that you would have the option of submitting a further Exceptional Circumstances claim in late summer/August if need be. However, if your current circumstances mean that you are unlikely to be able to engage with teaching and undertake assessments for a prolonged period of time (i.e. you anticipate that this will likely still be the case in late summer/ August) then a Leave of Absence may be a more appropriate option.

If you are given a deferral until the late summer assessment period and sit your exams/assessments as if for the first time, and then fail to meet the required progression marks, you will not be able to take a second attempt before the new academic year. You would then normally need to take a period of Leave of Absence in order to complete your resit at a later date in the following academic year.

For PGT students, an extension request may also require an extension to your programme, so we would recommend discussing options with your supervisor to consider a possible timetable for completing your work and accessing academic support and resources.

2 Postgraduate Researchers

EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

For Postgraduate researchers, extension and Leave of Absence processes are a little different:

You can request an extension to your submission/resubmission deadline if you are within three months of that deadline, by completing the COVID-19 contingency: PGR extension request form

Extension requests of up to three months can be considered and approved by the Research Student Administration team without requiring support for the request from your supervisor or department. If approved, they will be notified of the change to your deadline/s.

Requests for extensions of more than three months would need approval from the University's Special Cases committee and would also require consultation with your supervisor/department before being approved.

As noted elsewhere in this document, it is advisable to discuss your circumstances and the impact on your studies with your supervisor to help inform options that you may consider and the support that you are able to get from your department.

Where the disruption to your studies is likely to be significant and ongoing, and/or where your ability to proceed with your research is restricted, a Leave of Absence is an option that can be considered.

What is a Leave of Absence?

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

A 'Leave of Absence' refers to an extended break from a student's studies where they may be unable to engage with their studies for a prolonged period of time, usually 4 weeks or more. This allows them to take time off and return when they are once again able to study. They would usually return at the point where they left off, but in the following academic year.

york.ac.uk/students/studying/manage/plan/taught/loa-taught/#tab-1

There are a broad range of reasons for which a student is eligible to take a Leave of Absence from study (e.g. personal or family circumstances, health reasons or family issues). Similar to the change in requirements for Exceptional Circumstances, medical evidence is not required during this time if a Leave of Absence is requested on the basis of health issues (physical and/or mental wellbeing), and students are able to self certify. Indeed, students are advised not to visit or contact medical practitioners solely for the purpose of obtaining supporting evidence.

While medical evidence will not be required when requesting a Leave of Absence for medical reasons, students are strongly encouraged to obtain confirmation from a medical or other professional confirming that they are fit to return if the current Covid-19 situation is resolved prior to their proposed resumption of study.

3 Is this suitable for me?

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

A Leave of Absence may be most applicable to a student's current situation if:

They are unable to engage in teaching and learning in the summer term.

They are also unlikely to be able to study and undertake assessments in August. In other words, if their personal circumstances are likely to have a significant and continuing impact on their studies for the foreseeable future.

If you're considering this as an option, the process is as follows.

Firstly, it is advisable to talk to your supervisor to speak to them about your options and whether this may be suitable for you and your individual situation. If it is agreed/decided that a Leave of Absence may be best, you should then complete Part A on the Leave of Absence Form and email it to your supervisor. Your supervisor and department will then complete the remaining sections of the form and forward it on for approval.

york.ac.uk/students/studying/manage/plan/taught/loa-taught/#tab-6

When completing your section of the form, you should include:

A brief description of your individual circumstances

How these circumstances have impacted your ability to study or complete your assessments. Examples might include being physically unable to because of health symptoms or due to having to prioritise family or employment commitments.

This might also include whether your focus, concentration, or time management has been affected by these particular circumstances.

3 Things to consider...

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Students on a Leave of Absence won't be able to receive student finance for the duration of their absence (including where the Leave of Absence is partially retrospective – eligibility for student finance will be based on the last date of engagement with studies), nor are they expected to continue studying while on a break.

If you are a Tier 4 student, taking a period of leave of absence may also affect your visa status. Tier 4 visa students considering a period of leave of absence are therefore strongly encouraged to contact the University's Immigration Advice team at immigration@york.ac.uk in order to discuss this.

Please also note that if you receive funding which is not from the Student Loans Company this may also be affected by a period of leave of absence. You are strongly encouraged to discuss this with your funding provider. Alternatively, you may find it helpful to discuss this with a student adviser at the Student Hub who can also help with other student finance-related queries – you can contact them via their self-referral form on the University website at:

york.ac.uk/sshub

If you are resident in University accommodation, taking a break from your studies may affect your contract. If you have a tenancy agreement in private accommodation too, you may be subject to a notice period to break the contract or may be required to find a replacement tenant. You are encouraged to discuss housing and tenancy issues with a Student Adviser at the Student Hub.

Student Support Plans

If you currently have a Student Support Plan in place via disability services.

The University will continue to implement and apply your individual academic support and adjustments wherever possible, and plans will be updated where necessary. For example, students who are currently given extra time in exams will also be given more time/an extended window within which to complete online exams.

If you have any concerns about your individual situation regarding how your Student Support Plan will be impacted, please contact your departmental disability advisor or Disability Services.

www.york.ac.uk/students/support/disability/

Key Documents and Info

Undergraduate Student Safety Net webpage:
coronavirus.york.ac.uk/for-students/ug-safety-net

Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Assessment
webpage:
york.ac.uk/students/studying/progress/exceptional-circumstances/

Leave of Absence webpage:
york.ac.uk/students/studying/manage/plan/taught/loa-taught/#tab-1

University Covid-19 webpages:
coronavirus.york.ac.uk/for-students

Further Advice and Support

University services for advice and support are still available online, such as the Student Hub and Open Door.

You can find full details of available services here:

<https://www.york.ac.uk/students/health/advice/coronavirus/>

Student Union Advice Services are still offering advice and guidance to students via email, phone or Hangouts Meet appointments.

YUSU Advice and Support Centre

webpage: <https://yusu.org/advice-support>

email: asc@yusu.org

GSA (for postgraduates)

webpage: <https://www.yorkgsa.org/welfare/>

email: advice@yorkgsa.org