



QAA's advice to degree-awarding bodies on mitigating the disruption of studies to TNE students caused by the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak

March 2020

Since January 2020, the COVID-19 (previously known as 'Coronavirus') outbreak has seen campuses in many affected countries temporarily closed and term dates amended. This includes international campuses of UK degree-awarding bodies, as well as campuses from affected countries that offer collaborative provision with a UK provider. The shutdown is affecting both teaching and assessment periods. This advice is designed to support providers with navigating challenges associated with the disruption of studies to TNE students.

The advice seeks to balance the need to maintain academic standards with the safety and wellbeing of staff and students affected by the COVID-19 outbreak. It is not intended to supersede measures put in place by local authorities to contain the spread of the virus and providers of higher education should ensure that public safety considerations are paramount.

Universities and colleges should work to ensure their students have the best possible experience throughout their studies. Where scheduled teaching and assessment is affected by events outside of their control, such as the COVID-19 outbreak, providers are encouraged to consider using methods of learning and assessment that they would not normally employ, as well as considering mitigating the potential impact on staffing workloads.

If an English provider is regulated by the Office for Students (OfS), they should be aware that Condition C3 (student protection plan) of the regulatory framework requires them to inform the OfS of events which require the implementation of a student protection plan. This should be done in line with [OfS Regulatory Guidance 16: Reportable events](#). Similar arrangements are in place for providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and should be referred to.

The fourth Core practice for Standards in the Quality Code states that 'Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.' Ultimately, degree-awarding bodies are responsible for the integrity of their awards wherever they may be delivered, while ensuring they are compliant with any local regulations.

During this challenging time, it will be for individual degree-awarding bodies to decide how to mitigate the effects of the campus shutdown on their students and staff, drawing on their academic regulations and policies that would cover such eventualities, including any provision they may have for disruptive circumstances such as incidents of any 'force majeure' or any interim measures laid out by providers to protect the interests of students.

If a degree-awarding body concludes it cannot reasonably attempt to assess its students and maintain academic standards in the present circumstances, it should put in place 'effective arrangements' and implement them as soon as the current situation is resolved. Examples of these may include amending dates of term time study and/or assessment submission deadlines, providing additional support through online tutoring/resources, and ensuring that effective communications are in place to safeguard the student experience.

Where possible and practical, degree-awarding bodies are advised to consult their student representatives and student representative body on the affected campuses on all decisions relating to potential changes to study times and assessment processes during this period.

As the priority is the safety and wellbeing of all students and staff in their learning community, QAA reiterates the need for degree-awarding bodies with campuses or provision in affected areas to follow the instructions of relevant health authorities.

The current Foreign Office advice on COVID-19 is available at:

www.gov.uk/guidance/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-information-for-the-public

UUK guidance for UK providers is available at:

www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/coronavirus.aspx

OfS advice for higher education providers is available at:

www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/coronavirus