

COVID-19 supporting resources

www.qaa.ac.uk/covid-19

Ongoing Implications of the Pandemic for Placements and Practice-Based Courses

The sector is again facing a lockdown owing to the pandemic. Much of the COVID-19 guidance that we have produced over the last 10 months continues to be pertinent now. Documents that are especially relevant to the current circumstances are listed at the end of this short paper. In addition, we have published another short document focused on the renewed attention being given to [safety nets](#).

Two of the areas likely to be most impacted by this further lockdown are the courses that require specialist facilities for practice and lab-based work and those that include a placement. While we produced thematic guidance focusing on both these areas in April last year, there was an important difference at that point - in those early days of the pandemic, the graduating cohort was only being affected by restrictions relatively late in their studies. This meant that many were close to completing work placement hours, which are often greater in courses that are required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and there was a greater likelihood that practical competencies in practice or lab-based courses would have been tested before that initial lockdown took effect. Further, for the cohorts at earlier stages in their courses, there was still hope that activities which could not take place in the rest of 2019-20 might be deferred until later in their studies. As the current academic year has unfolded, lockdowns and, outside of those, the restrictions around physical distancing have continued to present difficulties.

Practice and lab-based assessment

Challenges:

- 1 Continued lack of access to specialist facilities or restrictions on social interaction in the 2020-21 academic year impact on students demonstrating skills that are required to meet the intended learning outcomes of the course.
- 2 PSRB recognition of the course is compromised.
- 3 For progressing students, there are implications for the next stages of their course in terms of the outcomes they have been able to demonstrate so far and the next level, potentially requiring amendments to courses.
- 4 A backlog might also have implications on the future availability of specialist resources.

Possible options include:

- In terms of course intended learning outcomes, reviewing whether students really need to demonstrate (or demonstrate further) the specified skills to achieve an award in a particular subject and/or whether they need to demonstrate them in the way prescribed.

- Offering the students an alternative qualification that acknowledges the alternative theoretical emphasis of the course rather than a practical one. This might require emergency modifications and/or course design and development activity if an appropriate alternative does not exist already, as well as requiring close communication with, and consent of, the participating students.
- Supporting deferrals/interruptions of studies if that is a student's preference
- Offering students opportunities to return in the future, including post-graduation, to gain additional experience using specialist equipment or facilities that will enable consolidation and support them in specialist professions.
- Separating the elements that relate primarily to PSRB recognition from those that are necessary for the integrity of the academic award so that the latter is prioritised for graduation and the opportunity to achieve PSRB recognition is enabled subsequently.
- Extending the academic year.

Resources

- [Subject Benchmark Statements](#)
- Quality Code Advice and Guidance: [Assessment](#), [Course Design and Development](#)
- [Adapting to COVID-19: Smaller, Specialist and Newer Providers of Higher Education](#)
- [COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Practice and Lab-based Assessment](#)

Work-based learning, including placements

Challenges:

- 1 Placements have not been able to take place in the way intended.
- 2 Industries or particular companies/organisations have not been able to support placements at all, reducing availability.
- 3 PSRB recognition of the course is compromised.
- 4 There are implications for the stated intended learning outcomes of the course.
- 5 For progressing students, the option of deferring placements is becoming more challenging as a backlog might now be developing, with associated implications for future years and placement availability.

Possible options include:

- Offering students options to move to a non-placement alternative course (this might require emergency modifications and/or course design and development activity if an appropriate alternative does not exist already).
- Where there has been some placement or industry-related activity, reviewing intended learning outcomes of the course with respect to placements to see if they might reasonably be amended without compromising the integrity of the award

- Offering students opportunities to return for placements in future, post-graduation, and recognising their achievement in a further award subsequently (for example, a 'top-up').
- Reviewing the amount of placement required or how the placement activity is structured in order still to meet the needs of the course and/or PSRB requirements.
- Supporting deferrals/interruptions of studies if that is a student's preference.
- Considering whether the placement outcomes can be achieved another way, for example, through 'live briefs', research projects or other alternatives.

Resources

- [Subject Benchmark Statements](#)
- Quality Code Advice and Guidance: [Work-based Learning](#), [Course Design and Development](#)
- [COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Work-Based Learning \(including placements/partnerships/ apprenticeships/study abroad\)](#)
- [Supporting resources: Work-based learning including study abroad](#)

Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)

The nature of PSRB accreditation or recognition varies considerably across disciplines and professions. In some cases, PSRBs provide graduates with a professional status that has significant implications for health, safety and wellbeing; other PSRBs provide a more general acknowledgement of knowledge and/or skills in a field of study or work. There is also a difference between graduates of accredited courses who move into a field with ongoing regulation where their skills and knowledge might continue to be tested after initial qualification, compared to those whose degree is the main security of skill and knowledge for accessing a profession or field where there is no, or limited, further regulation. These factors will affect the extent to which a PSRB can apply flexibility to its requirements. It remains important for providers to continue discussions with PSRBs in line with pre-pandemic approaches.

What we are doing

As you will have seen from our news feed, on 12 January we [convened a discussion](#) between the Minister for Universities in England, Michelle Donelan, senior representatives of 17 PSRBs and Universities UK (UUK).

We are continuing to work with PSRBs on behalf of our members to consider how students can be supported in achieving professional standards without compromise to public safety. Along with the Department for Education, UUK and PSRBs themselves, we are progressing a series of actions aimed at supporting students to complete their accredited awards and move into the workplace.

We are also continuing to work with all of our member providers to support them through guidance, exchange of good practice, and working with key organisations to enable the successful graduation of students without compromise to academic quality and standards.

Additional resources

QAA has produced and curated a substantial volume of guidance, advice and supporting resources, most of which are available on our [COVID-19 Support and Guidance webpage](#).

Two particularly relevant documents developed in collaboration with the sector to support online learning are:

- [Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning](#) (published 26 June 2020)¹
- [Questions to Inform a Toolkit for Enhancing Quality in a Digital Environment](#) (published 3 July 2020)

Another document which should prove helpful is our December 2020 report - [How UK Higher Education Providers Managed the Shift to Digital Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

It includes an Annex listing the guidance that we have produced in relation to blended learning, teaching and assessment with quick links to the resources. That list of guidance is also appended here for quick reference. Please note, some of the detailed resources, such as case studies, are available for QAA Members only. All staff and students from QAA Member institutions can access [Membership Resources](#).

Additional supporting resources relating to [placements, work-based learning and study abroad](#) are also available. These include:

- [Reaching decisions about placement provision](#)
- [Contingency planning for placement provision](#)

¹ This document has also been made available in the Welsh language: [Adeiladu Tacsonmeg o Ddulliau Dysgu Digidol](#) (published 2 September 2020)

Annex

Examples of QAA guidance relating to COVID-19 and blended learning, teaching and assessment

Date	Title	Nature	Contributors
Monthly	Membership Headline Briefings	Webinars	QAA
23 March 2020	COVID-19: Initial Guidance for Higher Education Providers on Standards and Quality	Guidance document	QAA
6 April 2020	COVID-19 Response - Adapting Assessment for Professional Qualifications (Parts 1 and 2)	PSRB Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA • General Optical Council • Nursing and Midwifery Council
7 April 2020	COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Practice and Lab-Based Assessment	Guidance document	QAA
7 April 2020	COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Securing Academic Standards and Supporting Student Achievement	Guidance document	QAA
8 April 2020	COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Accelerated Degrees	Guidance document	QAA
17 April 2020	COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Accelerated Degrees	Webinar	QAA
21 April 2020	COVID-19 Guidance - Work-based Learning COVID-19: Thematic Guidance - Work-based Learning	Webinar Guidance document	QAA
24 April 2020	'No Detriment' Policies: An Overview	Supporting resource	QAA
1 May 2020	Should Providers Include a COVID-19 Statement on Degree Transcripts	Supporting resource	QAA
7 May 2020	Assessing with Integrity in Digital Delivery	Supporting resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA • QAA's Student Strategic Advisory Committee

18 May 2020	COVID-19: Admissions	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA • Shoeburyness High School • University of Salford • Edinburgh Napier University • Aberystwyth University
28 May 2020	The Impact of COVID-19 on Admissions and Transitions into Higher Education	Supporting resource	QAA + nine providers (listed in link)
1 June 2020	COVID-19 Guidance Breakdown for Students' Unions	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA • NUS
2 June 2020	Preserving Quality and Standards through a Time of Rapid Change: UK Higher Education in 2020-21	Guidance document	QAA + 16 providers and 10 sector organisations and bodies (listed in link)
6 June 2020	The Postgraduate Student Experience and COVID-19	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The University of Sheffield • University of Glasgow • Royal College of Art • The Open University • Durham University
June 2020	Developing a Sense of Belonging in Online Distance Learning (Supported by QAA Scotland's Enhancement Theme Collaborative Cluster course)	Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA Scotland • University of Dundee • Edinburgh Napier University • The Open University in Scotland • Queen Margaret University • University of the Highlands and Islands
25 June 2020	Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning	Guidance document	QAA plus 17 providers (listed in link)
3 July 2020	Questions to Inform a Toolkit for Enhancing Quality in a Digital Environment	Guidance document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA • Teesside University • The Open University • Arden University • Jisc
13 July 2020	We need to talk about contact hours	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA • HEPI • Independent HE • Liverpool John Moores University SU • University of Worcester SU • University of Greenwich • University of Nottingham • Royal College of Art

7 August 2020	Adapting to COVID-19: Smaller, Specialist and Newer Providers of Higher Education	Supporting resource	QAA plus 16 providers (listed in link)
1 September 2020	Focus on Technology Enhanced Learning	Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA (Scotland) • Jisc • Heriot-Watt University
1 September 2020	What are the key ideas and actions arising from our focus on: Technology Enhanced Learning project	Document	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • QAA (Scotland) • Jisc • Heriot-Watt University
7 September 2020	Supporting Student Transitions - Working with Students' Unions (QAA Members' site)	Webinar and case studies	<p>SU representatives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiff Metropolitan University • University of Bristol • University of Worcester • University of Bath • University of Central Lancashire • Highlands and Islands Students' Association
22 September 2020	COVID-19: Supporting Student Transitions- Academic Support (QAA Members' site)	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University of Aberdeen • University of Reading • Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) • Warwickshire College
30 September 2020	How have small, specialist and newer providers of higher education adapted to the challenges of COVID-19? (QAA Members' site)	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GuildHE • Independent HE • Universities UK • York St John University • London Contemporary Dance School • Richmond, The American International University in London
2 October 2020	COVID-19: Supporting Student Transitions: The Impact of Student Recruitment on the Student Experience (QAA Members' site)	Webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GuildHE • UUK • University of Aberdeen • ICMP • The Sheffield College

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