

What is the School of Politics and International Relations doing to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on students' grades?

This advice has been updated in line with [central university guidelines](#) issued on 31 March 2020 and 15 April 2020 and supersedes all previous SPIR communications.

The guiding principle of SPIR's approach is that **students should suffer no detriment to their final degree classification** as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, or this year's UCU industrial action.

We are taking action at three stages of the assessment process. Measures at stages 1-2 apply to all students taking modules in SPIR. Measures at stage 3 apply to students examined under the SPIR Subject Exam Board (SEB), i.e. single-honours programmes in SPIR and Politics with Business Management students. All other students fall under their home school's SEB; please check with them for details.

1. Assessment Design and Deadlines

- 1.1 SPIR has removed some assessments and made the remaining ones shorter and more accessible, while still enabling students to demonstrate their breadth of learning and analytical skills. It should therefore be possible to do just as well on these revised assessments as the original ones, even under the difficult circumstances many students now face.
- 1.2 In cases where students did not submit coursework due before 9 March 2020, which now carries a heavier weighting as a result of assessment changes, SPIR will allow students a second attempt at these elements of assessment. You will be contacted individually if this applies to you.
- 1.3 SPIR is permitting a two-week "grace period" after the original deadlines, where work can be submitted late without penalty, for all assessments due on or after 9 March 2020. You should use this extra time to cope with difficulties you face in completing your assignments, asking your tutors for help as appropriate. The exceptions to this are:
 - The UG Dissertation, where the deadline has already been moved and the absolute deadline for submitting the assessment without late penalties is 17 May 2020.
 - The PGT Dissertation, where the deadline has also been extended, to 13 September 2020; beyond this deadline, late penalties will apply.
- 1.4 If you face very serious difficulties, such that this two-week grace period is insufficient, you should apply for Extenuating Circumstances (ECs).
 - Although EC applications must be made in the usual manner (see [UG](#) and [PGT](#) guidelines), for any COVID-19-related applications, students need not supply any supporting evidence. Moreover, in addition to the usual grounds, students may claim ECs on the grounds of employment and/or caring responsibilities; a lack of appropriate equipment or technology to complete assessments; and household circumstances (e.g. a lack of private space in which to undertake an assessment).
 - Please note that successful EC claims generally result only in further deadline extensions; elements of assessment are only waived in extreme cases.
 - Moreover, for students to be considered for progression/ graduation by the summer exam board in June, deadlines cannot be extended any further beyond 17 May 2020 for undergraduates and 12 June 2020 for postgraduates. Students whose ECs require extensions beyond these dates will be considered by the late summer exam board in August.
- 1.5 Per QMUL regulations, deadlines for 48hr take-home exams are absolute, i.e. non-submission by the deadline will result in an automatic zero;* the 5-mark per day penalty for late submissions applies only to regular coursework. However, where students do not submit their take-home exam by the deadline, they will be offered an uncapped late-summer resit.
*Exception: if you submit your work slightly late due to issues beyond your control (e.g. internet failure), you can apply for ECs to have your work accepted.

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SPIR is investigating how it can ease the requirements of the PG Dissertation and will issue a separate communication to PGT students in due course.

2. Marking

- 2.1 The SPIR coursework coversheets have been amended; these versions ([UG](#) and [PGT](#)) should be used for all coursework with deadlines on or after 9 March 2020. A new box allows students to declare any particular difficulties they had when completing the assessment. Tutors will take this into account when assessing the work. For example, if you were unable to access a key text, fundamental to answering a question, you would suffer no detriment.
 - NOTE: this is not a substitute for the “grace period” or ECs. You should use as much of the “grace period” as required to surmount difficulties in completing the assessment, and apply for ECs if your difficulties are very severe. This box is only for residual technical difficulties specific to this assignment.
- 2.2 Tutors will otherwise use the standard SPIR marking criteria. Since the assessments have been reduced in length and complexity, markers’ expectations will also be adjusted appropriately. For example, markers do not expect the same sort of sophistication and detail in a 1,000-word take home exam as a 3,000-word essay. We routinely apply our marking criteria to work at different levels (years of study) and length/ complexity, so this is standard practice.
- 2.3 Please remember that QMUL’s [Academic Misconduct regulations](#) continue to apply in full. Submitted work will be monitored rigorously for plagiarism and other offences. We have issued [separate guidance for take home exams](#), including on the expectations around referencing. But, in short, while markers will not penalise formatting deficiencies, any words or ideas that are not your own must, as always, be identified as such and accompanied by a citation.
- 2.4 Marking on final elements of assessment will be reviewed to check for consistency and fairness. Where any problems are detected we will adjust marks appropriately.

3. Subject Exam Board: Progression and Classification

- 3.1 **Progression:** All year 1 and 2 students will progress to their next year of study regardless of the number of credits obtained. However, in order eventually to *graduate*, the current regulations state that you must have passed a minimum of 75 credits in year 1 and a total of 195 credits at the end of year 2. Therefore, it is vital that you complete your modules to the best of your ability. Students who fail modules will be offered a late-summer resit (dates to be announced).
- 3.2 **Students studying abroad this year**
 - Year abroad: the marks obtained year do not count towards your final degree classification. You will be deemed to have passed and gained the resultant 120 credits, even if your study was disrupted.
 - Semester abroad (Semester B 2020/21): you will have been deemed to have passed and gain the resultant credits. However, the marks will only be counted when calculating your final degree classification if it would improve your result.
- 3.3 **Module-level adjustments**
 - Individual assessments: All module convenors will submit reports to SPIR’s Subject Exam Board (SEB) identifying any impact of UCU industrial action and COVID-19 on teaching delivery, assessment, and student attainment compared to previous years. Where the SEB believes that poor performance was due to a problematic element of assessment, it has the power to rescale marks for that assessment.
 - Final-year Dissertation: SPIR will survey tutors to identify students whose access to supervisors was significantly disrupted by the pandemic (e.g. due to illness) or by UCU industrial action. Where the dissertation mark had a demonstrable impact on these student’s

degree classification, we will review the dissertation again to see if a compensatory adjustment is warranted.

3.4 Classification adjustments

- For all current students due to graduate in 2020, 2021 or 2022, when determining students' final degree classification, SPIR will discount the weakest 30 credits taken in the 2019/20 academic year.
 - The UG Dissertation module (POL318) counts for 45 credits. If this module is your weakest mark, we will discount 30 of those 45 credits, i.e., POL318 will count for 15 credits when determining your classification. This would exhaust your 30-credit discount allowance.
 - Where a module has the lowest mark due to assessment offences, we will not discount that module but instead look at the next-lowest module.
 - For UG students graduating in 2021 or 2022, SPIR will discount the 2019/20 academic year entirely where doing so would improve their final degree classification.
 - The “zone of consideration” for borderline students to be considered for classification in the higher grade category will increase from 1% to 1.5%. For example, an undergraduate student's overall “college mark” (the weighted average of their module marks) is 58.5, 1.5 marks below the threshold for an Upper Second-class degree (2.i). However, they can be awarded a 2.i degree if half of their final-year credits being used for classification are in the 2.i category. This year, only 90 of their 120 credits are being used for classification; hence, if the student has 45 or more credits at 2.i level, the SEB will recommend them for a 2.i degree classification.
 - Finally, after all of these adjustments have been applied, SPIR's SEB will benchmark graduating students' performance against previous years. If any substantial disparities remain, we will notify the Degree Exam Board (which oversees and authorises the results of SEBs) and request further action as appropriate.
- 3.4 All of these measures are subject to oversight from SPIR's SEB, and from SPIR's external examiners – experienced senior academics appointed from other universities to ensure the quality of our teaching and assessment.

Appeals

We are confident that these many different measures will result in students suffering no detriment to their degree classification due to the COVID-19 pandemic or the UCU industrial action. However, students who remain dissatisfied with the outcome of our processes will be able to avail themselves of the usual QMUL appeals process: <http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/students/student-appeals/appeals/index.html>.

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