

Classification in 2020/21

Introduction

This document sets out the University's approach to the classification of taught programmes in the 2020/21 academic year. This enacts the commitments in the [assessment support package of mitigations](#) that were announced in January 2021: “We will review the performance of student cohorts graduating this year against previous years unaffected by COVID-19” and “We will re-evaluate the methods for classifying taught postgraduate Masters' degrees in 20/21”.

Sections 32 and 39 of the Regulations and Code of Practice for Taught Programmes (the ‘Taught Code’) are temporarily qualified by this document for the 2020/21 academic year, and in future academic years where stated.

This document also builds on and supersedes, where relevant, the following temporary regulations:

- [‘Classification in undergraduate modular programmes in 2020/21 onwards - for students on an intermediate year of study’](#) for calculating the classification of students on modular undergraduate degrees who will be considered for a classified award in 2020/21 and subsequently, where assessment that contributes to classification has been affected by COVID-19 in 2019/20. Specifically, the inclusion of units in the safety net from 2019/20 and the units that contribute to the calculation of the secondary rule change.
- [‘Progression and classification in taught postgraduate programmes in 2020/21 for students who studied on a part-time basis in 2019/20’](#), specifically the inclusion of units in the safety net from 2019/20 and the method for classification in 2020/21.

The existing regulations ([sections 30](#) and [38](#) in the Taught Code) on eligibility for the award of a qualification apply and should be considered before classification in modular undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes in the normal way.

The [application of academic regulations to students taking outstanding assessment in 2020/21](#) sets out whether students who are taking outstanding assessment from 2019/20 in the 2020/21 academic year and are due to be considered for award and classification should be considered under the 2019/20 or 2020/21 academic regulations.

Temporary amendment to the classification of modular undergraduate programmes in 2020/21

The temporary amendment to classification applies to all modular undergraduate programmes that result in a classified award, including intercalated degree programmes and exit awards that are classified.

It does not apply to non-modular undergraduate degree programmes (BDS, BVSc, MBChB) or programmes that are not classified

The classification of undergraduate programmes in the School of Law is set out in separate regulations.

The existing regulations ([section 30](#) in the Taught Code) on eligibility for the award of a qualification apply and should be considered in the normal way before a student's qualification is considered for classification under these regulations.

1. For the purposes of classification, each of the following programme marks, if applicable, will be calculated (rounded to the nearest integer) for each student:
 - a. **The Completed Programme Mark** consisting of the unit marks from all years of study contributing to the degree ('Programme mark A').
 - b. **The Safety Net Mark** consisting of unit marks from intermediate years of study¹ that contribute to classification prior to 2019/20 (if applicable), unit marks within a student's 2019/20 safety net and all unit marks from the 2020/21 final year of study ('Programme mark B').
 - c. **The Cohort Unit Exclusion Mark** consisting of all unit marks from intermediate years of study that contribute to classification prior to 2020/21 and any unit marks from the 2020/21 year of study which have not been excluded due to a cohort impact ('Programme mark C').
 - d. **The Safety Net Mark + Cohort Unit Exclusion Mark** consisting of unit marks from intermediate years of study that contribute to classification prior to 2019/20 (if applicable), unit marks from a student's 2019/20 safety net and any unit marks from the 2020/21 year of study which have not been excluded due to a cohort impact ('Programme mark D').
2. The best outcome from the available programme marks A-D will determine classification.
3. The following conditions must be met where the relevant programme mark is used as the basis for classification:
 - Programme marks C or D must include a minimum of 80 credit points of unit marks from the final year of study (inclusive of where units marks are disregarded for other reasons – see clause 6);
 - Programme mark D must include a minimum of 80 credit points of unit marks from the final year of study; and no more than 100 credit points of unit marks may be excluded as a combined result of the application of the cohort unit exclusion and the safety net

¹ Intermediate years of study is defined as the year or years of study that contribute to degree classification, with the exception of the final year of study

(inclusive of where units marks are disregarded for other reasons – see clause 6), where the programme contains more than one year of study that contributes to classification.

4. For the application of the 'secondary rule' (32.13 in the Taught Code), if any of the programme marks A-D are within the range of a classification boundary, as set out in 32.12, the secondary rule is applied to the programme marks that fall within the range, using the subset of units that contributes to the calculation of that programme mark.
5. Where the conditions in clause 3 are not met, the School and Faculty Board of Examiners must determine whether the relevant programme mark (C or D) would result in a higher classification for the student. If it is, the Faculty Board of Examiners must refer the case to the University Taught Degrees Examination Board with a recommendation for further consideration. Otherwise, if the use of programme mark C or D does not result in a higher classification, then the School and Faculty Board of Examiners will classify on the basis of the best outcome for the student from the available programme mark/s.
6. Unit marks may be disregarded under existing regulations for the purposes of calculating any of the programme marks and determining classification for individual students where it is agreed in response to the impact of extenuating circumstances or a student was awarded credit for a unit in 2019/20 but not given the opportunity to improve upon a 'fail' mark.

The conditions for disregarding unit marks within the calculation of programme marks C and D are described in clause 3. The existing regulations do not place a limit on the number of credit points that can be disregarded for an individual student and so do not affect programme marks A and B.
7. The calculation of the programme marks will be applied at the June/July or September 2021 meetings of the board of examiners (except where otherwise stated in these regulations) at the point when a student is considered for award and classification.

Completed programme mark² (Programme mark A)

8. A programme mark is calculated for the purposes of classification on the basis of all unit marks within the programme that contribute to classification as a weighted average of the separate year marks in accordance with existing regulation (section 32 in the Taught Code).
9. Unit marks may be disregarded, as set out in clause 6, according to existing regulation. Where a unit mark is disregarded, the year mark retains its weighting for the purposes of classification, meaning that the weighting of the other units in that year of study increase to account for the disregarding of the unit mark.

Safety net mark (in Programme mark B or D)

10. A programme mark is calculated for the purposes of classification on the basis of unit marks from the 2019/20 academic year within a designated 'safety net', as set out in the [temporary regulations for classification in 2020/21](#) (see clauses 1-7 on calculating the safety net), with the following clarification (to clause 2a): that the 'safety net' includes all complete units that contribute to classification from the 2019/20 academic year with marks unaffected by COVID-19. For the avoidance of doubt, the 'safety net' pertains to a subset of units identified from 2019/20; there is no 'safety net' applicable to units undertaken in 2020/21.

² This has been termed the 'normal' programme mark in student communications.

11. The method for classification in 2020/21 as set out in clauses 8-12 of the [temporary regulations for classification in 2020/21](#) is superseded by this document.
12. Where a unit mark is excluded through application of the safety net in the 2019/20 academic year, the programme mark is calculated as the weighted average of the remaining units across the programme as a whole, rather than as the weighted average of year marks. The weightings of the remaining units within and between years of study is preserved from the original programme structure, taking into account the credit-point weighting and the specified weightings of the years of study for the programme.

Cohort unit exclusion mark (in Programme mark C or D)

13. A programme mark is calculated for the purposes of classification but excluding those units where an underperformance by the cohort of a unit in 2020/21 compared with previous years' cohorts is detected, as defined below.
14. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sample test is applied to check whether the performance of the cohort on a unit in 2020/21 compared with cohorts from previous unaffected years is not the product of natural variation. Where the significance level established for the test³ indicates – in the context of sample size and Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic parameters - that the observed difference does not arise from natural variation, the unit will be eligible for exclusion under programme marks C or D. Only the underperformance of the 2020/21 cohort in comparison to previous cohorts is considered.
15. The test compares:
 - the mark distribution of each relevant unit in 2020/21, and
 - the distribution of an aggregation of marks from comparator units from previously unaffected cohorts.
16. The mark distribution of a unit in 2020/21 is based upon the marks presented to the school board of examiners at its June/July 2021 meeting. Any unit taken by a student in their final year of study may be excluded under this system.
17. The membership of the cohort in 2020/21 is defined as those students who have undertaken the unit's teaching in the 2020/21 academic year and the associated summative assessment within the 2020/21 academic year.

The following (non-exclusive) students are therefore eligible to be members of the cohort:

- If the student is studying the first part of their final year of study in 2020/21 on a part-time basis (in which case the exclusion will be triggered at the point they are considered for classification, if applicable).
- If the student has suspended studies after the completing the unit in 2020/21 (in which case the exclusion will be triggered at the point they are considered for classification, if applicable).
- If the student is undertaking the unit/s as part of a supplementary year with teaching and assessment in 2020/21 and qualifies to be considered for classification under the

³ The significance level for the test and any other relevant parameters will be agreed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) in advance of the application of the cohort unit exclusion method

2020/21 academic regulations, as set out in the temporary regulations for the [application of academic regulations to students taking outstanding assessment in 2020/21](#).

- If the student is not required to take or retake any or all parts of a unit's assessment (e.g. notwithstanding a failed unit mark) under clause 30.19 of the Taught Code, where the school and faculty board of examiners permits the award of 120 credit points for the final year of study on the basis of a pass overall.

The following students are NOT eligible to be members of the cohort:

- If the student has yet to complete all assessment (either because they did not attempt it or because they self-certified absence) such that a classified award can be made, as determined by the school and faculty board of examiners. However, once a student has taken the relevant unit assessments within the 2020/21 academic year and qualify for a classified award they become members of its cohort and are eligible for any cohort unit exclusions.
- If the student is on an assessment-only supplementary year in 2020/21 to complete the relevant unit.
- If the student is required to undertake a supplementary year in 2021/22 to complete the relevant unit; at which point they cease to be a member of the 2020/21 cohort.

18. Cohort performance on a unit is defined as the unit marks achieved by the members of the cohort at the point when they are presented to the school board of examiners in June/July 2021. This means that:

- The mark of a student who fails a unit, inclusive of whether they qualify for an award or are required to complete a reassessment in August 2021, will be included in the cohort performance.
- The mark of a student who misses assessment and is required to complete a supplementary assessment in August 2021 in order to qualify for an award will be excluded from the cohort performance.
- Where a student has completed a resit in 2020/21 following failure in a previous year of study, the capped mark will be included in the cohort performance.

19. For each relevant unit from 2020/21, unit/s from previously unaffected cohorts will be designated by the relevant Faculty Board of Examiners to form a statistically comparable group⁴ in advance of the comparison calculation.

20. 'Previously unaffected cohorts' is defined as the unit marks presented to the school board of examiners at its June/July meeting from the three most recent cohorts unaffected by COVID-19. This will encompass the cohorts from 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 and Teaching Block 1 in 2019/20.

21. A unit identified for exclusion under 14 above will be excluded from the programme marks C and D for all members of the unit's cohort, regardless of individual student performance.

⁴ Noting that the comparison may be between cohorts on the same unit.

22. Where a unit mark is excluded as a result of cohort unit exclusions from units taken in the 2020/21 academic year, the programme mark is calculated as the weighted average of the remaining units across the programme as a whole, rather than as the weighted average of year marks. The weightings of the remaining units within and between years of study is preserved from the original programme structure, taking into account the credit-point weighting and the specified weightings of the years of study for the programme.

University Taught Degrees Exam Board

23. A faculty board of examiners may refer cases, with a recommendation, to the University Taught Degrees Exam Board (UTDEB) where it is unable to apply these regulations due to the specified conditions for its application (see clause 3) or where it believes that a manifestly unsound outcome may have been reached by the application of these regulations.
24. The UTDEB will consider each case and agree an outcome that is consistent with University regulation but may diverge from these requirements provided that: any such divergence does not disadvantage any particular student generally; and that academic judgement is applied to ensure that the scholarly integrity and rigour of assessment and examination processes are maintained.

Temporary amendment to the classification of taught postgraduate programmes in 2020/21

This temporary amendment to classification applies to all taught postgraduate programmes that result in a classified award with merit or distinction, including exit awards where they are classified.

It does not apply to programmes that are not classified or taught exit awards from a PGR programme.

Specific programmes with existing regulations for classification are set out separately.

For the purposes of this document:

- the 'taught component' refers to the taught units in the programme: for a Master's degree and Postgraduate Diploma of Higher Education this consists of 120 credit points and 60 credit points for a Postgraduate Certificate of Higher Education;
- the '2020/21 academic year' encompasses all assessment relating to a programme, including the dissertation, whether or not this takes place within the academic year ending on 31 July 2021.

The existing regulations ([section 38](#) in the Taught Code) on eligibility for the award of a qualification apply and should be considered in the normal way before a student's qualification is considered for classification under these regulations.

1. Classification in taught postgraduate Master's programmes in the 2020/21 academic year is determined by a two-stage method:

Stage 1: Exclusion of unit marks for a cohort from classification where a clear underperformance of the cohort of a unit in 2020/21 is detected compared with previous years' cohorts unaffected by COVID-19, combined with the quantitative safety net from 2019/20 where applicable.

Stage 2: Introduction of a 'Secondary rule' where a higher classification may be awarded based on an individual student's mark profile if one or both of the taught component mark and the dissertation mark is just below the threshold for that higher classification, as set out in clause 26-28.

The classification of Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates of Higher Education is determined by stage 1 only.

2. Boards of examiners will apply the relevant method/s for classification at the final exam board meetings of the 2020/21 academic year. If students are due to be considered for award and classification under the 2020/21 academic regulations (as determined by [application of academic regulations to students taking outstanding assessment in 2020/21](#)) **before** this meeting, the boards of examiners will make an award under the 2019/20 academic regulations and then apply the 2020/21 regulations at the final exam board to ensure the students are not disadvantaged. Where applied, students should be informed of this process by their faculty.

Stage 1: Cohort unit exclusion within the taught component

3. For the purposes of classification, each of the following taught component marks will be calculated (rounded to the nearest integer) for each student:
 - **The Completed Taught Component Mark** consisting of all the unit marks from the taught component ('Taught component mark A').

- **The Cohort Unit Exclusion Mark** consisting of unit marks from the 2020/21 year of study which have not been excluded due to a cohort impact ('Taught component mark C').
4. Where a student studied in 2019/20 on a programme that had established a 'quantitative safety net', then two additional taught component marks will be calculated (rounded to the nearest integer) for each student:
 - **The Safety Net Mark** consisting of a student's 2019/20 quantitative safety net and all taught unit marks from 2020/21 ('Taught component mark B').
 - **The Safety Net Mark + Cohort Unit Exclusion Mark** consisting of a student's 2019/20 quantitative safety net and the unit marks from 2020/21 which have not been excluded due to a cohort impact ('Taught component mark D').
 5. The best outcome from the use of each of the taught component marks A-D will be used for classification; if for a Master's degree, where stage 2 will apply, in combination with the dissertation mark.
 6. The following condition applies where the relevant taught component mark is used a basis for classification:
 - Taught component marks C or D must include a minimum of 80 credit points of unit marks from the taught component in a Master's degree or a Diploma of Higher Education, or a minimum of 40 credit points of unit marks in a Certificate of Higher Education (inclusive of where unit marks are disregarded for other reasons – see clause 8). Where a programme requires a higher number of credit points than stated by the University's credit framework, the taught component mark must include a minimum of two-thirds of unit marks from the total credit points required for the award of the programme.
 7. Where the condition in clause 6 is not met, the School and Faculty Board of Examiners must determine whether the relevant taught component mark (C or D) would result in a higher classification for the student. If it is, the Faculty Board of Examiners must refer the case to the University Taught Degrees Examination Board with a recommendation for further consideration. Otherwise, if the inclusion of taught component mark C or D does not result in a higher classification, then the School and Faculty Board of Examiners will classify on the basis of the taught component mark/s that provides the best outcome for the student.
 8. Unit marks may be disregarded under existing regulations for the purposes of calculating any of the taught component marks and determining classification for individual students where it is in response to the impact of extenuating circumstances or a student was awarded credit for a unit in 2019/20 but not given the opportunity to improve upon a 'fail' mark.

The conditions for disregarding unit marks within the calculation of programme marks C and D are set out in clause 6. The existing regulations do not place a limit on the amount of credit points that can be disregarded for an individual student and so do not affect programme marks A and B.
 9. The calculation of the taught component marks will be applied at the relevant 'final' meeting of the board of examiners (except where otherwise stated in these regulations) in 2020/21 at the point when a student is considered for award and classification.

Completed taught component mark (Taught component mark A)

10. A taught component mark is calculated on the basis of all taught unit marks within the programme in accordance with existing regulation (section 39 in the Taught Code).
11. Unit marks may be disregarded, as set out in clause 8, according to existing regulation. Where a unit mark is disregarded, the year mark retains its weighting for the purposes of classification, meaning that the weighting of the other units in that year of study increase to account for the disregarding of the unit mark.

Cohort unit exclusion mark (in Taught component mark C or D)

12. A taught component mark is calculated but excluding those units where an underperformance by the cohort of a unit in 2020/21 compared with previous years' cohorts is detected, as defined below.
13. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov two-sample test is applied to check whether the performance of the cohort on a unit in 2020/21 compared with cohorts from previous unaffected years is not the product of natural variation. Where the significance level established for the test⁵ indicates – in the context of sample size and Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic parameters - that the observed difference does not arise from natural variation, the unit will be eligible for exclusion under programme marks C or D. Only the underperformance of the 2020/21 cohort in comparison to previous cohorts is considered.
14. The test compares:
 - the mark distribution of each relevant taught unit in 2020/21, and
 - the distribution of an aggregation of marks from similar comparator units from previously unaffected years.
15. The mark distribution of a unit in 2020/21 is based upon the marks presented to the school board of examiners at its June/July 2021 meeting.
16. Any unit taken by a student in the taught component may be excluded under this system, except any unit that forms the dissertation stage of a Master's degree programme.
17. The membership of the cohort in 2020/21 is defined as those students who have undertaken the unit's teaching in the 2020/21 academic year and the associated summative assessment within the 2020/21 academic year.

The following (non-exclusive) students are eligible to be members of the cohort:

- If the student is studying the first part of their taught component in 2020/21 on a part-time basis (in which case the exclusion will be triggered at the point they are considered for classification, if applicable).
- If the student has suspended studies after completing the unit in 2020/21 (in which case the exclusion will be triggered at the point they are considered for classification, if applicable).

⁵ The significance level for the test and any other relevant parameters will be agreed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) in advance of the application of the cohort unit exclusion method

- If the student is undertaking the unit/s as part of a supplementary year with teaching and assessment in 2020/21 and qualifies to be considered for classification under the 2020/21 academic regulations, as set out in the temporary regulations for the [application of academic regulations to students taking outstanding assessment in 2020/21](#).

The following students are NOT eligible to be members of the cohort:

- If the student has yet to complete all assessment (either because they did not attempt it or because they self-certified absence) such that a classified award can be made, as determined by the school and faculty board of examiners. However, once a student has taken the relevant unit assessments within the 2020/21 academic year and qualify for a classified award they become members of its cohort and are eligible for any cohort unit exclusions.
 - If the student is on an assessment-only supplementary year in 2020/21 to complete the relevant unit.
 - If the student is required to undertake a supplementary year in 2021/22 to complete the relevant unit; at which point they cease to be a member of the 2020/21 cohort.
18. Cohort performance on a unit is defined by the unit marks achieved by the members of the cohort at the point when they are presented to the school board of examiners in June/July 2021. This means that:
- The mark of a student who fails a unit, regardless of whether they are required to complete a reassessment in August 2021, will be included in the cohort performance.
 - The mark of a student who misses assessment and is required to complete a supplementary assessment in August 2021 in order to qualify for an award will be excluded from the cohort performance.
 - Where a student has completed a resit in 2020/21 following failure in a previous year of study, the capped mark will be included in the cohort performance.
19. For each relevant unit from 2020/21, unit/s from previously unaffected cohorts will be designated by the relevant Faculty Board of Examiners to form a statistically comparable group⁶ in advance of the comparison calculation.
20. 'Previously unaffected cohorts' is defined as the unit marks presented to the school board of examiners at its June/July meeting from the three most recent cohorts unaffected by COVID-19. This will encompass the cohorts from 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 and Teaching Block 1 in 2019/20.
21. A unit identified for exclusion under 14 above will be excluded from the taught component mark for all members of the unit's cohort, regardless of individual student performance.
22. Where a unit mark is excluded, the taught component mark is calculated as the weighted average of the remaining units in the taught component.

Safety net mark (in Taught component mark B or D)

⁶ Noting that the comparison may be between cohorts on the same unit.

23. The taught component mark is calculated on the basis of unit marks taken in the 2019/20 academic year within a designated 'safety net', where applicable, as set out in the [temporary regulations for classification of taught postgraduate degrees in 2020/21 for students who studied part-time in 2019/20](#) (see clauses 9-15 on establishing the safety net), with the following clarification (to clause 9a): that the 'safety net' includes all complete units that contribute to classification from the 2019/20 academic year with marks unaffected by COVID-19. For the avoidance of doubt, the 'safety net' pertains to a subset of units identified from 2019/20; there is no 'safety net' applicable to units undertaken in 2020/21.
24. Where a unit mark is excluded, the taught component mark is calculated as the weighted average of the remaining units in the taught component.
25. The method for classification in 2020/21 as set out in the [temporary regulations for classification of taught postgraduate degrees in 2020/21 for students who studied part-time in 2019/20](#) is superseded by this document.

Stage 2: 'Secondary rule' for the classification of Master's degrees

26. The school board of examiners will use the best outcome from the taught component marks A-D and the dissertation mark to classify per existing regulations (section 39 of the Taught Code).
27. In addition, a secondary rule will apply in either of the following cases:
 - a. If both the taught component mark and the dissertation mark are within 1% of a classification threshold (merit or distinction).
 - b. If one of the taught component mark or dissertation mark is already at or above the classification threshold (merit or distinction) and the other component is within 1%.

In either (a) or (b) above, the school board of examiners will award a higher classification if 50% or more of the rounded individual unit marks (i.e. from the taught component and dissertation stage), weighted by credit point value, are at the higher classification.

28. The secondary rule will not apply to the classification of Master's degrees after the 2020/21 year, except where a student has received an extension to the submission of their dissertation.

University Taught Degrees Exam Board

29. A faculty board of examiners may refer cases, with a recommendation, to a University Taught Degrees Exam Board (UTDEB) where it is unable to apply these regulations due to the specified conditions for its application (see clause 7) or where it believes that a manifestly unsound classification has been reached by the application of these regulations.
30. The UTDEB will consider each case and agree an outcome that is consistent with University regulation but may diverge from these requirements provided that: any such divergence does not disadvantage any particular student or students generally and that academic judgement is applied to ensure that the scholarly integrity and rigour of assessment and examination processes are maintained.

*Approved by the Vice-Chancellor
26th May 2021*