Introduction

To date, staff and students have adapted to the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic with incredible professionalism, ingenuity, patience, consideration and skill. When we returned to campus from the Christmas break, who could have imagined the scenario in which we now find ourselves?

In recent weeks and months, staff have been focussed on continuing this academic year by adapting teaching to an online context, finding new ways to assess and tutor, adapting graduation and progression rules, redesigning examination boards, and supporting students remotely. Although that work is not yet complete, we now must also focus on planning for the next academic year.

At the point when lockdown was mandated by the government, we moved to restricted campus operations and the majority of staff and students began working from home. An outstanding effort by staff across our Colleges/Schools and programmes ensured we were able to transition to online teaching and learning and develop a new emergency assessment framework to ensure students could graduate and progress. As a result of enormous effort, most staff managed to transition rapidly to emergency online provision, and there have been some examples of outstanding, innovative and caring practice. Most students were also able to continue learning and completing assessments. Of course, there were also difficulties. Some staff and students face personal circumstances that make the lockdown particularly challenging and, for them, adapting to this new scenario is a real and ongoing struggle. In addition, we are acutely aware that we have been putting provision online that was originally designed to be delivered on campus, meaning that it has its limitations.

In planning for the next academic year we must recognise that, for a range of reasons, online delivery will form a key element of our resilient provision (see context below). Importantly, unlike in the immediate aftermath of the introduction of lockdown, we have some time to plan for the next academic year. This means that expectations for the quality, consistency and pedagogical appropriateness of our online education offer will be higher and, moreover, there will be an expectation that our provision is resilient.

In this paper, we outline a Framework for Educational Resilience 2020/21 (the Framework) that will support us to operate effectively in the context of the next academic year (as best as we can envision it). The aim of the Framework is to underpin institutional and programme resilience, deliver a sustainable curriculum, and maintain a high quality and supportive learning experience for all students.

The paper is organised into 5 sections: Context; Implications; Details of the Framework for Educational Resilience 2020/21; Actions/Timelines; and Future Developments.

Please read all sections of this paper carefully. Although we will need to change what we do, and work and collaborate in unfamiliar ways, the Framework is designed to support staff through this change. In turn, this will benefit students and ensure they are able to learn and progress.

1. Context: Why do we need to put in place a Framework for Education Resilience for (at least) the next academic year?

The next academic year is likely to be heavily disrupted by social distancing requirements, masking, second wave infections, staff and student illness, testing/tracing/isolating/shielding policies, international travel disruption, potential loss of student confidence, and other fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic that we cannot yet predict. Semester One is likely to be the most heavily impacted but, at this time, we must assume that some level of disruption will persist for much of the next academic year.

In this scenario, perhaps the only certainty is uncertainty. It seems likely, for example, that we will be able to ease the restricted access to campus over the summer and that at least some students will be on campus
in September. We also know that, even though we are planning to run our UG and PGT programmes, the ways in which we will be allowed to operate on campus will result in radical changes to campus life. The information we have available currently, for example, suggests:

- Students and staff (some/all?) will be on campus for (some/all?) of the time but under strict social distancing rules.
- International students (if they don’t defer) are likely to find it difficult to travel for Semester One and although a Semester Two start looks like a possible solution, challenges to travel might persist.
- Where students and staff are in the Covid-19 vulnerable categories, or where they live with/care for vulnerable individuals, they may face restrictions or make personal choices that will make it difficult for them to be on campus for the foreseeable future and certainly through at least part of the next academic year.
- If students are on campus, they will expect some aspects of campus-based education, but the Government rules on social distancing and policies on testing/tracing/isolating/shielding will impact both staff and students, and make it impossible for us to offer education as normal, especially traditional lectures and examinations.
- A second wave of infections would lead to considerable fear on campus and, potentially, the need to return to lockdown conditions at short notice.
- If students and staff are in a taught session together on campus, and one member of the session has suspected Covid-19, contact tracing and isolation policies may mean that, at very short notice, some/all of those staff and students will need to pivot to online delivery/learning until the testing process is complete (and hopefully confirms a false alarm!).

2. Implications

In the context described above, it would be foolhardy to attempt to plan for the ‘normal’ delivery of education. Staff and students will be facing new pressures with high levels of unpredictability and new demands on their capacity to teach and learn effectively in online and on-campus modes, and their ability to switch between those modes. This means that as a university, we must think radically. Hospitals and other large, complex organisations have already adapted in remarkable ways. Translated into our university context that means planning to operate effectively in a dynamic, bimodal (online and on campus) model of provision.

We have made the following assumptions in challenging ourselves to think differently about curriculum delivery, learning and assessment next year:

For staff:

- the challenges of juggling the complex demands of personal and professional lives will continue through the next academic year, so we need to recognise these challenges by building additional resilience and support into the design of all modules that are offered;
- additional peer and professional services support will be needed to help tutors to develop good quality and pedagogically appropriate online material;
- guidance on rethinking assessment practices will help to reduce the need for traditional terminal examinations as these are most vulnerable to disruption;
- a reprioritisation of effort will be required – including from research to teaching for some staff - if we are to ensure successful delivery/student academic support next year.

For students:

- the challenges of juggling personal circumstances and learning will continue, and will impact some students more than others (this will require an additional and detailed impact assessment strategy, coupled with potentially innovative reasonable adjustments and solutions);
• the learning experience for all students is likely to be fractured by pandemic-related disruption, with the potential for changes to be required at short notice and new challenges in maintaining engagement;

• we will need to find new ways to offer increased academic support to all students and, in particular, those students who face additional challenges;

• our new UG intake will require considerable support given the disruption to their school experience this year.

For the curriculum:

• every module we offer must be ‘resilient’ which means it must be offered in a bimodal format (online and on-campus) and with the aim of ensuring equality of learning experience and high levels of student support no matter how learning is accessed;

• the challenges for staff of ensuring that all modules are resilient means that we must consider carefully the number of optional modules we make available and whether all are feasible next year, while ensuring that Programme Learning Outcomes can still be met;

• we must also recognise the requirements of the professional regulatory bodies retaining, where possible, options (albeit modified to ensure resilience) required for external recognition, and current guidance from the Office for Students and Competition and Markets Authority;

• each resilient module will need a team of staff to share the work on delivering and supporting at a consistently high quality in both on-campus and online modes;

• students must be supported to progress through each module in either/both modes of delivery and with due regard to their individual circumstances;

• students will be able to graduate with the degree for which they are currently registered.

For assessment:

• the New Academic Teaching Year (NATY) already introduces two formal assessment points for all students in the next academic year and this helps to improve our resilience (and would have made life a lot easier this year!);

• we must ensure that where possible, no module relies on a traditional, closed-book end of module examination for more than 50% of the total module mark (this will ensure we can invoke emergency regulations to progress a student through a module if either formal examination period is disrupted at short notice);

• rethinking assessment practices to reduce the focus on rote learning and closed book tests would constitute good pedagogical practice and would engage students in more authentic assessments with better feedback on progress;

• where traditional exams are still offered, an inclusive online alternative must be planned at the same time (in case of disruption at short notice) and we will need to investigate further the kinds of remote proctoring that would be acceptable to our PSRBs.

Regarding on-campus provision:

• modelling is underway to identify how best we could use campus safely under a range of social distancing scenarios and although none of these scenarios is ‘business as usual’, they do represent the ‘new normal’;

• given that we will have to restrict the numbers of students and staff in any given space, and large lectures are likely to be impossible to schedule and deliver under social distancing rules, it makes sense for all core lectures to be designed for, and made available via online delivery only (with a pedagogical design that is appropriate to the medium), so that we can re-focus the campus spaces for those activities that are more difficult to replicate online;
• it is important to remember, and as noted in Section 1, that some vulnerable students and staff may need to operate off-campus for much of the next academic year, and some will be forced to switch to online at short notice; hence the need for us to be resilient in both modes.

For online provision:
• although we were able to switch much provision from on-campus to online for the last few weeks of the spring term, the challenge facing us next year is at a different scale;
• a major collective institutional effort will be required by all academic and professional services colleagues to get us to the module quality and resilience required;
• we must build resilient and supportive staff teams around each module that we offer in order to reduce the pressure on each individual member of staff;
• additional HEFi-led and College-based digital support is currently being configured to help staff to prepare for the next academic year, and HEFi is also preparing a suite of new guidance for developing online modules.

These considerations have informed the development of the emergency resilience framework. It is important to note that all universities are facing similar challenges and, across the sector, both modification of the offer and the extensive use of online delivery are being modelled.


In designing this Framework, we have focussed on the following imperatives:
• realism about what can be delivered in the scenario and implications described in Sections 1 and 2;
• resilience such that what we plan to deliver can withstand the challenges described in Section 1 and can maintain high levels of quality and consistency;
• concern and reassurance for students that the offer meets their needs under the circumstances and that they will be offered additional support to help them navigate the challenges;
• concern and understanding for staff who may feel challenged by the change required and who will need to work differently with academic peers and professional services colleagues to reduce the delivery pressure on any one individual; and
• the need to reprioritise and refocus resource given the financial challenges facing the sector.

The Framework for Educational Resilience 2020/21 requires all education provision in the next academic year to meet six ‘Conditions’ that will ensure the provision is resilient.

For each condition below, we recommend an appropriate way forward. If Schools want to consider delivering the Framework in different ways, the Head of School (HoS) must justify their decisions to their Head of College (HoC) and College Director of Education (DoE) and demonstrate how their approach is equally resilient and meets all six conditions.

i. Learning delivery must have staff resilience.

Each module offered should be co-owned and the delivery shared as appropriate by a team of a minimum of three academic staff; large modules may need four or more. These are not arbitrary numbers. In the case of large, compulsory modules, and as an illustrative example, a resilient team would allow each member to lead on one of four key responsibilities: (i) the quality of the online content; (ii) the organisation of on-campus activity; (iii) student support with a particular focus on students facing additional challenges; and (iv) inclusive assessment design. Responsibilities could be shared in other ways but, in any event, no member of staff can be expected to run a resilient
module single-handed. It is suggested that, where a single member of staff usually delivers a module, that module is either combined with other modules to create a resilient module, or dropped for the academic year 2020-21 (unless it is compulsory). **Note: staff who fall into vulnerable categories and who are therefore likely to be off campus for longer periods of time should be supported by including them in teams with other staff who are not in this category.**

ii. **Each module offered must be resilient, so all Schools must reconsider the number of modules to be offered.**

All compulsory modules must be delivered and in a resilient form. In order to make next year feasible for staff, however, we make the strong recommendation that Schools reduce the number of optional modules on offer. This can be done by combining two or more existing modules and differentiating by assessment, sharing existing module content across Schools and Colleges, removing content within modules and/or removing some modules for this academic year. It is suggested that for UG students, Year One is delivered primarily through compulsory modules, Year Two is mostly compulsory, and that some level of reduced optionality is retained for Years 3 and 4. For PGT, it is suggested that most modules are compulsory and shared across programmes where possible. **Note: it is a School’s responsibility to demonstrate that each module it chooses to offer is resilient as noted above.**

iii. **All students must be able to meet their Programme Learning Outcomes**

When Schools review their module provision and take decisions about which optional modules will be offered, the secure delivery of Programme Learning Outcomes will be the starting point for decision making.

iv. **Bimodal provision is central to resilience**

In every resilient module, *all core lectures must be delivered online* (remembering the need for the design to be pedagogically appropriate), with the running of seminars, labs and other activities that are difficult to deliver online then made possible by the freeing up of space on campus and in the timetable. At the same time, we have to remember that most campus-based activities will also have to be available in an online version to cater for the current or changing health circumstances of individual staff and students, or further pandemic disruption. Where some labs and practical sessions can *only* take place on campus, these will be scheduled as late as possible in the academic year (if that is feasible) and on multiple occasions. **Note: In all modules, as colleagues prepare online material in new ways, it is essential that we retain the research-intensive nature of our education offer by linking to our online research resources and adopting research-led approaches to learning.**

v. **Additional student support is critical to the success of our education provision and must be made available**

During term time, all students will be required to engage in a weekly group academic tutorial - online - with their personal academic tutor. We will have familiar platforms available for all staff next year, so this will be feasible and resilient. This action will help us to maintain student engagement and a sense of community as students attempt to navigate an unfamiliar learning experience. We will also pick up problems quickly and effectively – particularly for those students who will struggle the most. **Note: For the next academic year, it is likely that more of our academic colleagues will need to become personal academic tutors to ensure we can deliver this action.**

vi. **Wherever possible, assessment must be designed to be resilient and inclusive in order to enhance the learning experience for students and reduce uncertainty**

Given the challenges we faced this year in attempting to graduate and progress our students, it is important that we rethink assessment and – as far as possible – avoid traditional examinations that rely mainly on rote learning and can only be taken in a fully proctored setting. Most emergency online assessments that have been put in place for this academic year are ‘open-book’ and inclusive exams, and it essential that we plan for this type of assessment for the next academic
year. Note: an open book exam that is open for an extended period of time could be classified as an ‘exam’ or ‘coursework’; and a ‘class test’ could be classified as either too. In some cases, therefore, it is possible to make changes to the module assessment format without needing to change the information that is already published in your module information. The requirement noted earlier - for no module to rely on a traditional, closed-book end of module examination for more than 50% of the total module mark – will apply in all cases.

To reiterate: we have proposed actions that will help Schools to meet each of the six conditions of the Framework for Educational Resilience 2020/21. We have recommended these actions as practical ways forward based on our assessment of the context for next academic year, and discussions with other universities nationally and internationally. If Schools choose to deliver the Framework differently, the HoS must demonstrate (to their HoC and DoE) how their adaptations will ensure they meet the six conditions of the model and thereby guarantee resilient provision.

4. Actions and Timelines

So, what next? We all recognise this is a significant challenge for everyone and we don’t underestimate the scale of the task. This will require staff in Schools and Colleges to work together, under the leadership of the Head of School, to put in place a resilient model that they can deliver.

Approval Process

The Framework (Draft 6) will be presented to M3 on the morning of Monday 18th May, and a message will go to all staff later the same day. The full Framework document will be circulated to staff by Heads of School on Tuesday 19th May. Schools, in collaboration with their senior student reps, can then begin planning for the 2020-21 academic year. The Framework will be reported to Council on the 19th May, and the final version will go to Senate for approval on the 10th June.

Heads of School will be responsible for leading the development work in Schools, and any local variance to the Framework must be approved by their Head of College and Director of Education. It is noted that the successful delivery of Education next year will require a significant institutional collective effort, particularly in ensuring our offer is resilient and in supporting students through a very challenging period. Timetabling will be involved throughout and we will be working closely with Campus Services on the safe opening of campus

Student engagement has, to date, been with the Guild (prior to UEC and through UEC) and this will be followed up at a detailed level in Schools where Senior Student Reps (and any additional student reps as required) should be engaged as a reference group to support the planning to develop modified and resilient provision.

Schools will be required to submit top-level information on planned changes to their optional module provision by 17th June at the latest. Core modules (wherever possible) should be confirmed to Timetabling and Examinations by the end of May to enable colleagues to do their work. A pro-forma is being developed by Registry to make this process as straightforward as possible. The pro-forma will include the requirement for Schools to confirm that they have consulted with their student reps for the returning cohorts, and to provide specific detail about the nature of that engagement.

Note: there is work ongoing with Legal Services to ensure we remain compliant with the relevant legislation, and with External Relations regarding the timing of communications with our current and prospective student cohorts.

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Institutional Resource

It is accepted that we are going to need to deploy institutional resource differently (much as they have done in the NHS) for example:

- Directors of Global Engagement (DoGEs; previously Directors of Internationalisation, DoIs) will need to focus more than they currently do on international students and supporting the work of DoEs.
- Professional Services will need to be realigned to ensure appropriate support for the development of high quality on-line teaching provision; collaboration across Academic Services, External Relations, Colleges and IT Services is already being established, co-ordinated by the Director of HEFi.
- A team in each School - led by the HoS and working closely with the Head of Education, all senior staff and student reps - will need to rethink their whole offer and the way in which academic staff will be deployed appropriately into the resilient model.
- Academics will need to be prepared to change the content they deliver, merge with other modules around core concepts/policies/challenges, and engage in effective, supportive, collaborative working.
- High quality, caring and consistent academic support for students is ‘the golden thread’ that will ensure the success of our provision for students in these exceptional (and daunting) circumstances.
- We will need to ensure our QA/approval/admin processes are as supportive and streamlined as possible to make these changes. Close collaboration between the Director of Academic Affairs and College Directors of Operations will be critical to ensuring appropriate and timely professional services support, and College Academic Policy Partners will act as a key point of contact.
- Provision for Joint Honours students will require additional oversight in Schools and collaboration between Programme leads, Joint Honours coordinators and Heads of Education.

5. Future Developments: Programme Architecture Framework

In order to ensure we can remain resilient and attractive to applicants in what is likely to be a very challenging future, we have commissioned NOUS to undertake a review of our Programme Architecture Framework. NOUS worked with us in developing the NATY, and they will bring their extensive experience of developing programme architectures with major universities around the world. They will work alongside us as we modify our curriculum in this emergency phase for next year, and consult with colleagues and current and prospective students to propose some options for the development of an institutional Programme Architecture Framework for future years.

Kathy Armour and the Senior Education Team

18th May, 2020