The Examinations Report has been updated to reflect the actions identified at EQC in October 2020. With regard to the early release of timetables, the report outlines the dependencies on other processes linked with timetable production. Amended sections are highlighted on pages 5,7&8 within the report.

This paper provides a review of City, University of London examinations in 2019/0 and outlines some of the challenges faced and how they were addressed. The paper also includes reference to some of the more significant issues to be faced by the Exams Office in the immediate future and explains how we intend to mitigate these challenges.

Notes
1. 13.9% increase in January exam sittings from 2018/9 to 2019/0
2. All Period 2 and Period R exams moved to alternative assessments and remote exams. 
   This was only possible due to an extraordinary level of work and commitment from the Exams Office, and school teaching and professional staff.
4. Successes in planning and implementing exams in difficult circumstances to enable students to meet the requirements of their courses.
5. Overview of risk and updates to examinations

Action(s) required from the Committee:
A. **Consider** the paper
B. **Note** where action has been taken, and where further action is being proposed
Examinations 2019/20: a review (Update following October 2020)

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to advise the Educational Quality Committee of the work undertaken by the University’s Exams Office in order to deliver both a good student experience and high quality of academic integrity. The paper outlines some of the specific challenges faced by the University’s Exams Office in the 2019/0 academic year, explains how these were addressed and also alerts the Committee to the most pertinent issues in the immediate future.

Strategic Context

The Education & Student Strategy 2014-20 ‘Support for Success’ section focuses on continuing, ‘to build a high quality student experience characterised by: Proactive and efficient services which are responsive to the needs of our students’. This paper explains how the Exams Office strives to deliver a high quality, consistent student experience that reflects ‘the needs and aspirations of our diverse student body’.

Review

The following statistics focus on the three main examination periods (January, May, August) and do not include any exception examinations that run outside of these periods.

Note that although PG Business period 2 exams takes place in a separate April exam period, this data is included with the main period 2 data for consistency in reflecting all Schools across all periods.

Covid-19 Impact

Period 1, January 2020, ran as normal. This exam period took place prior to the impact of Covid-19 and can therefore be reliably compared to previous years.

Period 2, May 2020, was significantly impacted by Covid-19. Alternative plans had to be quickly agreed and put in place including:

- Alternative assessments were arranged where appropriate reducing exams by 48% from 382 to 199 exams
- The majority of remaining exams amended to open-book with associated updates to mark schemes agreed
- The majority of exams amended to 24 hour duration to accommodate alternative time zones, reasonable adjustments and commitments students may have at home such as caring or parental responsibilities
- Separate start times agreed per school to enable the spread of load on moodle.
- All in-person arrangements cancelled
- Managing the relationship with our 100+ invigilators who had scheduled work cancelled at short notice.
Exceptions:

- Working with schools and PSRB where necessary to ensure exams meet the required arrangements. Law LPC and Actuarial Science were affected.
- PG Business scheduled all exams for the original duration plus a small amount to accommodate reasonable adjustments, rather than 24 hours. Separate sittings were set up for students who advised the exam time was unsuitable in their time zone.

Period R, August 2020, was significantly impacted by Covid-19. This exam period had to be scheduled with predicted data which necessitated scheduling all Period 2 examinations plus Period 1 resits (first and second sits). For this reason the data from this period is not comparable to other August assessment periods.

This was due to:

- Delayed Period 2 Exam Boards due to moving these online and to enable time for new systems of marking.
- Supporting Your Academic Success (SYAS) replaced the Extenuating Circumstances process giving students another attempt opportunity for all period 2 examinations.
- Exam period started one week earlier due to an additional week being added to beginning of exam period (from 2 weeks to 3 weeks) to accommodate additional SYAS sittings.

Candidatures (Yearly)

![Figure 1: Candidatures per Year](image-url)
Figure 2: Exam Sittings Percentage Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>5 year review</th>
<th>% Increase from 2015/6 to 2019/0</th>
<th>% Increase from 2018/9 to 2019/0</th>
<th>% Increase from 2017/8 to 2018/9</th>
<th>% Increase from 2016/7 to 2017/8</th>
<th>% Increase from 2015/6 to 2016/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business (UG)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26.84%</td>
<td>-0.90%</td>
<td>-4.65%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business (PG)</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>29.00%</td>
<td>-3.13%</td>
<td>97.84%</td>
<td>-45.71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Law School</td>
<td>-34%</td>
<td>-11.36%</td>
<td>-23.65%</td>
<td>1.29%</td>
<td>-4.34%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASS</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>2.27%</td>
<td>-19.45%</td>
<td>10.07%</td>
<td>3.54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>56.74%</td>
<td>17.32%</td>
<td>-11.07%</td>
<td>3.32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMCSE</td>
<td>-40%</td>
<td>-33.42%</td>
<td>-3.97%</td>
<td>-10.35%</td>
<td>5.45%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9.86%</td>
<td>-6.02%</td>
<td>5.79%</td>
<td>-5.56%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yearly figures aren’t comparable to previous years as an indication of overall exam sittings due to the change in scheduling in response to Covid-19. They are useful in showing where alternative assessments were possible with a significant reduction in Law and SMCSE exams.

Any actual change in number of sittings is masked by the necessity of alternative assessments and the predictive scheduling for August 2020.

Candidatures (per Period)
Figure 4: Candidates per Exam Period (Table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business (UG)</td>
<td>6557</td>
<td>5667</td>
<td>8832</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td>8548</td>
<td>6893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business (PG)</td>
<td>5454</td>
<td>4233</td>
<td>4181</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>5216</td>
<td>4542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Law School</td>
<td>1267</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2769</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>2466</td>
<td>1437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SASS</td>
<td>2921</td>
<td>2530</td>
<td>4289</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>4701</td>
<td>4044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHS</td>
<td>3574</td>
<td>3449</td>
<td>2192</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>3828</td>
<td>1703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMCSE</td>
<td>2343</td>
<td>3489</td>
<td>3315</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>7999</td>
<td>3844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>22116</td>
<td>19368</td>
<td>25578</td>
<td>5823</td>
<td>32758</td>
<td>22463</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figures 3 and 4 show the changes in the exam periods against the patterns of previous years. The change in period 2 and Period R is clearly demonstrated.

Period 1 which ran without Covid-19 impact demonstrates a significant 13.9% increase in exam sittings from 2018/9 to 2019/0. All schools show a rise in sittings with the exceptions of Business (PG) and SMCSE. The Business (UG) increase is in part accounted for by the exams that usually take place in the two days prior to the official exam period starting in order to accommodate these exams and give students a better timetable spread. This wasn’t possible this year as detailed in the January Exam Period section below.

**Examination Considerations**

**Remote Examinations**

Necessary use of remote examinations required a quick response to preserve student experience and maintain academic integrity. In a significant achievement the Exams Office, other Student & Academic Services staff, academic and professional staff within schools successfully moved examinations online and to alternative assessments where possible. This involved a huge amount of work taking into account new regulation, online functionality and other additional considerations such as moodle load and time zones. The exams team thank everyone involved for their extraordinary contribution to enable students to be informed of the new arrangements so quickly.

Anecdotally there have been some significant benefits to remote exams, although some issues have arisen that would need resolution to continue remote exams as part of the University offering ongoing.

**Benefits:**

**Students**
- No travelling, supporting students who find travelling difficult due to visual impairment or disability physical impairment, or find the process stressful
- Students can use their own equipment with which they will be most comfortable
• Familiar surroundings can reduce anxiety and environmental issues (heating, lighting etc.)
• Many students prefer typing than handwriting which they may not be practiced in. This can remove common complaints such as hand cramping and in inclusive of those students who are unable to handwrite.

University
• Online marking is makes scripts available earlier to maximise marking time for academic staff.
• Reduced costs such as printing, couriers, external exam space, proofreading, invigilation.
• Reduced time from support teams such as Portering, Security, IT, Student Health Service
• Reduced Professional Services and Schools time in physically preparing question papers, sorting scripts for marking, scanning scripts for sampling and External Examiner review.
• Reduction in space allowing availability for other activities.
• Increased compliance by removing the physical distribution of exam scripts and reasonable adjustment information.

Concerns:
• Rise in Academic Misconduct. In some cases this was difficult to prove where many students had similar scripts.
• Digital poverty means some students don’t have access to effective devices or internet.
• Students may have responsibilities or other home environment that means they are unable to have quiet focussed time to complete the exam (exacerbated by Covid-19 and the lack of ability to use spaces such as libraries, coffee shops, shared work spaces etc.)
• Cost – Only one course (Law LPC) required online proctoring. Putting this in place was not cost effective for a small number of candidatures.

January Examination Period

The January exam period remains an issue due to the Academic Year Review throughout 2018/9 not reaching conclusion.

This was exacerbated in January 2020 as the time between opening post-Christmas and the main exam period starting was insufficient to run the normal Business (UG) examinations of over 1000 sittings. This normally takes place to reduce the number of exams within the main period and improve timetable spread for these students who have a large combination of modules. The additional exam days would have been the 2nd and 3rd January 2020 which wasn’t possible due to:

• Student feedback that they would have to travel either on New Years Eve or before missing celebrations with family and friends, or on New Years Day leaving little contingency of time to settle for exams the following day.
Exams on the first day back from Winter break has no contingency for risks to Exams Office preparations.

This will continue to be the case in January 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. These additional exams add pressure to the already oversubscribed January exam period.

The ongoing issues remain:

- The disproportionate distribution of exams across the exam periods. The January examination period is half the length of May at two weeks, however in 2018/9 sittings in January equalled 68% of those in the May exam period (2019/0 not relevant as May exams were affected by Covid-19).

- It is noted that Jewish students are unable to sit examinations on Friday afternoons due to observing the Sabbath from sundown which falls early in January. The short two week exam period limits the opportunity to reschedule these exams whilst maintaining a good spread for all candidates.

- The University is continuing to increase student numbers which is necessarily requiring more sittings to examine these students. In January 2020 the 18:00 exam session was at full capacity, equal to the morning and afternoon sessions. Any additional increase will require use of Saturday examinations and/or external venues which have cost implications (£2k+ daily) and are logistically challenging for both staff and students.

Timetabling – Timetable Release Ongoing

Earlier publication of the timetable has been achieved over the last several years with the January exam timetable published 7 weeks prior to the start of the exam period, the May exam timetable published 6 weeks prior and the August timetable published 3 weeks prior.

This is the earliest the timetables can be published within the current environment due to the reliance on receiving information from other university processes. These would need to be addressed in order to publish earlier:

The start of timetabling is dictated by the data being available in SITS. This requires students to be registered, all module registrations to be finalised and registered in SITS, and all exam assessment patterns to be accurate.

The most significant of these factors is elective module choice deadlines (varies per school at least 1-2 weeks into teaching) followed by schools registering the choices in SITS. The benefit we offer students in flexibility of changing modules at the beginning of term means timetabling data is available at the end of week 4 of teaching. Some courses such as MSc Actuarial programmes have a later deadline which requires the exams to be scheduled with space for all students on all options which isn’t an efficient use of the limited exam space and couldn’t be rolled out to other courses.

The second main factor is data checking to correct inaccurate data imported from SITS. Improvements have been made to this in the past several years but time is required to ensure accurate data before timetabling can begin. Various factors can arise such as
diets not running correctly to register students or assessment patterns not registered correctly which need to be resolved before timetabling can begin.

The timetabling itself is a very tight turnaround and schools are given a short time to review the draft timetable before publication to students. There is very little contingency within this time to reduce the time allocated for these tasks.

The August timetabling commences once resits have been confirmed following period 2 Assessment Boards. Within the existing academic year this is an extremely tight turnaround for schools and the timetabling, draft review, amendments and publication takes place within a very short period – this is made possible due to the far fewer students sitting during this period which means there is more flexibility within the available space.

Student experience is a priority for the Exams Office and the timetable release will be reviewed where there are any changes in these circumstances that may enable the timetable to be published earlier.

**Timetabling – 2019/0**

The May and August timetables had to be delayed due to the impact of Covid-19 and the decision to move the publication back by one week in order for the students to receive accurate timetables. Students were notified in good time that the August timetable would be published one week later (2 weeks prior to the exam period starting which isn't out of line with industry norms). This decision had to be taken in order to accommodate the exam period starting one week earlier whilst scheduling significantly more exams than normal.

Timetabling principles continued to be met despite significant challenges. These are that no student has more than one exam per day or a 18:00 exam followed by a 10:00 exam the next morning. Almost all exams in January 2020 (other periods were remote so this doesn’t apply) were of single duration as this limits disruption to candidates, the remaining % being the shared extra provision venues. The majority of candidates had 2 or less exams over 5 days.

**Figure 5: Timetabling Metrics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Back-to-back exams</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Single duration</td>
<td>99.68%</td>
<td>98.66%</td>
<td>99.57%</td>
<td>99.63%</td>
<td>98.45%</td>
<td>99.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≤ 2 exams over 5 days</td>
<td>93.40%</td>
<td>83.00%</td>
<td>98.80%</td>
<td>95.40%</td>
<td>83.00%</td>
<td>96.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Period 2 2017/8 onwards is available only due to the change of software at this time.
Reasonable Adjustments

The proportion of candidates requiring reasonable adjustments (RA) in exams has remained fairly consistent was a minor increase of 3.38% in January 2018/9 to 3.56% in January 2020. Period 2 and Period R aren’t comparable to previous years as these have been skewed by the exams that were moved to alternative assessments and therefore aren’t representative of the same university population.

The Exams Office is part of the Reasonable Adjustments Review being managed by the Change Unit to improve the end-to-end student experience from declaration to having adjustments delivered, including the efficiency and communication of adjustments from the point at which adjustments are agree to the teams delivering them to students.

Exceptions Examinations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Study Abroad (normal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December (was January)</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>MBA (normal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January (now in main period)</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>UG Business (normal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>MBA (remote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Study Abroad (cancelled/remote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>PG Business (remote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June - July</td>
<td>4 weeks</td>
<td>Law (GDL &amp; Legal Practice) (remote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throughout</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>Nursing (remote during lockdown)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some in-person exception exams recommenced from mid-July.
MBA period 1 examinations moved from January to December in 2019/0. This is due to the fall of the year which means there are not sufficient days between the reopening of the University post-Christmas and the start of the main exam period. Similarly Business (UG) exams took place within the main exam period as discussed above.

**Technology**

The Exams Office implemented work submission through moodle for student’s PC work in individual rooms where there is no access to a printer. This removed the risk of USB drives. This was initially in trialled May 2019 and is now applied to all exams of this nature with success.

The Exams Office is working with IT to improve the security of the Exam User account. This is used where students have a PC exam, including due to reasonable adjustments. The account is being reviewed to improve the security of the account for both the integrity of the exam and the ability to recover work in an emergency such as a loss of power.

**Religious Observance**

Ramadan has fallen during the Period 2 examinations since 2016 and this will be the case until 2021. The Chaplaincy estimate this affects approximately 2,000 students. Where in previous years we have been able to create the timetable with no 18:00 exam starts, the remote exams in May 2020 enabled students to manage this themselves and gave them the opportunity to sit their exam at their preference.

The need for a policy to support the current process of considering absences from examinations and other University events e.g. teaching, in-semester tests etc. due to religious observance was raised with the Quality and Academic Development team (QUAD). This has rolled forward from the original plan QUAD had advised to develop this policy during 2019/0.