

Student FAQs

www.ox.ac.uk/students/coronavirus-advice?wssl=1

Examinations and assessments

For all students

What are the plans for exams and assessments in Trinity term?

There will be no conventional exams in Trinity Term. The arrangements will be as follows:

- The majority of examinations for **first year undergraduates** will be cancelled, and students will be deemed to have passed. The only exceptions are Law and Medicine, where assessments will be rearranged for professional qualification reasons.
- For all **second and third year (non-finalist) undergraduates, and first year MPhils**, exam papers will be deferred into the next academic year. The only exceptions are those third-year undergraduate exams which need to go ahead because they are taken by a mix of continuing and leaving students.
- For **final-year undergraduates and taught postgraduates** exams will be replaced with alternative forms of assessment in Trinity term 2020. These will take the form of either open-book versions of papers, longer pieces of work completed over several days, or a mix of the two

Further detail is provided below.

Why is the University adopting this approach?

The approach we have developed resulted from a consultation with staff and students. It is aimed at supporting students as much as possible; taking into account individual circumstances, whilst mitigating the impact of the pandemic as much as we can. We have strived to develop a workable solution – to reduce complexity, minimise disruption, and provide an equitable approach for all candidates. To do this we have taken a decision to focus on completion – to help as many students as possible complete their degrees, graduate on time with the outcomes they deserve, and move on to the next stages of their lives and careers. This will also mean the University can offer the best possible education for the continuing students and next cohort in the next academic year.

When will I find out the details about my specific course?

Departments and faculties have been asked to write to all students to provide a clear outline of the assessment approach for each subject within the next few days. This should be sufficient to enable you to plan for Trinity Term and start preparing for the mode of assessment. There may be some finer details that are not yet finalised, however these will follow as soon as possible. Departments and faculties are likely to be in contact no later than Friday 3 April, but please wait for your department to contact you.

Will projects and dissertations be affected?

Projects and dissertations will largely proceed as planned. However, deadlines may be extended to account for the disruption that the pandemic has caused. Factors such as lost lab work, fieldwork, and reduced archive access will be fully taken into account by examiners.

Topics may also need to be revised (for example, if fieldwork is no longer possible), and in some cases, lab-based projects will be replaced with desk-based activities.

Can I suspend my status and restart in the next academic year?

No. All students will be expected to complete the academic year in line with the approach outlined. If you are a finalist and believe you have exceptional reasons which prevent you from completing teaching and/or assessments, please see the finalists section below.

Will I be able to submit a mitigating circumstances application?

We know it is likely that some students may fall ill over the coming period, and some students will be trying to study whilst dealing with difficult family circumstances and in a range of different environments. It will be possible to submit a Mitigating Circumstances Notice. However, the normal processes will be simplified as we want to make it as easy as possible for students to explain their circumstances at this exceptional time. There is no action required at this stage.

First year undergraduates

How will I be assessed if I am not taking exams?

All students will be deemed to have passed the year. Your department or faculty will let you know if there are any coursework elements of assessment that they still want you to submit, but in most cases these will be simply records of lab classes already completed. Instead of formal exams, you will be supported to consolidate your first year learning in other ways, including informal assessments to give you feedback on your progress to date. Details will follow in the near future from faculties and departments about this.

My course includes a professional qualification. Will I still have exams, and when will they take place?

This only applies to first year exams in Law and Medicine. We are now working through the details, and your department or faculty will be in touch to confirm the arrangements as soon as they are known.

Second and third year (non-finalist) undergraduates and first year MPhil

If my exam is deferred into the next academic year, when will it take place?

We hope to hold these in October, with the remainder of next academic year adjusted around them. However, we have to retain some flexibility at this stage because of the uncertainty over the development of the pandemic. We will confirm the new dates as soon as it is possible to do so.

Final year undergraduates and taught postgraduates

How will open-book exams work, and what can I best do to prepare?

We have developed an [overview of open-book exams and initial advice to help students to prepare](#). All students taking open-book exams should read this. We will be providing much more detailed guidance in the coming days and weeks, including technical information about how the exams will run, tips to help you get ready, as well as opportunities to practice exam submissions.

How have decisions been taken about the forms of assessment that will be offered to different groups of students?

Decisions have been taken by department/faculty subject experts who are best placed to decide how to test courses' learning outcomes through remote assessment methods - following expert technical advice on the options available. Departments and faculties have carefully considered the

merits of this open-book exams, as well as longer pieces of assessed work for their subject matter, taking student opinion into account.

Will the exam timetable be amended?

We will try to keep the timetable broadly aligned with student expectations, to minimise disruption. However, most exams in weeks 0 and 1 will be delayed to give students and staff time to prepare. Some other adjustments will be made, for instance to ensure no student has two exams on a single day.

What will I need to sit open-book exams?

You will need a computer with access to the Internet. If you are typing your exam, you will need to use Microsoft Word or an equivalent, and submit it as a PDF. If you are hand-writing your answers, you will need to be able to scan or photograph pages for submission. You will need access to your Oxford email account, SSO, password, and candidate number during the exam. You should also have a quiet space with a desk, comfortable chair, and adequate lighting. High-level information about open-book exams can now be found online, and further technical information will be provided in the near future

I am worried about being able to take part in open book exams (for example, because I don't have an appropriate workspace, or I cannot access the necessary technology). What should I do?

We understand that this is a concern for some students and we are currently liaising with departments and colleges to determine what additional support can be put in place to address specific concerns. Your college will write to you soon to gather information on your particular circumstances. We aim to put in measures to support you as much as we can, and more information will follow about this in the near future.

Can I travel to Oxford to take remote exams?

The UK Government has now advised that any students remaining at University should now stay where they are and not attempt to travel. And if you have already left, you should not return to Oxford until further notice. This means you will need to carry out remote exams in the area you are currently located in. We will keep this situation under review as the Government's policy evolves.

How will you deter cheating?

When you take an exam, you will be required to sign up to an 'honour code'. This will confirm that you have understood and abided by the university's rules on plagiarism and collusion. We will be making extensive use of plagiarism checkers, as we already do for submitted work, and we reserve the right to conduct follow-up *viva voce* exams to check candidates' understanding of the examined material, even where these are not currently specified in the *Examination Regulations*. We are also depending on students' integrity. We regard integrity and honesty as being central to the ethos of the University, and among the qualities of our students we value most highly. You will be expected to apply this to open-book exams.

Will any other measures be put in place to recognise the disruption that has been caused?

Yes. We are developing a form of safety net policy. This will seek to minimise the negative effect that future assessments can have on your overall outcome, so long as students pass all assessment elements. Further details will follow about this in the near future.

What are my options if I don't take the open-book exams and other assessments in Trinity term 2020?

We will do everything we can to provide the necessary support to help you sit the open-book exams and we hope the safety net policy will give you greater confidence to do so. However, if after exploring all the options, you are unable to complete exams remotely because of illness or very difficult personal circumstances you will have two options available:

1. Opt to graduate with a "Declared to Deserve Honours" status

This is a special class of degree, which we are introducing this year as a response to the pandemic (with an equivalent for taught postgraduates). We are working with employers and other universities to make clear that this is a recognition of the extraordinary circumstances which make completion of the assessments impossible for some candidates. While the formal award will be unclassified, transcripts will be adapted to explain the unusual pandemic circumstances behind the award, and will be accompanied by an enhanced reference letter indicating the class of degree the student was expected to achieve.

2. Return to Oxford to sit written exams in Trinity term 2021.

This option would require college (or department for non-matriculated programmes) support on the basis of the student's particular circumstances, as in a normal year. Please note that, if granted permission, you would only be able to return to take examinations. See question '*Can I suspend my status and restart in the next academic year*' with regard to teaching and learning.

You will be invited to discuss these options with your college (or department for non-matriculated programmes) in due course if you believe you would like to take either of them forward.

How will employers and other universities respond to "Declared to Deserve Honours" classifications?

We are currently working with employers and other universities to explain this new status, and to highlight that it relates to the extraordinary circumstances related to the pandemic. We will adapt the transcript to explain the unusual pandemic circumstances behind this award. For those progressing from undergraduate to postgraduate studies at Oxford, admissions teams at Oxford University will be encouraged to look favourably on this status. While it is not possible to make any guarantees at this stage about the reaction of other educational institutions or employers, we will do everything we can to support students who take this option. It is important to highlight that this is one of three possible choices (the others being to undertake exams in Trinity 2020 or 2021). Students are encouraged to make a decision based on their personal circumstances.

Why is the second sitting opportunity in Trinity term 2021?

There is ongoing uncertainty about when the impact of the pandemic will diminish, making it difficult to plan for exam sittings before the start of the 2020/21 academic year. In addition, holding large numbers of exams ahead of the next academic year is likely to have significant consequences for staff and students (current and future) in 2020/21. Scheduling alternative sittings for Trinity term 2021 was felt to be the most appropriate solution for all parties.

Submissions

How are Easter vacation submissions being affected?

It will be possible to submit all Hilary term written assessments (dissertations, extended essays etc.) online.

For any students due to submit work between Monday 16 March (Week 9 of Hilary Term) and Saturday 18 April (week -1 Trinity Term) you have an automatic 48-hour extension to the submission deadline. If you had an extension request in place prior to Monday 16 March 2020, you can add an additional 48 hours to your request. As this request has already been granted, you will not need to contact the Proctors about this. Many courses have also put in place additional extensions.

I am a postgraduate research student and need to submit my DPhil thesis. What should I do?

The general requirements for submission of research degree theses for examination remain the same. All research students submitting for the first time are required to submit their thesis electronically through RTDS. Students submitting a thesis following major corrections should also submit through RTDS. The requirement to submit a hardbound copy of your DPhil thesis to the Exam Schools in order to graduate following being granted leave to supplicate has been temporarily suspended for the remainder of the academic year. However, to graduate at a degree ceremony you will still need to submit an electronic copy to the Oxford University Research Archive (ORA) a minimum of five working days prior to your graduation date. You should then plan to submit a hardbound copy to the Exam Schools between January and March 2021.

What should I do if I am unable to obtain medical evidence for an extension request?

A 'self-certification process' has been put in for the remainder of this academic year for students affected by the coronavirus or by a short-term illness. If you have been affected directly or indirectly by coronavirus, you can self-certify for up to 14 days. For other short-term illnesses (such as migraine, norovirus, gastroenteritis, flu, or diarrhea), you will be able to self-certify for up to seven days. Please complete the [self-certification form](#) yourself. The Proctors will then consider the case and inform you, your college and your department of the outcome. The Proctors are currently considering a self-certification process for examination excusals, and further information will follow.