

# MAPS Education Strategy: Fair and Authentic Assessment

## Guidance for Students in Preparing for Exams

### Overview and Aim

This document outlines agreed principles for equal and fair support for students as they prepare for exams. It includes principles for access to example past exam questions and the guidance we offer students in how to answer those questions. There is an agreed **baseline** level of support that all modules should offer but some recommended **additional guidance** is outlined, for implementation where appropriate. The document is split into two parts: 1) providing clarity to students on the types of questions they could encounter in an exam; 2) providing opportunities for students to test their understanding of the questions and receive feedback.

Underlying these principles are the values of an 'inclusive curriculum', which includes identification and elimination of barriers that prevent students from accessing and engaging in the education to which they are entitled. Students should therefore expect transparency and clarity on availability of guidance for past papers for a given module. An inclusive approach to education is to the benefit of all students but is of particular benefit to students with fewer social networks. This is more likely to include students from WP or BAME backgrounds, commuter students and those with working or caring responsibilities beyond university.

To manage staff workload, in the short term the principles outlined in this document are intended as a 'direction of travel' rather than 'do this immediately'. For the academic year 2021/22 departments should ensure that **baseline** support is in place, communicated and enforced. Before the 2022/23 academic year, departments should discuss and agree in principle any additional support / guidance above this baseline that is appropriate to the subject and discipline. If additional guidance is identified, then staff should be encouraged to gradually build up the resources available to support exam revision.

### 1. Provision of past exam papers and questions

This section describes how we provide clarity on the format and scope of exam papers and questions.

#### Baseline support:

- Each module Moodle page should show one actual *or* sample paper that is representative of the content, format and style of the paper the students will be sitting in the current academic year.
- Departments should provide clear communication to students on which past papers are available on the Library website and the extent to which these are relevant to current course content. The default position has previously been that three past papers are available on the Library website but departments may provide fewer if justified (e.g. if the module is new, there is a change in teaching staff or if content changes significantly year on year). Departmental policy on this (and the justification) should be reported to faculty.

#### Additional guidance:

- As many past papers are largely available 'in the wild' anyway (either passed down to selected students via friends or from various websites) departments are encouraged to remove the existing three year past paper limit on the Library Exams website. This would ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access additional past papers. However, if for some disciplines access to more past papers does not confer an advantage on a student (e.g., if further past papers would simply duplicate questions already available) a limit on the papers available can be retained.
- Where appropriate, further papers and questions can be made available on Moodle in a variety of forms: posted without modification, or used as in-class examples, workshop and tutorial questions, coursework questions or formative examples (quizzes etc) within the taught module.

- While there is no limit to the past papers / questions / part questions that a lecturer can make available to students, we should be mindful of the potential to overwhelm students with too much material. There is a balance between providing enough information to understand the scope of an exam and providing more material than students have time to usefully digest.
- It is good practice to make clear to students how the example questions they are exposed to relate to past exam papers (e.g. by posting on Moodle that ‘formative quiz questions on this Moodle page are adapted from past exam papers’ or ‘questions 3 and 4 in this workshop problem sheet are part questions from past exam papers’).

#### Notes:

- For modules where it is wished to provide more papers than the standard three past papers on the Library Exam website, from this year we will request the most recent paper be added to the website when it becomes available, without removing older papers already present. For simplicity and for reducing workload we will not make earlier papers (more than 3 years old) immediately available on the library website, but these can be provided on Moodle.
- If the module is new, or content/lecturing staff have recently changed, then clearly a limited number of relevant past papers will exist. In these cases, this should be communicated clearly to students on Moodle, pointing out which (if any) past papers are relevant. For example, a paper or section of a paper can be declared ‘out of syllabus’ if there has been a change in lecturing staff resulting in a different emphasis or question style. It may also be relevant to highlight changes in exam paper style resulting from the change to open book exam conditions. Ideally this guidance should be provided for all papers available to students (on Moodle and the Library website).
- For the situations in the point above, if feasible in terms of workload, further examples of question types could be incorporated into teaching material (e.g. in lectures, tutorial questions etc).

## 2. Provision of solutions to past exam papers

This section describes how we provide opportunities for students to practice and receive feedback. The overarching principle is that students should be provided with sufficient guidance to support revision and preparation for exams and help them to understand the style, scope and depth of a typical exam paper. Guidance provided should enable students to test their understanding and provide reassurance they are on the right track. This guidance should not act as a coaching aid nor as a set of answers to be learned by rote; it should help support all students to attain to the level they deserve but not above.

#### Baseline support:

- There should be a set of indicative answers to support the example paper provided on Moodle. These answers should be detailed enough to allow students to judge the distribution of marks, depth of answer required and any flexibility in the mark scheme / acceptance of alternative answers.
- Clear written guidance should be provided to students about when and how they can access dedicated exam support, such as in office hours, revision workshops or Moodle forums.

#### Additional guidance:

Guidance on how to approach past exam questions can additionally be provided in many forms, and diversity is encouraged. If possible, it should be made clear to students how this relates directly to helping their exam preparation. Forms of guidance could include:

- full written model answers similar to (or the same as) those provided to external examiners.
- solutions demonstrated or discussed orally in lectures, workshops and tutorials.
- ‘Sketched solutions’ that provide students with a prompt for the approach to take, some (but not all) steps in the solution and if appropriate a final answer.
- numerical or final answers without working / explanation for students to check their own work.
- Moodle quizzes with answers that can be used for self-study.
- written feedback to assessed coursework based on past exam questions.

- Generic feedback to an exam paper, e.g., questions answered well, common errors and reasons why full marks not given.
- Example student answers that show how marks were awarded (especially if these show a range of possible answers / approaches for which marks were awarded).