

Arrangements for managing the introduction of summative examinations

Background

A policy to regulate the introduction of new summative exams was implemented in Summer 2017 to ensure the viability of the exam timetable from 2017-18 onward. Approved by the Academic Board on 3 May 2017, the policy addressed operational risks identified by the Academic Registrar's Division, which warned that the Spring Term exam period was at full capacity. Adding exams risked both timetable feasibility and compliance with the Equality Act 2010 regarding reasonable adjustments. The policy aimed to stabilise exam volume and was also applied to the January exam period.

Since its introduction, assessment diversification initially increased Spring Term capacity, but this trend has slowed or even reversed due to a return to traditional exams in response to AI-related concerns. As a result, Spring Term capacity remains limited. Although the School expanded the January exam period in 2025, this capacity was quickly filled, leaving it at full capacity again.

Efforts to further expand the January exam period are ongoing. Meanwhile, the current policy remains in effect.

How the policy works

1. Introducing New Exams Requires Removing Existing Ones

- Any new course with an exam (regardless of duration, weighting, or exam period) must be paired with the removal of an existing 'like for like' exam.
- This applies to both new courses and changes to assessment methods for existing courses.
- The policy only covers centrally timetabled and administered exams.

2. How to Remove an Exam ('Like for Like' Amendments)

- An exam can be removed by:
 - **Permanently withdrawing** a course that includes an exam.
 - **Modifying a course** to replace its exam with an alternative assessment.
- What **doesn't** count as removal?
 - Temporarily suspending a course does **not** allow for a new exam to be introduced.
 - Exams for suspended courses remain on the timetable and are reinstated when the course returns.
 - If a course moves to a different department, its exam is not considered 'withdrawn.' (See 4 below)

3. Timing of Exam Replacements

- A new course exam can replace an exam **only in the same academic year** that the previous course is withdrawn.
- A new exam **cannot** replace an exam from a course withdrawn in a previous year.

4. 'Banking' Withdrawn Exams for Future Use

- If a department cannot immediately introduce a replacement, it may 'bank' the withdrawn exam slot for **one academic year**.
- If unused after a year, the slot is lost.
- Example: If an exam is withdrawn in 2024-25, the department must introduce a replacement by 2025-26.
- Departments may bank up to **five courses** or **10% of their total courses** (whichever is lower) per academic year.

5. Cross-Department Exam Swaps

- In most cases, a new exam should replace one from the same department.
- However, departments can agree to swap exams between them, particularly for **joint programmes**.

6. Assessing 'Like for Like' Replacements

- **TQARO** and **SSC** assess whether a new exam is a fair replacement based on the criteria below.

7. Criteria for "Like for Like" Replacements

- The new and withdrawn exams must be comparable in:
 - a) **Course status** – Both must be compulsory or optional on a programme in the same way.
 - b) **Course availability** – More widely available courses impact exam scheduling more (see the course availability and its impact on exam scheduling below).
 - c) **Student numbers** – Based on past or predicted enrolment (over three years if available).
 - d) **Unit value** – A full-unit course cannot be replaced with two half-units, as this increases exam slots.
 - e) **Exam duration** – The new exam must be the same length or shorter.
 - f) **Level** – Undergraduate exams must replace undergraduate exams, and postgraduate with postgraduate.

Course Availability and Its Impact on Exam Scheduling

The availability of a course - meaning how many programmes include it and how students select it - affects exam scheduling complexity.

- **Why does this matter?**
 - Courses **restricted to a single department** (or closely related ones) create fewer scheduling conflicts because students are likely to take exams within the same subject area.
 - Courses available across **multiple departments** or **degree programmes** introduce **greater variation in student exam timetables**, increasing the likelihood of unresolvable clashes.
- **How does this affect 'like for like' replacements?**
 - If a new exam replaces an exam from a course that was available to **fewer programmes**, it may have a **larger scheduling impact** than the removed exam.
 - Ideally, the new exam should **match** the replaced exam in terms of programme availability to maintain scheduling balance.
- **Example Scenarios:**
 - **Low Impact Replacement:** If an Economics exam (available only to Economics students) is replaced by another Economics exam with similar restrictions, the timetable impact remains manageable.
 - **High Impact Replacement:** If an exam from a niche History course is replaced by a widely available Politics course exam (offered across multiple degree programmes), the new exam introduces a **greater mix of student schedules** and increases the likelihood of timetable clashes.
- **Key Considerations for Approval:**
 - The new exam's availability should **closely match** that of the withdrawn exam.
 - If the new exam is significantly more widely available, departments may need to justify its impact and propose mitigation strategies.

8. Submitting Proposals

- **New** or **modified courses** with exams must include a 'like for like' removal.
- For **new courses**, this should be detailed in the 'Assessment Rationale' field in the 'Teaching & Learning Design' tab.
- For **existing courses**, departments should contact TQARO via tqaro@lse.ac.uk before updating course data in **Akari** to confirm exam viability.