

University Managing Disruption to Online Assessment (IT Outage) Policy

The University policy for managing assessment processes in cases of information technology failure is set out below. This policy applies where there has been a significant IT outage, confirmed by IT Services, that materially impacts on student access to University systems for learning and for submission of assessment.

Where a planned outage is requested, the following staff should be consulted in advance to ensure there is no unintended disruption that materially impacts on student access to University systems for learning and for submission of assessment: Platform Owner (or nominee), Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee), Exams and Assessment, Educational Enhancement, IT Services, Library.

1. Potential solutions

In the event of a significant IT outage, the University will normally consider the merits of extending deadlines or of removing late submission penalties, or occasionally both. **Appendix 1** provides a summary of the pros and cons of both these solutions.

Any solution should also take the following factors into consideration:

- (i) loss of assessment preparation time for submissions and/or exams - students may not have been able to access study resources via Canvas or access their work on campus
- (ii) the types of assessment impacted - School Office submissions may have been affected as students are unable to access their work and/or print
- (iii) late submission deadlines falling on the day of the outage – both School Office and e-submission deadlines need to be considered

Table 1 sets out a protocol for the timeframes for extending deadlines.

Table 1

Outage period/severity	Extend deadline
Any IT outage period more than 48hrs before a submission deadline. IT outage period of less than 2hrs: between 48hrs and 2hrs of submission deadline. An intermittent IT outage period totalling less than 2 hours: between 48hrs and 2hrs of submission deadline.	No action
IT outage period exceeding 2hrs: between 48hrs and 2hrs of submission deadline. An intermittent IT outage period totalling at least 2 hours: between 48hrs and 2hrs of submission deadline. Any significant interruption to service within two hours of submission deadline.	Normally extend by 24hrs

IT outage period exceeding 5 hours up to 24hrs before a submission deadline.	Normally extend by 48hrs
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Other solutions may need to be considered should the IT outage continue for a longer period of time.

2. Decision-making

An executive decision will be made where a significant IT outage occurs. This ensures that a timely decision is made and that the same solution is agreed for all students across the University. An executive decision also enables the University to coordinate communication of the solution to students and allows for the solution to be implemented efficiently and in a timely manner.

The process for decision-making and the communication of decision is set out in **Appendix 2**.

3. Communication to students

The solution agreed following an IT outage will be communicated to students by the University. Methods of communication may include 'pushed notification' via mobile app to all students, Sussex Direct staff and student news items and/or email to affected students, where possible. Communication via email to student will also be copied to Heads of Schools. The communication will confirm whether the solution applies to electronic submissions only or also to submissions to the School Office. **Appendix 3** sets out points to clarify in the communication to students.

Review / Contacts / References	
Policy title:	Managing Disruption to Assessment (IT Outage) Policy
Date approved:	2018
Approving body:	University Education Committee
Last review date:	2023 (updates to Appendix 2 and addition of Appendix 4 and 5)
Revision history:	1.1
Next review date:	2026
Related internal policies, procedures, guidance:	Regulations for examinations and assessment : Academic standards : Academic Quality and Partnerships : University of Sussex
Policy owner:	Academic Services
Lead contact / author:	Deputy Director, Academic Services

Pros and cons of different solutions following IT outage

Solution	Pros	cons
Remove late penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easier for ITS to implement than extending deadlines. - If not known if system is fixed, may be easier than extending deadlines once and extending again if not fixed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If 7 day late penalty is removed, student has full 7 days late to submit without penalty which may impact on schedule for other assessments. - Perceived inequity by students who submitted on time and can no longer work on assessment as they will not be able to delete a file submitted by the deadline. - Error files cannot easily be removed (ITS need to remove file for student to upload new file within late submission period). - File submitted on time may be marked and then file replaced by student. - Fewer files available on time for marking, impacting on marking, internal and external moderation schedule. - Does not compensate for loss of work time for SSU students who have penalty waiver. - SSU students no longer have an advantage.
Extend deadline by 24/48hrs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Once deadline extended, student can replace error files by new deadline. - impact on schedule for other assessments and delay in work being available for marking is restricted to 24/48hrs. - SSU students have penalty waiver from new deadline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May be difficult to communicate to students if service unavailable. - May be difficult to update all deadlines quickly. - Students may remove file and not replace by new deadline incurring late penalty if file replaced during new late submission period. - Files available later for marking (but not as late if all penalties removed). - Deadline cannot be extended to a Friday for School Office submissions, as 24 hr late submission would not be possible.

Decision-making and communication

- (i) ITS confirm that there has been a major IT incident impacting on students' ability to submit assessments. This is sent for information to designated email group*. The purpose is to confirm that there is an issue and to confirm that next steps are being considered and will be confirmed shortly.
- (ii) Platform Owner (or nominee) sends an email to Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee) to confirm that there has been a major IT incident impacting on students ability to submit assessments. The purpose is to confirm that there is an issue and to instigate a mitigating action to be taken. In the event that both the Deputy Director of Academic Services and their nominee are unavailable, the Director for the Student Experience should be alerted.
- (iii) The Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee) consults with Student Administration Managers (Exams and Assessment Manager/ Academic Regulations Manager) and ITS (or nominees) and agrees the solution, in accordance with the policy.
- (iv) Where the IT incident has a duration of more than three consecutive days during the assessment submission period and/ or will not be resolved before University closure days, the Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee) will consult with the PVC Education and Students and agree a solution, in accordance with the policy.
- (v) The Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee) along with Student Administration Managers (Exams and Assessment Manager/ Academic Regulations Manager) and ITS, agree the communication to be sent to staff* and students to confirm the agreed solution, noting the points set out in Appendix 3.
- (vi) The Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee) will draft a report to ULT to advise of the issue, impact, agreed solution and any future actions to close the incident.

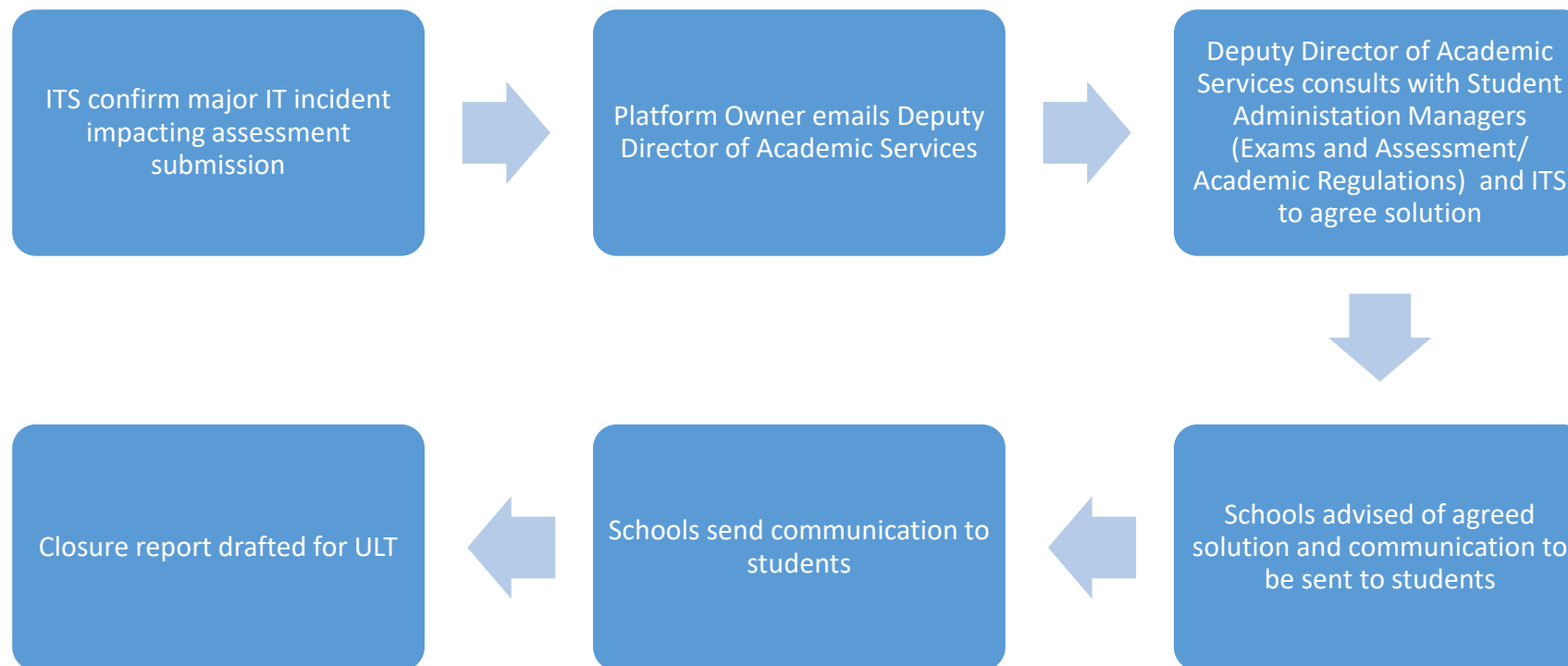
* PVC Education and Students, Head of Schools, Director of Teaching and Learning, Director of Student Experience, School Education Manager, Curriculum and Assessment Officer, Exams and Assessment, Academic Regulations, Student Complaints and Conduct, Educational Enhancement, IT Services, Library.

Communication of IT outage - points to remember in communications to students

1. Confirm that there has been an IT outage and whether or not normal service has resumed.
2. Confirm the duration of the outage if normal services has resumed.
3. Confirm the solution that has been agreed (extended deadlines and/or to remove late submission penalties).
4. Confirm which original deadlines the solution applies to (day/s and/or time).
5. Confirm if the solution applies to electronic submissions only or also to submissions to the School.
6. Advise students that any queries should be referred to the School Office.
7. If extended deadline confirm:
 - (i) the associated late submission deadline will also change
 - (ii) once the system has been updated, files can be replaced before the extended deadline
 - (iii) once the new deadline has passed and a submission is present in the system, a file may not be replaced
 - (iv) student should contact the School if they submitted the incorrect file during the late submission period
 - (v) when system will be updated with revised deadlines
8. If late submission penalties removed confirm:
 - (i) once a submission has been made by the original deadline or within the late submission period a file may not be replaced
 - (ii) student should contact the School if they could not replace a draft file submitted by the original deadline
 - (iii) student should contact the School if they submitted the incorrect file during the late submission period
 - (iv) original late submission deadline stands for students registered with the Student Support Unit who have a penalty waiver
 - (v) extended deadlines stand for students registered with the Student Support Unit, unless the deadline falls on the day of the outage
 - (vi) when late penalties will be removed

Decision flowchart

Note: Where the IT incident has a duration of more than three consecutive days during the assessment submission period and/ or will not be resolved before University closure days, the Deputy Director of Academic Services (or nominee) will consult with the PVC (Education and Students) and agree a solution, in accordance with the Policy.



Communication templates

Template to email circulation group (as detailed in policy) to be issued by ITS Platform Owner following identification of major IT incident impacting on students ability to submit assessments.

NEWS story:

We have received reports there is an issue with <Service name> which may impact students' ability to submit assessments.

We are investigating this as a matter of urgency.

Further updates

We can confirm this incident is impacting students' ability to submit assessments and have communicated this to the Deputy Director of Academic Services, who will be coordinating the next steps.

Template to Deputy Director of Academic Services

Dear [Deputy Director of Academic Services]

We have an <ongoing> issue with <Service name> which is impacting students' ability to submit assessments.

It started:

<It ended: >

Link to news story:

Can you start a Teams chat with the Student Administration Managers (Examination and Assessment Manager/ Academic Regulations Manager) and myself to discuss a solution and any mitigating actions?

Template to schools to be issued by Exams and Assessments Team following agreed solution to confirm course of action for acceptance/change to submission of student work

We have been notified by ITS of (ISSUE AFFECTING SUBMISSION) which is affecting submissions to Canvas between (DATE) and (DATE).

In line with the IT outage policy it has been determined that the appropriate course of action will be to (input solution and details):

- Extend submission by 24 hours
- Extend submission by 48 hours
- Alternative solution xxxx

In order to facilitate this the Exams and Assessments team will (input details specific to solution – examples below):

- Amend the submission deadlines to XXX for the modules with a deadline between the affected dates
- Amend submission points to school office for XXX
- Remove late penalties upon notification from schools of affected submissions

Communication to students on this matter have been/will be circulated via the mobile app, and student news items and/or email to affected students with a copy attached here.

Please note that students are not eligible to submit an EC claim or Academic Appeal on this basis as we are actively applying a corrective measure so as to not disadvantage them.

Any further update to the issue will be communicated via ITS news items. <Link to ITS news item>