# Southampton University and College Union

## Subject:    Marks Release Date and Workload Pressures on Staff

Southampton University and College Union would like to address an untenable workload issue for academic staff. The amount of time between the end of the assessment period and the marks release date is completely insufficient, creating significant stress and exhaustion amongst teaching staff and related admin staff.

We are bringing this to the JNC because the marks release dates are set centrally, as is the assessment period.

For 2021/22, the assessment period ends on the 10th June. Marks release is the 30th June.

Between those two dates, the following needs to happen within less than three weeks:

1. Teaching staff complete marking and moderating. Depending upon the individual teaching commitments of staff, a significant portion will have more than 70 scripts to mark, and others will have 100 to mark. The scripts will include module coursework, exams and UG dissertations, all of which can add up to more than 300,000 words to read and assess and then write comprehensive, fair, and useful feedback. Consequently, many staff have no choice but to mark well beyond a 35-hour week and into the weekends to complete marking on time. 'On time' will be much sooner than the marks release date because all scripts will need to be moderated by another member of staff, which takes at least two days, before they proceed through the following requirements which also need time.

2. Samples must be made available to external examiners (EE), who themselves need a reasonable amount of time for scrutiny. In order to access our students' work and prepare a robust and helpful report, the EEs need at least a week. Best practice would be at least ten days, but the short time between the assessment period and marks release makes this impossible.

3. After all marks are marked and moderated, the student office staff transfer marks to Banner. This requires a lot of time inputting them manually and ensuring all transfers of marks are correct. The student office must also process all the documentation for students with Special Considerations (Spec Cons) and extension applications.

4. All Academic Integrity cases must be dealt with by discipline AI officers, who will also be doing their own marking, and reported back to the tutor who marked the assignment before a final mark can be put into Banner. AI cases can take up to a month to resolve, and this may be on top of late submission for Special Considerations.

5. Special Considerations boards, pre-boards and a full Exam Board are held for each discipline/department. Each of these is, at minimum, two hours long or much longer depending upon the number of Spec Cons and extensions. They will be even longer this year for some departments with four year programmes (like Modern Languages and Literatures, for example) that need to conduct 'individual consideration' for all students

affected by the 19/20 academic year. These meetings need to take place across at least three separate days, and there will be academics staff who are Exams Officers and Director of Programmes who will need to attend all of them on top of their marking load.

6. Finally, classification decisions are processed and passed on to the awards team via the student office in times for marks release.

The above is simply not feasible in that timeframe. It puts an unreasonable burden on teaching staff, academic colleagues in Education admin roles (e.g. EOs and DoPs), student office colleagues and external examiners, creating unnecessary tension between them. All staff involved are extremely conscientious, but such time pressure inevitably means mistakes will be made. Furthermore, the extremely quick turnaround has EDI implications for disabled staff and those with caring responsibilities, who cannot work around the clock.

SUCU requests that the university move the marks release date to allow all staff involved a more reasonable timeframe in which to complete the heavy end of year marking workload as well as all the contingent administration that goes with it.