Dear Students,

The Coronavirus pandemic means that we are all experiencing unprecedented mandatory restrictions on everyday life. We hope that you and your families are safe. We appreciate that your studies here at Bristol are important to you - and that the present situation has added uncertainty and additional stress; but please rest assured that your Faculty staff have been working round the clock to protect your education as much as possible from the impact of recent events.

Since term finished on 18th March, Department, School and Faculty teams have been working to revise teaching and assessment to provide a robust set of measures that allow your programmes to continue during this challenging time, even though you may not be in Bristol and University buildings are now closed.

In a very short space of time your tutors, lecturers and support staff have had to adapt to a purely online environment, using Skype for business as our board room and project space. It has forced us to work at distance and to experience some of the challenges and complications you too will face in isolation this term. For us all, staff and students, this is unprecedented. The one thing that has been repeatedly reinforced in recent days is that you have a brilliant team of tutors, lecturers and support staff in your departments that care passionately about you and your education.

You should know that many of them have been working extremely hard to ensure your programmes can continue through this crisis.

If you think of our task as an engineering project, the design space is complex. Our faculty has hundreds of interconnected live units and assessments that are embedded in your programme designs. We have reviewed all of these in the past 7 days. Programme-level learning outcomes are the key competence points in your degree that are essential for professional accreditation and important for you as a future engineer. These have been the central elements of our thinking in the redesign of your learning and assessment for the Summer term. They are important to you for both progression and degree classification.

The balance has been for us to create a new assessment strategy to meet these key criteria to protect your professional development and the value of your degree while recognising the effects of the crisis. We are grateful for the ongoing dialogue with students and the feedback and these communications have contributed to the re-design of your remaining programme assessments.

This has been co-ordinated by the Faculty, but your Lecturers, Unit Directors and Programme Directors have done the detailed work to ensure the key learning outcomes will be appropriately assessed. Today you may feel bombarded by information from us and from the University, but we are doing our best to minimise this. Please read all the University guidance carefully, and most importantly, to explore all the support available to you should you need it.

Your Programme Directors will soon be in touch to explain the key topics and themes you need to focus on in the coming weeks. Importantly for third, fourth- and fifth-year students, your Departments will also clarify any new submission dates or arrangements for your major projects. In summary, for progression and the ratification of final awards, where we are satisfied that programme-level learning outcomes have been demonstrated on a unit or that they will be by future mandatory units, we have either removed the requirement for additional submission points on the unit or have consolidated assessments to reduce your workload. We may have also changed the nature of some
assessments in order to achieve this. Wherever possible we have eliminated unseen timed examinations that would usually require you to be physically present in an exam hall with a pen or in an engineering laboratory. This accommodates students in different time zones, those of you with caring responsibilities and the fact that you are all working in remote and non-ideal study environments.

Faculty staff will be spending the Easter vacation designing the online experience that will complete your academic year and lecture programmes. In terms of your personal assessment and requirements for the summer term the next important communication will come from your Department and Programme Directors setting out more detail in the context of your cohort and your degree. In time, more information about specific unit submission requirements and new deadlines will be introduced by your Unit Directors; but please note that some of your units are shared by multiple programmes. Not all students that are registered on a unit will be required to complete all unit-level assessments: it is now all about you and your programme of study.

FURTHER ADVICE, SUPPORT & QUESTIONS
We appreciate that many of you may have concerns about your studies and will want to contact staff to discuss these. University staff are working tirelessly to support you and are fully committed to support your academic success. In any correspondence please consider that those you contact are also working in isolation at home, often with caring responsibility and in remote and less than ideal working environments.

Please keep updated on the latest developments including a list of frequently asked questions through the University’s Coronavirus Advice Webpage and by regularly checking your emails which is now our main mode of communication with you. In the meantime, if you have any Faculty specific questions or concerns you can email engf-fem@bristol.ac.uk

Colin Dalton (Undergraduate Faculty Education Director) and Nicholas Howden (Graduate Education Director) on behalf of the COVID-19 Faculty Education Group