

All Student Email
Update on support with your academic studies (including assessment)
Monday 30 March

Dear Students

I am writing to give you an update on the work that is being done by staff at the University to support you with your academic studies (including arrangements for your learning and assessment) during the Covid-19 pandemic. Admittedly, this is a long communication but it contains information that I hope you will find helpful and reassuring; accordingly, I am asking you, please, to take the time to read it.

First, we recognise that this is an extremely challenging time for you, indeed for everyone. It is also completely understood and appreciated that each of us will be dealing with our own particular situations and have specific concerns and questions. Although no single institution has the definitive blueprint for dealing with the situation that we are in, I believe that we can, nevertheless, draw encouragement from the knowledge that our University community is characterised by staff and students working together and supporting each other to a high level; we will, I am confident, continue to do this to the best of our ability (recognising that – like any community and institution – we aren't perfect but also that we never cease trying to act in accordance with our values) throughout this difficult season. As we do this please know that we are mindful of, and wishing for, the wellbeing of every student and member of staff (and their loved ones). In addition, and when it comes to your academic progression and success (at whatever stage of your studies that you are currently at – starting, finishing or mid-way), I want to emphasise that the University is guided by a very clear principle that is at the heart of our student-centred ethos: ***We will not allow any student to be academically disadvantaged due to circumstances beyond their control (such as those relating to Covid-19)***. Please be reassured that it is this principle that is guiding us as we seek to do all that we possibly can to support you and that informs everything in this e-mail.

Second, I want to thank you – the collective student body – for the way in which you are working and communicating with University staff, including those in the academic areas within which your programme of studies is located. I have seen a number of messages from individual students expressing gratitude for the support that they are receiving from these staff. I would like to join you in acknowledging my colleagues across the University for all that they are doing to support you, including delivering teaching and tutorials online as well as dealing with the inevitable queries that will arise. We are grateful for your ongoing support and understanding as staff in your academic areas finalise any remaining new arrangements in relation to your studies following the move to online delivery of teaching and learning that we have needed to make. Given that students at Chichester are studying different subjects, with specific and varying requirements (including assessment requirements), and will also be at different points with their studies, **the primary way that we are choosing to communicate with you about arrangements is through the relevant staff in your academic area; they are best placed by far to update you on how the remainder of your programme this academic year will be delivered and about any changes that have/are being made**. Therefore, and as and when you have any queries about your academic studies, please can I encourage you to contact your Module Co-ordinators, Programme Co-ordinator or, if necessary, Head or Director of area in the first instance. They will continue to respond to you as quickly as possible offering guidance, practical support and reassurance. If they haven't already done so, staff in your academic area will, shortly, be confirming with you the assessments arrangements for each of your modules. In many cases, the assessment to be undertaken will remain the same as originally intended for each module. However, where – because of the specifics of the subject and/or module (to take one example: performance subjects/assessments) – changes have needed to be made to the

assessment the University has put in place a process to approve this and in order to assure academic quality, standards and transparency. All academic areas will have completed this process by the early part of this week (a considerable achievement given the size and complexity of the task) and will communicate with you as required as soon as possible after that. **What this means is that by the middle of this week you should know the specifics of all the assessments that you are being asked to undertake.**

Third, I wanted to give you particular reassurance in relation to how the University will be approaching your academic progression and success this academic year. Again, the principle here is that *we will not allow any student to be academically disadvantaged due to circumstances beyond their control*. Some of you have contacted us about approaches that you have become aware other universities are taking with their students (and, here, I want to note that most universities are not cancelling assessments but, rather, like us, are changing their assessments towards tasks that can, where the subject being studied permits, be completed remotely). We are aware of some of these approaches. However, and as I am sure you will appreciate, different universities operate with different systems, regulations and calculations/algorithms in relation to academic achievement. Given this, what one university decides to do may not work/'fit', or be appropriate or necessary at another. At the University of Chichester, our student-centred approach (one that informs our academic regulations on various aspects of assessment and academic outcomes) has always operated on the principle that we will not allow students to be disadvantaged academically due to circumstances beyond their control. Please be assured that this principle, alongside the closely related one of the primacy of the academic judgement of your lecturers - who we are completely confident will make appropriate decisions throughout the assessment process - means that we are in a strong position to support you at what we appreciate is a worrying time. **In summary, our current regulations and normal approach are flexible enough to guard against anyone being disadvantaged academically due to circumstances beyond their control. We remain committed to the success of every student.**

Fourth, and notwithstanding all of the above, the University continues - on a daily basis - to review how we can best support students, (including considering guidance that is being issued for the whole higher-education sector). For example, we have ensured that for the remainder of this academic year we have an appropriate and streamlined process for agreeing mitigating circumstances (given the extreme nature of our current situation). This process is now as follows: ***Given the current exceptional national and international situation, the University will be applying mitigating circumstances on your behalf for any modules that are failed during the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year. Accordingly, there is no need for you to submit either a mitigating circumstances claim, or related evidence, for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year.*** I know, of course, that you will be determined to continue to do all that you can in relation to completing and submitting your assessments but - if this is not possible - I hope you will find this decision reassuring. The University is committed to ensuring that we do all that we can to support you with all study related issues in as flexible a way as is possible and taking in to account the impact of the broader individual responsibilities and commitments that we know that you will have at this extraordinary time. **In other words, your programme team/lecturers will do all that they can to assist you in relation to the academic work that you are being asked to undertake in a way that also helps you to have every opportunity to complete your studies successfully and without undue delay.** This includes, to be agreed at the individual programme level, reasonable flexibility in relation to both specific whole module assessment submission dates and/or granting individual extensions for the submission of work (where the latter is requested by an individual). In addition to this, your programme team/lecturers will, if you request it, also help facilitate your communication with our library services and e-learning teams if you have any queries regarding accessing learning resources.

In conclusion, it is my hope that the contents of this e-mail provide you with reassurance and a sense of the University's total commitment to your progression and success. We will continue to do everything that we possibly can to support you – as fellow members of this learning community we can, and should, do no less for each other – and, in so doing, emerge from this current challenge intact and together.

Thank you for your understanding and for taking the time to read this communication.

With my very best wishes
Mark

Dr Mark Mason
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience)