

Update on further support with your academic studies and assessment [message from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor]

Dear students

Following on from my communication of Monday (30 March 2020) I am writing with another update on further measures that the University has put in place to support you with your academic studies and assessment during the Covid-19 pandemic.

This communication contains additional information that I hope you will find helpful and reassuring and I am, once again, asking you to take the time to read it. In particular, it contains information relating to how **we will not allow your average from Semester 2 2019-20 to negatively impact on your overall degree result at the end of your programme of studies**. This measure, as with everything else the University is doing to support you, has been informed and shaped by the principle that *we will not allow any student to be academically disadvantaged due to circumstances beyond their control* (such as those relating to Covid-19). We are doing all that we can to ensure that you are well prepared for the next stage of your studies or, in the case of final-year students, so that you can receive the degree that you have worked for on time.

1. For ALL students (undergraduate and postgraduate taught): A summary of the supportive measures that are already in place for you:

- We have moved to the online delivery of teaching and learning;
- Where changes have needed to be made to your assessments, these have been, or will be very shortly, communicated to you by your academic area;
- Our current University regulations are flexible and help in guarding against anyone being disadvantaged academically due to circumstances beyond their control;
- **Given the current exceptional 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.** *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.* This means that, where a module is failed (including through non-submission) then you will have an opportunity to submit the relevant assessment(s) one further time on a 'first-sit' basis. This will be at the summer 2020 assessment point (with the assessment[s] for that module remaining those that have been confirmed following any changes made in response to the Covid-19 situation) or at the subsequent January 2021 assessment point (with the assessment[s] for that module being confirmed by your academic area in due course). We appreciate that you will be determined to continue to do all that you can in relation to completing and submitting your assessments; however, we also recognise that, for some of you, this may not be possible for a range of reasons and, if so, we hope you will find this particular supportive measure reassuring;
- **We have emphasised the important principle of academic judgement.** This means that staff will make appropriate decisions that take account of the challenging context in which you will be preparing for and undertaking these assessments (including, for example, your reduced access to learning resources);
- **Your programme team 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.** They will be reasonable in reviewing module assessment submission dates and/or granting individual

extensions for the submission of work. This also includes, in particular cases that are agreed and offered by your academic area due to the specifics of the subject that you are studying (e.g. performance, or practice, based subjects), the deferral of particular assessments until a later point (i.e. one of our set assessment points/windows – later in the summer this year, or at the next point/window in January 2021). If you agree with your academic area to defer until the next academic year, then the form of the assessment may revert back to its original form; however, we cannot guarantee this at present.

2. For undergraduate students: In addition to the above, we are now also introducing the following supportive measures.

- Providing that you qualify to progress to the next level, or graduate, based on your marks obtained this year, including those obtained through assessments from the remainder of this current Semester 2 period, then we will ensure that your final academic year average is no less than the overall average that you have attained based on all of the other/remaining semesters that we would normally take in to account when calculating your degree award. **In other words, and at whatever level or stage of your studies you are currently at, we will not allow your average from Semester 2 2019-20 to negatively impact on your overall degree result at the end of your programme of studies; if it does then we won't include it and, instead, use the average of the other/remaining semesters when calculating your final degree result.** *If you achieve higher marks in assessments undertaken and submitted relating to the remainder of your Semester 2 study then you may be able to raise your mark for the year (and final average).* **Therefore, as long as you qualify to pass the year, completing remaining Semester 2 assessments can only be of benefit to you because we will not let the exceptional circumstances in which you are completing these assessments leave you with a mark below your overall average based on the other/remaining semesters that we would normally take in to account when calculating your degree result.** **In addition, for final year students in 2019/20, we will remove the requirement for your dissertation to be in the higher classification category when calculating your degree outcome.** All individual student transcripts will be accompanied by a note, as required, to explain this;

3. For final-year undergraduate students undertaking and submitting their Dissertation/Individual Project (or equivalent) in Semester 2, 2019-20:

- For final-year students who undertake and submit their Dissertation/Individual Project (or equivalent) in Semester 2 this academic year and receive a mark for that individual piece of work which is lower than their Semester 1 2019-20 average mitigating circumstances will apply and they will be given the following choice: (1) To accept the mark that they have been given and for their degree result to be calculated accordingly, or (2) To submit their Dissertation/Individual Project (or equivalent) one further time on a 'first-sit' basis and, if receiving a higher mark than on the previous attempt, for this mark to be used in calculating their degree result.

4. For students on particular programmes of study, including Postgraduate Taught (PGT) students:

We are continuing to develop our approach for students on particular programmes of study in the following situations:

- Where the majority of your assessment is through **modules that run across both semesters of the academic year;**
- Where your chosen programme of studies is subject to professional regulation (i.e. **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies [PSRB] requirements**). For those

programmes recognised by professional bodies, there will still be a need to align with assessment guidance that they provide; this will be evident in the details that your academic areas will communicate to you regarding assessments;

- Where students are on postgraduate-taught (PGT) programmes, such as Masters degrees, including those where assessments are normally due to be submitted in the autumn;
- **For PGT students undertaking and submitting their Dissertation/Individual Project (or equivalent) in the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year, we have introduced the following supportive measure:** *If you achieve a grade of at least 'A' in the majority of taught modules (equivalent to at least 120 credits), you will be awarded a Master's degree with Distinction irrespective of the grade you achieve in your dissertation. Similarly, if you achieve a grade of at least 'B' in the majority of taught modules (equivalent to at least 120 credits), you will be awarded a Master's degree with Merit, irrespective of the grade you achieve in your dissertation.*

If any of these situations applies to you, your academic area (Programme Co-ordinator or Head/Director) will provide you with further guidance as soon as possible (if they have not already done so).

Of course, while this challenging time lasts, we may have to adapt our approach set out above so as to respond effectively to events as they unfold (including additional guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency and the Office for Students). We will communicate any further measures as clearly and openly as we can. We will adhere to both the principle of not allowing students to be disadvantaged academically due to circumstances beyond their control and our duty to maintain the standards of our awards. Accordingly, we will carry on doing our very best to respond to challenges as they arise.

Our hope is that the contents of this e-mail provide you with further 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 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.

Once again, thank you for your understanding and for taking the time to read this communication.

With my very best wishes

Mark

Dr Mark Mason
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