

The University of Exeter No-Detriment Policy for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Students with respect to the Global Covid-19 Pandemic

This Policy to Apply to All Taught Student Assessments Undertaken in the Academic Year 2019/20

1. Principles

Since we communicated the no detriment policy on 25th March we have been working through the detailed processes required to operate the 'safety net' in practice across the wide diversity of our degree programmes. As we said, **our aim is to ensure the fairness and integrity of the Exeter award, as well as to support our students through this difficult situation in a way that allows them to progress or be awarded.**

We will use the concept of the 'safety net' to do what we can to ensure that students receive an award or stage average that accurately reflects their academic attainment during their time on their course, unimpaired by the current Covid-19 crisis. We can justify doing this because students have already undertaken many assessments that have measured their attainment. This record of attainment will be used to set the *benchmark* against which we will assess their summer performance.

The *benchmark* forms the safety net because students will not be awarded a credit-weighted mean mark for the year lower than the *benchmark*, as long as they qualify to pass the stage*.

It is very important that the *benchmark* is both fair and robust (to be defensible in relation to integrity of the award). This means that the *benchmark* must be based on *several* assessments, just as the award is based on several assessments. This prevents marks on a small number of assessments from biasing the award. On some degree programmes, we do not have enough assessment marks from this academic year prior to the 15th March cut-off to create a robust *benchmark*. To be fair, we need to calculate *benchmarks* in the same way for degree programmes with widely differing proportions of assessment undertaken in the academic year after 15th March. This policy below outlines how we will address this and its complexity reflects the diversity of programmes and progress through those programmes that students have reached.

Along with other Russell Group universities, we are doing everything we can to make the case to professional bodies to be as accommodating as possible under these circumstances. **Please note that in some circumstances programmes subject to professional regulation may not be permitted to apply this policy.** If this is the case students will be communicated with separately by their respective College. Now that we have completed development of the policy, we will propose it to the regulatory bodies for approval.

The Key Elements of the policy are as follows:

- a) The *benchmark* will be based on actual achievement from the current academic stage as far as possible.
- b) In order for the *benchmark* to be reliable, it will be based on a mean mark derived from sufficient credit (equivalent to half the total credits of the relevant stage; a stage equates to an academic year for full-time students).
- c) If insufficient credit has been accumulated in the current stage, achievement in the previous University of Exeter-based stage will be included within the calculation.

- d) If there was no prior University of Exeter-based stage, then the *benchmark* will be *provisional* until, in the case of Postgraduate Taught students (PGTs), sufficient credit has been accumulated to confirm the *benchmark*.
- e) The *benchmark* will be calculated and applied after all other normal assessment processes have been completed (e.g. condonement, mitigation, scaling, and late penalties). Please see the relevant policies for further details.
- f) For students who pass the current stage during 2019/20 academic year, the credit-weighted mean for all assessments contributing to the stage (academic year for full-time students) will be compared to the *benchmark*, and the higher of these two results will be used as their overall result for the stage*.
- g) The student transcript will be annotated to reflect this policy.

* See Section 3 for limitations with respect to penalties for academic misconduct.

2. Calculation of the Benchmark

In normal years, we calculate your credit-weighted mean for the stage based on all of the summative assessments taken during that stage. For undergraduate and integrated masters programmes this is 120 credits worth of assessment, for 1-year Masters programmes this is 180 credits worth of assessment. The number of credits per programme stage can be found in the [Credit and Qualifications Framework](#).

In calculating *benchmarks*, we will follow an approach as close as possible to our normal processes, but taking into account the fact that students have not had a chance to accumulate all of their credits. We will do this by **doubling** the credit-weighting of assessments submitted during the present stage of a student's programme up to 15th March 2020. Therefore:

- i. If students have completed at least half of their stage credits through assessments submitted on or prior to 15th March 2020, we will use the 2019/20 marks alone to calculate the *benchmark*.
- ii. If students have completed less than half of their stage credits through assessments submitted on or prior to 15th March 2020, we will use all of their 2019/20 credits (*double-weighted*) and, where possible, we will make up the remaining credits necessary to calculate a *benchmark* by using their credit-weighted mean mark for the last academic stage studied at the University of Exeter. Note: because the credit-weighted mean marks for a whole stage (academic year for a full-time programme) are composed of many individual assessment marks, they are highly robust measurements of prior performance.
- iii. If students have completed less than half of their stage credits through assessments submitted on or prior to 15th March 2020, and we cannot make up the remaining credits from prior University of Exeter-based stages (for example, students on a single-stage, typically 1-year, programme or who are in the first stage of a multi-stage programme) we will use only this stage's assessments to calculate a *provisional benchmark*. This *provisional benchmark* will be compared with the marks in the same way as the full *benchmark*; however, in the event that performance in the summer examination and assessment period falls very substantially below the *benchmark*, Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs) (exam boards) will have discretion to allow marks that fall below the *benchmark* to stand.

For Taught Postgraduate Students, the same principles apply (although only i or iii above are possible on 1-year single-stage programmes); however, we have the opportunity to establish or increase a firm benchmark after the June APACs, before dissertations and other remaining assessments are completed. Therefore, at APACs in June, we will re-calculate the *credit-weighted mean* using all results on the degree programme up to that point in time. We will then establish the benchmark that will apply at the final September APACs; the following outcomes will be possible:

- A firm *benchmark* will be established if at present only a *provisional benchmark* is possible;
- The *benchmark* that applies at the June APAC will be confirmed and unchanged where a firm *benchmark* already exists and the summer examination and assessment results do not merit an increase in the *benchmark*;
- The *benchmark* will be increased where a firm *benchmark* already exists and the credit-weighted mean of summer examinations and assessments exceeds that pre-existing *benchmark*.

To reiterate, the firm benchmark established at the June APACs is the one that will be applied in decisions regarding final classification as described in the next section.

3. How will the benchmark be used?

Passing the stage is a pre-requisite for benefitting from the *benchmark*. (For part-time students, in the first year of a two-year stage, this will mean passing the year.) The *benchmark* is used at the level of the credit-weighted mean for the stage after all normal assessment processes have been completed and a credit-weighted mean has been derived through standard methods of calculation. At this point two outcomes are possible:

- a) If the credit-weighted mean of confirmed marks for all assessments that contribute to the stage exceeds the *benchmark*, then the credit-weighted mean will be the overall stage result.
- b) If the credit-weighted mean of confirmed marks for all assessments that contribute to the stage is lower than the *benchmark*, then the *benchmark* will be the overall stage result.

A confirmed assessment mark is the assessment mark calculated after all of our normal processes have been undertaken, such as scaling (where necessary), penalties for late submission, Academic Misconduct penalties, etc. The June Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs) (exam boards) confirm these marks. In terms of Academic Misconduct the following will apply:

- a) For work submitted before the 15th March 2020, if a mark is affected by academic misconduct, then the mark attained once the penalty has been taken into consideration (e.g. pass mark or zero) will be used in the calculation of the *benchmark*.
- b) For work submitted after 15th March 2020, academic misconduct penalties should continue to be applied where necessary. If a mark is affected by academic misconduct, then it is the mark attained once the academic misconduct has been taken into consideration (e.g. pass mark or zero) that is taken as the confirmed assessment mark, and the mark associated with this *module* will not be raised under the 'no detriment policy'.
- c) Appeals on the grounds of retrospective mitigation will need evidence to demonstrate why they were not able to apply for mitigation at the time.
- d) Students will not be permitted to re-litigate issues from previous stages in order to improve their previous stage averages for consideration within *benchmark* calculations.

- e) Late submissions applied before 15th March 2020 will be used in the calculation of the *benchmark*. Late submission penalties applied after 15th March 2020 will be uplifted by benchmark, if appropriate.

Using the *benchmark* at the level of the credit-weighted mean for the stage is the most justifiable approach because the *benchmark* is a measure of overall performance, and is, therefore, only suitable for comparison with the credit-weighted stage mean. We considered using the *benchmark* at the level of individual assessments, but this cannot be justified methodologically and would also run the risk of final stage result or degree classifications being excessively influenced by a small number of assessments. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that we will closely examine individual assessment marks in the summer APACs. Where APACs consider that student performance in an individual assessment is anomalous, and will have a material impact on a student's degree classification, either this year or subsequently, they have discretion to apply the *benchmark* to individual examination or assessment results, with the effect of raising an individual's credit-weighted stage mean. In the light of this year's exceptional circumstances APACs will be especially mindful of these powers and will use them where appropriate. For further information, see <http://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/aph/assessmentprogression/>.

4. Benchmark estimator

The policy may seem complex (although at its heart it is fairly simple) and, therefore, we have provided some hypothetical examples to illustrate how it will work. These can be found [here](#) and are appended to this document.

This section is provided to help *estimate* a *benchmark*. The correct *benchmark* can only be calculated when assessment marks have been fully confirmed by the June Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs). The roman numerals refer to the cases described in section 2.

For case (i), the *Benchmark* is the credit-weighted mean mark for the assessments submitted in the current academic stage (2019/20 academic year for full-time students) before 15th March 2020.

For case (iii), the Provisional *Benchmark* is the credit-weighted mean mark for the assessments submitted in the current academic stage (2019/20 academic year for full-time students) before 15th March 2020.

For case (ii): where students have completed less than half of their stage credits through assessments submitted on or prior to 15th March 2020 and we can make up the remaining credits necessary to calculate a benchmark.

Information needed:

- The credit-value of the assessments that you have taken in your current academic stage (2019/20 academic year for full-time students) and submitted before 15th March 2020 – call this **A**.

- Your credit-weighted mean mark for the assessments that you have taken in your current academic stage (2019/20 academic year for full-time students) and submitted before 15th March 2020 – call this **B**.
- Your credit-weighted mean from your last academic stage (2018-19 academic year for full time students) studied at Exeter (you can find this in the Student Record System (SRS)) - call this **C**.

For programmes with 120 credits per stage, to estimate your benchmark:

- Find the row in the table below for which the value A is closest to the value D.
- Read off the value of E and F for that row.
- Multiply your value of B by E to create the result G
- Multiply your value of C by F to create the result H
- The estimate of your *benchmark* is equal to G + H

D. Credits accumulated in current stage (academic year for full-time students)	E	F
60 or more	1.00	0.00
55	0.92	0.08
50	0.83	0.17
45	0.75	0.25
40	0.67	0.33
35	0.58	0.42
30	0.50	0.50
25	0.42	0.58
20	0.33	0.67
15	0.25	0.75
10	0.17	0.83
5	0.08	0.92
0	0.00	1.00

The mathematical formulation is as follows:

$$\text{Benchmark} = \lambda B + (1 - \lambda) C$$

$$\lambda = \min(2A, 120)/120$$

A, B and C are defined as above.

5. Frequently Asked Questions

a.) How can the minimum number of credits be achieved?

In order to achieve the credit minimum, credit can be accumulated from individual assessment components across a number of modules. It is not necessary to have completed all assessments for a module for the assessments to count.

b.) What if students have achieved more than half of the credits for their current stage?

The *benchmark* will be the credit-weighted mean of *all* assessments submitted before the 15th March 2020.

c.) How will the *benchmark* be applied for first year, direct entry second year, and part-time PGTs in their first year of study at the University of Exeter if they have not achieved half of their stage credits?

For all such students, we will create a *provisional benchmark* using all the credits accumulated during the current stage. This *provisional benchmark* will be compared with the marks in the same way as the full *benchmark*; however, in the event that performance in the summer examination and assessment period falls very substantially below the *benchmark*, Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs) (exam boards) will have discretion to allow marks that fall below the *benchmark* to stand. If an APAC decides to do so, then a clear justification must be provided to students.

d.) How long does this *no detriment policy* last?

We have taken the decision to extend the 'no detriment' policy to all undergraduate and postgraduate taught assessments which fall in the 2019/20 academic year; however, please note that in some circumstances programmes subject to professional regulation may not be permitted to apply the policy above. Now that we have worked through the detail of the policy, we will propose its application to the regulatory bodies and notify affected students of any further development.

e.) What about students who are currently failing?

The *benchmark* calculation will be based on marks which students have already accrued for work submitted up to 15th March 2020; if the *benchmark* is below a pass mark, then it cannot be applied because students will need to have passed the stage (or year, in the case of first year part-time PGT students) in order for the 'no detriment' policy to apply. In such cases the credit-weighted stage mean will be calculated using all marks for the stage confirmed at the June APAC.

f.) Is it possible to create a calculator so students can calculate their own *benchmark*?

We have provided guidance to assist you to *estimate* what your *benchmark* will be. We will not be able to publish *benchmarks* in advance of the June APACs.

g.) Can you pass the stage if you fail a module? Do the normal condonement rules apply? How will they be applied?

The standard condonement rules as set out in the Assessment, Progression and Awarding Handbook will continue to apply to all assessments. In order for the 'no detriment' policy to apply, students will need to have achieved a stage/year pass – this includes condoned credit (where permissible according to programme regulations). If a non-condonable module is failed at the first attempt and passed at the referral stage in August, the individual mark will be capped at a pass as usual; however, the credit-weighted stage mean can still be raised to the *benchmark* once a pass is achieved for the stage.

Condonement is the process that allows students to be awarded credit in order to allow for progression or award, despite failing to achieve a pass mark at a first attempt of a module. Programme specifications provide information on which modules are condonable (not all modules are condonable). Students are not entitled to reassessment on a condoned credit. Condonement is only applied in order to allow for progression

or award. For further information, see <http://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/aph/progression/>

- h.) If students have had mitigating factors (i.e. varying performance due to a chronic and acute ongoing condition), which impacted upon their performance prior to the *benchmark* census date (15th March 2020), will the usual avenues to apply for mitigation be open to them?

The *benchmark* will be calculated based on marks confirmed by the APACs (following due consideration of mitigation applications). Only once the normal/ standard process has been completed will the *benchmark* be calculated and compared to the credit-weight stage mean.

- i.) How will this be reflected on student transcripts? Will an explanation of the policy be made available for prospective employers?

Marks will be recorded on transcripts with any differences explained between the individual component marks and the final stage result.

- j.) Are PGT examinations/assessments covered by the 'no detriment' policy? How will this work, especially with PGT dissertations?

For Taught Postgraduate Students, the same principles apply (although only i or iii are possible on 1-year single-stage programmes). Therefore, at Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committees (APACs) (exam boards) in June, we will re-calculate the *benchmark* using results obtained during the summer term examination and assessment period. The re-calculated *benchmark* will apply to all remaining assessments after the June APACs until the end of the academic year. The following outcomes will be possible as a result of the re-calculation of the benchmark:

- A firm *benchmark* will be established using all summative assessments accumulated so far in the academic stage (if at present only a *provisional benchmark* is possible);
- The same *benchmark* will be confirmed and unchanged where a firm *benchmark* already exists and the summer examination and assessment results do not merit an increase in the *benchmark*;
- The *benchmark* will be increased where a firm *benchmark* already exists and the credit-weighted mean of summer examinations and assessments exceed that pre-existing *benchmark*.

- k.) How can we mitigate the lost learning / research opportunities associated with laboratory work, field work, archival access for dissertations or other assessments?

Separate discussions will need to take place with tutors/supervisors in order to determine whether deferral or interruption would be the best course of action, or whether the programme of study could be defined so that it does not rely on currently inaccessible resources and opportunities.

- l.) How can we manage potential delay to progression for students on 1+3 programmes (PGR) programmes, particularly those with research council funding?

We are currently working with the Doctoral College and the Russell Group in order to support students in this position.

- m.) Are we able to offer interruptions and/ or deferrals if necessary?

Yes, if this is the decision taken by the student following discussions with tutors/supervisors.

- n.) If students successfully appeal marks post-APAC, resulting in a mark (gained before 15th March 2020) being raised, will the *benchmark* and overall outcome be recalculated?

Yes.

- o.) What about students on repeat years?

Students who are currently repeating a stage will have their credit-weighted mean calculated using credits achieved in their current stage, not their first attempt. If the

credit-weighted mean from a previous stage is required to be included in the *benchmark* calculation, this will be the previous stage, not the previous year/ first attempt at the current stage.

p.) **How will students be affected where they have taken modules relating to a higher/ lower level than that of their current stage?**

Students taking modules relating to a higher/ lower level than that of their current stage will be treated in the same way as those taking modules which align with their current stage and level.

No Detriment-Policy Examples

The policy may seem complex (although at its heart it is fairly simple) and, therefore, these hypothetical examples are provided to illustrate how it works. They are written as if FAQs.

First, some undergraduate examples for a typical 3 year programme in which the final year mark has a weighting of 2 and the second year a weighting of 1 in the degree classification calculation.

I have got consistent 2.1 marks in my second year and final year, what does it mean for me?

- You don't need to worry about calculating the benchmark because it will be in the 2.1 class and, when combined with your 2.1 performance in the 2nd year, your degree mark will be in the 2.1 degree class as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties

I have got consistent 1st class marks in my second year and final year, what does it mean for me?

- You don't need to worry about calculating the benchmark because it will be in the 1st class and, when combined with your 1st class performance in the 2nd year, your degree mark will be in the 1st class as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties

I have a stage mean of 68 for the second year and have completed 25% of my final year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 75; what does it mean for me?

- Your benchmark for the final year is 71.5 $[(68 * 0.5) + (75 * 0.25 * 2)]$. If you don't improve on the benchmark, your degree mark will be in the 1st class $[(68 + 71.5 + 71.5)/3 = 70.3]$ as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties

I have a stage mean of 58 for the second year and have completed 50% of my final year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 65; what does it mean for me?

- Your benchmark for the final year is 65 (you have completed enough credits). If you don't improve on the benchmark, your degree mark will be in the 2.1 class $[(58 + 65 + 65)/3 = 62.7]$ as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties

I know I am borderline, have a stage mean of 68 for the second year and have completed 50% of my final year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 71; what does it mean for me?

- Your benchmark for the final year is 71 (you have completed enough credits). If you don't improve on the benchmark, your degree mark will be in the 1st class $[(68 + 71 + 71)/3 = 70]$ as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties

I know I am on the 2.1 borderline; I have a stage mean of 58 for the second year and have completed 25% of my final year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 60; what does it mean for me?

- Your benchmark for the final year is 59 $[(58 * 0.5) + (60 * 0.25 * 2)]$. You are still borderline and on these marks, if you don't improve on the benchmark, your degree mark will be in the 2.2 class $[(58 + 59 + 59)/3 = 58.7]$ as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties. However, remember the benchmark is a safety-net and you have a lot of summer assessments in which to achieve the improvement you are looking for. Furthermore, exam boards (APACs) always look carefully at borderline candidates and, naturally, will give these special focus this year given the exceptional circumstances.

I am a second year and have a stage mean of 55 for the 1st year but have stepped up this year because I know it counts towards my degree classification; I have completed 50% of my second year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 65; what does it mean for me?

- Your benchmark for the second year is 65 (you have completed enough credits). If you don't improve on the benchmark, your stage mark will be 65 as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties

I am a second year and have a stage mean of 55 for the 1st year but have stepped up this year because I know it counts towards my degree classification; I have completed 25% of my second year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 65; what does it mean for me?

- Your benchmark for the second year is 60 $[(55 * 0.5) + (65 * 0.25 * 2)]$. Of course, you can still improve on this in the summer assessments as you have several to come and once you have a full set of second year marks, we don't need to use the 1st year marks. However, if you don't improve on the benchmark, your stage mark will still be in the 2.1 class because it will be set to your benchmark as long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties.

I am a first year and I have completed 35% of my first year credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 65; what does it mean for me?

- You have a provisional benchmark of 65. It is provisional because you haven't completed 50% of your credits. The June APAC will look at your performance in the summer assessment and as long as it is close to your provisional benchmark they will set your overall stage result at whichever is higher, your credit-weighted mean for the year (stage) or your provisional

benchmark. This is all so long as you complete and pass the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties. If the APAC considers that performance between March and June is significantly lower than the provisional benchmark they have discretion to set your overall stage result at a mark lower than the provisional benchmark; if they do, you will be provided with the justification for this decision.

Second, postgraduate programmes are more complicated but here are 2 examples for a typical 1 year programme.

I am a postgraduate student and I have completed 35% of my credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 55, I will complete another 35% of credits by June and submit my dissertation, which is worth 30% of my credits, in September; what does it mean for me?

- You have a provisional benchmark of 55. It is provisional because you haven't completed 50% of your credits. The June APAC will look at your performance in the summer assessment, by which time you will have completed more than 50% of your credits. As long as your performance between March and June is close to the provisional benchmark they will set your firm benchmark at whichever is higher, your credit-weighted mean for the year up to that point or your provisional benchmark as long as you are not subject to academic misconduct penalties. If the APAC considers that performance between March and June is significantly lower than the provisional benchmark they have discretion to set the firm benchmark lower than the provisional benchmark. However, if they do so, you will be provided with the justification for this decision.
- When you have completed your dissertation, as long as you have completed and passed the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties, your degree mark will be set to whichever is higher, your credit-weighted mean for the whole year or your firm benchmark.

I am a postgraduate student and I have completed 50% of my credits with a mean (weighted by credits) of 65, I will complete another 20% of credits by June and submit my dissertation, which is worth 30% of my credits, in September; what does it mean for me?

- You have a benchmark of 65. The June APAC will compare your credit-weighted mean for the year (stage), based on all your assessments to that point, with the benchmark. As long as you are not subject to academic misconduct penalties, if your credit-weighted mean is higher than your benchmark the exam board will increase your benchmark to your new, higher credit-weighted mean mark; otherwise your benchmark will be unchanged.
- When you have completed your dissertation, as long as you have completed and passed the year and are not subject to academic misconduct penalties, your degree mark will be set to whichever is higher, your credit-weighted mean for the whole year or your benchmark.

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This policy must be confirmed by the Senate of the University of Exeter in May 2020. This may result in refinements to the presentation, however, it is important to state that the fundamental elements of the policy and decisions within it have been approved by the Education Executive and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group of the University of Exeter.