



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

University
Secretary's
Office.

The Council, 13 July 2020

Report of the Senate

Date: 24 June 2020
Chair: The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC)
Secretary: Dr T Strike

For decision

1. Degree Outcomes Statement

- 1.1 Senate received, and recommends to Council the adoption and publication of a Degree Outcomes Statement.

A paper providing fuller detail for Council, which underpins the degree outcomes statement and covers the prompts (see italics) provided by a QAA checklist is attached as Appendix 1.

For information

2. President & Vice-Chancellor's report

- 2.1 The President & Vice-Chancellor (P&VC) presented the report, including:
- (a) Student Number Controls: The Department for Education had confirmed the University's temporary student number cap. The University was working with representative bodies and mission groups to advocate against student number controls becoming a long-term measure.
 - (b) COVID-19 sector support: Michelle Donelan, Universities Minister, had said it was unlikely there would be additional funding for the HE sector. The feedback received to date on the Ministerial University Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce was somewhat mixed. The University was currently working on the assumption that no further support would be forthcoming.
 - (c) Immigration: The Immigration Bill, and the new immigration system it introduces, was due to come into force in January 2021. The specific details of the new points-based immigration system for students and staff was not yet available. Students arriving in the UK after 1 January 2021 would apply for a visa under the new arrangements.
 - (d) Planning: Departments and Professional Services would see a 15% budget reduction for 2020/21. Dependent on student recruitment for 2020/21 further actions could be required and work would take place to prepare further options that could be utilised, if required.

2.2 Discussion focussed on student recruitment and scenario planning.

3. Academic quality, standards and the student experience during the coronavirus pandemic:

3.1 Senate considered the following:

(i) Leadership, Management, Governance and Assurance during the COVID-19 crisis, including meeting Office for Students requirements

Senate received a noted a report which set out the operating arrangements for Council and Senate assurance based on the leadership, governance and management arrangements which have been adopted during the University's emergency planning and response to COVID-19.

This report is provided to Council under agenda item 12.

(ii) Managing the impact of COVID-19 on Learning and Teaching

Senate received and noted a report which set out the approach that had been taken to managing the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learning, teaching and assessment and summarised key decisions.

This report is provided to Council under agenda item 13.

(iii) Safety Net Policy

Senate received and approved a Safety Net Policy for achievement to be reliably assessed including appropriate alternative arrangements for assessment and awards, including for marking and moderation.

It was highlighted that policy supported students and recognised the potentially large impact of COVID-19 on their studies and outcomes. It aimed to offer assurance to students on their performance to date, and was broadly in line with other providers in the sector.

(iv) Postgraduate Research Student Support

Senate received and noted the report. It was highlighted that the University had been able to support final year UKRI-funded PGR students who had requested extensions. The University had agreed to extend the scheme to PGR students that received a full or part-stipend from the University, and would then consider support for international PGR students.

(v) Student Support

Senate received and noted the report. Attention was drawn to the impacts on different groups of students, which had informed planning for the next academic year. The University has sought to support students whether they remained in Sheffield, were in other parts of the UK or the world.

4. Review of Student Protection Plan

4.1 Senate considered and approved the updated version of the University's Student Protection Plan (SPP) for submission to the Office for Students for its approval and subsequent publication. The University had updated its SPP to be a single unified plan covering the University and the International Faculty.

5. MA in Legal Practice Course and Graduate Diploma in Law

5.1 Senate approved the discontinuation of the MA in Legal Practice (LPC) and the Graduate Diploma in Law (GDL), noting, subject to consideration by the Council, the transfer of the

existing provision to the University of Law (UoL). Discussion focused on future consultation with students and their rights under the published SPP.

The matters for Council consideration are under agenda item 17.

6. Withdrawal of Degrees and Distinctions Procedure

- 6.1 Senate considered and approved a new procedure, which would apply to all taught students.

7. Briefing for Senate on the Council Effectiveness Review

- 7.1 Senate received a briefing and noted the Council Effectiveness Review and that the views of Senate Members would be sought through a questionnaire.

8. Update on the Review of Senate sub-committees

- 8.1 Senate considered whether it wished financial matters to continue to be briefed in a separate Senate Budget Committee that reports to Senate or whether it would prefer for financial presentations to be given directly to the Senate. Senate agreed to receive a further proposal on a hybrid model.

9. Amendments to Regulations on the Use of Computing Facilities

- 9.1 Senate considered and approved amendments to Regulation XXIV.

10. Report of the Council

- 10.1 Senate received a report on the meetings of Council held on 24 February and 27 April 2020.

11. Reports of committees

11.1 Committees of Senate

- 11.1.1 Senate approved the reports of the following committees:

- (a) Research Ethics Committee
(Meeting held on 13 May 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including the impact of Covid-19 on research ethics; concerns regarding the use of 'comments' when ethics reviewers approve applications; new guidance and arrangements for ethical review of pedagogical research, the cancellation of the majority of UREC-funded projects for 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

- (b) Senate Academic Assurance Committee
(Meeting held on 9 June 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including the proposed approach to the Annual Academic Assurance Report. Attention was drawn to the Committee's role in aiding Senate to provide assurance to Council on academic standards and quality.

- (c) Senate Budget Committee
(Meeting held on 4 June 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, which covered the Quarterly Financial Report for the quarter ending 30 April and the projected year end surplus, and the Committee's discussion with the Chief Financial Officer. Discussion at Senate focused on the institution's approach to reducing costs.

(d) Senate Learning and Teaching Committee
(Meeting held on 13 May 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including:

- (i) Changes to the complaints procedure
- (ii) Changes to Regulation XIV, paragraph 57 (Study for Other Degrees)
- (iii) Changes to Regulation XIV, to reflect terminology used for the new student record system (SITS)
- (iv) Revision to Regulation XXII relating to the Discipline of Students
- (v) Revision to General Regulation XV, paragraph 59 (Award of Merits and Distinctions for Foundation Degrees)
- (vi) A revised Taught Session Recording Policy
- (vii) New, significantly amended, discontinued and suspended programmes approved by Faculties

Discussion covered the approach to sexual violence related complaints.

(e) Senate Research and Innovation Committee
(Meeting held on 13 May 2020)

Senate received and approved the Report, including:

- (i) A new policy on Posthumous or Aegrotat Awards for Postgraduate Research Students
- (ii) Amendments to Regulation XVI: General Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research
- (iii) PGR Supervision: Overarching Principles for Mandatory CPD
- (iv) Update to the Research Data Management Policy

(f) Senate Nominations Committee
(Meeting held on 1 June 2020)

Senate received and approved the report, including approval of the appointment and reappointment of Senate representatives on University committees.
Discussion focused on the diversity of views of committee members.

11.2 Joint Committees of the Senate and Council

(a) Honorary Degrees Committee

Senate received and noted the Report.

SENATE, 24 JUNE 2020

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD DEGREE OUTCOMES STATEMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 The UK higher education sector has agreed a number of steps to protect and demonstrate the value of university qualifications, to be more transparent and to ensure confidence from students, employers, and the wider public. These are set out in the statement of intent, published by Universities UK in May 2019, which calls on providers to meet four specific commitments:

- Ensure assessments continue to stretch and challenge students
- Review and explain how final degree classifications are calculated
- Support and strengthen the external examiners system
- Review and publish data and analysis on students' degree outcomes

1.2 Subsequently, in late 2019, the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA) with Universities UK (UUK), GuildHE and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) published:

- Guidance on producing a degree outcomes statement by the end of 2019-20
- A common degree classification framework, which will act as a reference point for providers by describing high-level attributes expected of a graduate to achieve a particular degree. This is Annex D of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

1.3 During 2019-20 work has been undertaken to review the institutional degree classification profile and to share five-year breakdowns with Faculties and departments to look at any underlying trends or factors. Quality and Scrutiny Committee reviewed this information and the draft degree outcomes statement in March 2020. It was noted that contextual information from departments was needed to understand the data.

1.4 In addition a review has taken place of the existing University outcomes criteria and degree classification descriptors with reference to Annex D of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). An updated version was agreed by Senate in March 2020.

2. What is a degree outcomes statement?

The key features of a degree outcomes statement are that it is a brief, high level report (approx. 3 sides of A4), written in plain non-technical language and it should include:

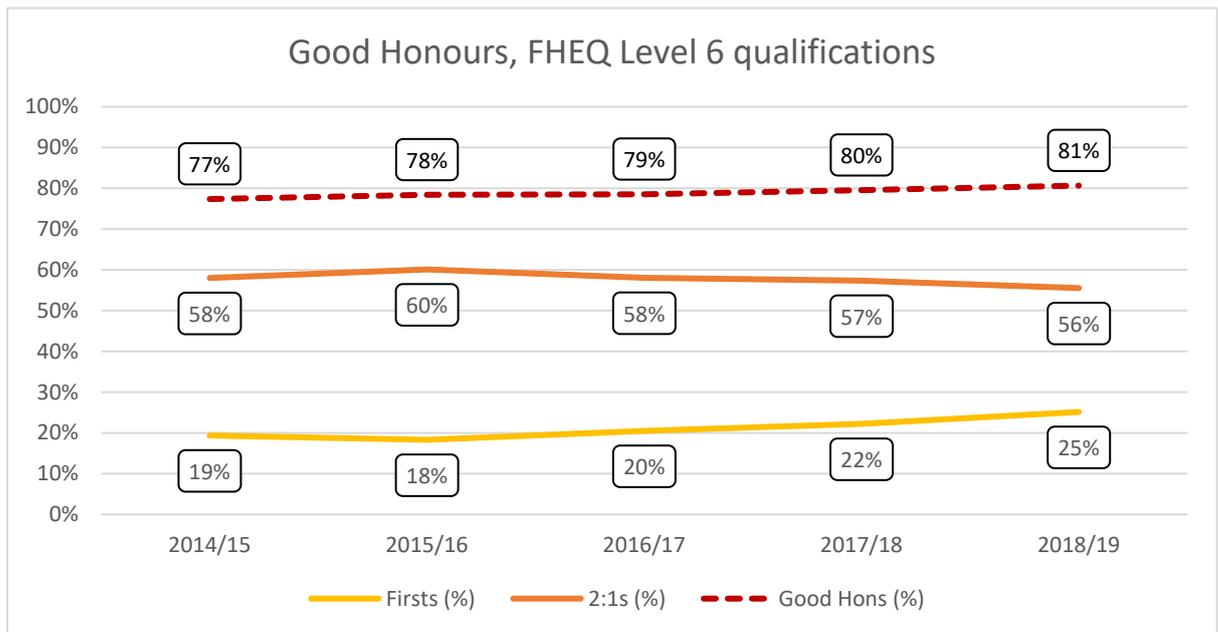
- The institutional degree classification profile over 5 years for **FHEQ Level 6** awards, with explanation of any trends, or marked changes
- Academic governance, assessment and marking practices, teaching practices and learning resources
- The algorithm for calculating degree classifications and rationale
- Good practice and actions
- Risks (not mandatory to publish)

3. Purpose and action for Senate

This paper provides fuller detail for Senate and Council which underpins the high level degree outcomes statement and covers the prompts (see italics) provided in the QAA checklist¹. Learning and Teaching Committee has considered this and recommends the statement (Appendix 1) to Senate for approval and subsequent consideration and sign off by Council. It must then be published online and publicly available, alongside our academic regulations and policies by the end of the 2019-20 academic session.

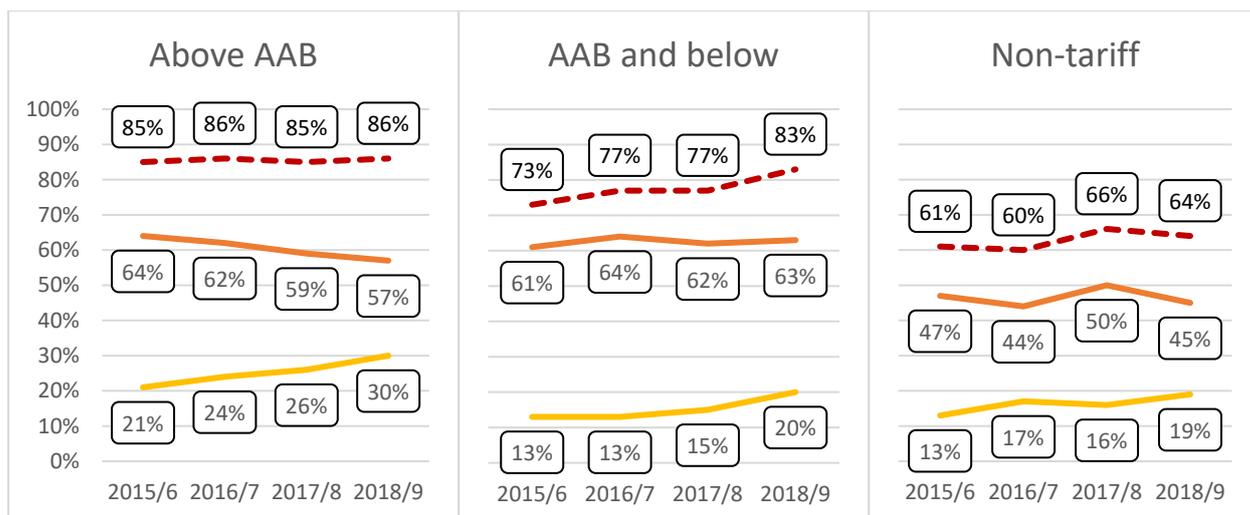
3.1 Institutional Degree Classification Profile

3.1.1 The institutional degree classification profile for the last 5 years, for FHEQ Level 6 is provided below.



3.1.2 Over this period the data show a 4% increase in good honours degrees awarded with a 6% increase in first class degrees awarded. Analysis by entry qualifications (tariff band) show a trend towards improvement across all bands, with a greater improvement for lower entry qualifications (AAB-). Although the overall good honours rate for students with higher entry qualification has only increased slightly, the rate of firsts for those students has increased markedly with a corresponding fall in the rate of 2:1s.

¹ QAA Checklist for governing bodies for considering and validating degree outcomes statements



3.1.3 As set out in the University's [Access and Participation Plan 2020-25](#) the analysis of attainment rates (percentage of students achieving 1st or 2:1s) has identified:

- no statistical significance in the attainment gap for full time, first degree students from POLAR4 Q1 and IMD Q1 however there is a general trend towards improvement in attainment.
- a sustained attainment gap between White and BAME students. The gap is particularly pronounced amongst Asian and Black students, 19% and 17% respectively. The gap is however closing (from 31% in 2013/14 to 17% in 2017/18) for Black students, whereas for Asian students the gap has remained largely unchanged at 19%.
- Students from Mixed backgrounds are now close to having parity in attainment outcomes.
- A recent improvement in attainment rates amongst mature students.
- An attainment gap between students with a disability and those without of 2 percentage points although not statistically significant there has been a downward trend over the past three years.

The APP sets out the targets and strategic measures that the University is taking to ensure that these attainment gaps are reduced and will be monitored by the Office for Students.

3.1.4 Further breakdown of the data to a departmental level shows greater variation in the patterns of degrees awarded. Departments have reflected on this and any underlying reasons. This will become part of the annual reflection data dashboard considerations.

3.2 Assessment and Marking Practices

3.2.1 *How do you ensure that your assessment criteria meet sector reference points, in particular the threshold standards for FHEQ L6?*

The University makes active use of sector reference points including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the QAA Code of Practice in developing its programmes, its assessment and associated regulations and its policies and guidance. External examiners are appointed for every taught programme of study and provide an annual report in which they specifically confirm whether the programmes and assessment meet these sector reference points and the University regulatory framework.

3.2.2 *Explain any changes to your marking practices or assessment criteria in the recent past. Does it explain any impact on your grade profile?*

To ensure consistency in assessment and marking, in 2012, the University introduced an institution-wide set of outcomes criteria for FHEQ Levels 4-7. This forms the framework within which departments publish and use both level and task specific assessment criteria for each major assessment type and the descriptors for degree classifications. This has been reviewed and updated (February 2020) following publication of the QAA Annex D outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6.

3.2.3 *How do you support consistency of marking, appeals, treatment of special circumstances, good recruitment of suitably qualified external experts?*

University policies, procedures and guidance are in place to ensure that the marking process is fair and reliable. These include policies and guidance on anonymous marking, graduate teaching assistants, moderation and exam boards.

3.2.4 In addition to policies and guidance, there is comprehensive support and training on assessment and marking practices for academic staff. Support for academic practice in learning and teaching has recently been refreshed and brought together under [Elevate](#), which provides formal programmes for new academic staff (e.g. PG Certificate in Learning and Teaching) through to workshops and online resources for all those involved in teaching and assessing students.

3.2.5 The University appoints an appropriately qualified external examiner for every taught programme of study to ensure that the methods of assessment used are credible, rigorous, equitable and are fairly and consistently conducted within relevant University regulations and policies; and that student performance and degrees awarded are of an appropriate standard nationally and are comparable to those delivered by other institutions in the UK. The [code of practice](#) sets out the criteria we use for appointing appropriately qualified external examiners to fulfil this role.

3.2.6 The role of the external examiner includes reviewing primary evidence e.g. samples of marked work that have contributed to the assessment of students and confirms whether internal examiners have applied standards consistently and appropriately.

3.2.7 The University takes an equitable and consistent approach to maintain academic integrity and fairness to other students when dealing with requests for extenuating circumstances to be taken into consideration for matters relating to examinations and assessments (e.g. extensions to deadlines or progression and award decisions made by Examination Boards). Clear [information](#) is made available to students on how to report extenuating circumstances that have impacted assessment and how the University considers these.

3.2.8 A published academic appeals [procedure](#) is in place for students to apply for a reconsideration of a recommended grade for any module or degree classification or examination in the event that either there has been a procedural error, failure of supervision or that there is new evidence concerning mitigating circumstances that was not made available to the examiners and could not have been produced at an earlier stage. The number of academic appeals that are upheld and result in a change in the degree classification awarded is consistently below 0.1% demonstrating that procedures are operating effectively.

Session	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18	18-19
UG Appeals Upheld	38	43	59	67	62
Total UG Appeals	122	164	186	212	187
% UG Appeals Upheld	31.15%	26.22%	31.72%	31.60%	33.16%
Appeal Notes	4 resulted in a change to the degree classification, 1 more permitted additional unit attempts before confirming the final classification	2 resulted in a change to the degree classification, 1 more permitted additional unit attempts before confirming the final classification	14 resulted in a change to the degree classification, and 4 more permitted additional unit attempts before confirming the final classification	9 resulted in a change to the degree classification	3 resulted in a change to the degree classification, 1 more permitted additional unit attempts before confirming the final classification
% Upheld UG Appeals Resulting in Change to/Enabling Re-Consideration of Classification	13.16%	6.98%	30.51%	13.43%	6.45%
Total UG Population	18537	19125	19661	19386	19174
% UG Students with Upheld Appeal	0.20%	0.22%	0.30%	0.35%	0.32%
% UG Students with Upheld Appeal Resulting in Change to/Enabling Re-Consideration of Classification	0.03%	0.02%	0.09%	0.05%	0.02%

3.3 Academic Governance

3.3.1 Explain how institutional governance structure provide assurance that the value of qualifications you award over time is protected, including for awards where learning and assessment is delivered through partnership arrangements

Council, as the University's governing body, has oversight of the degree classifications awarded and trends through reports from Senate (via the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee).

3.3.2 How academic governance structures ensure your marking practices are followed

Senate has responsibility for the academic governance of the University and is supported by a number of committees including the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. Via this route the institutional overview of degree classifications and any trends are considered and policies, guidance and procedures relating to learning, teaching and assessment are developed and approved.

3.3.3 External examiners' reports provide key assurances that marking practices are being followed and standards upheld. In addition to Faculty review and use of the reports in routine quality processes such as Annual Reflection, an overview report is produced annually for Quality and Scrutiny Committee which brings together the findings from the reports and identifies any issues for consideration at an institutional level.

3.3.4 For those FHEQ Level 6 awards where learning and assessment is delivered through partnership arrangements the University appoints the external examiners, the forms of assessment are subject to University approval and there is involvement in the exam board where award recommendations are made. There are currently only 3 partner institutions involved in delivery of FHEQ Level 6 awards and no plans for growth in this area.

3.3.5 *How academic governance has made use of external assistance in assuring the degree outcomes statement as recommended in the statement of intent?*

The University has programme and subject level external examiners covering the breadth of its provision. An institutional external examiner has not been used to provide external assurance of the degree outcomes statement.

3.4 Classification Algorithms

3.4.1 *Clearly describe your classification algorithm and the rationale*

The University has used a unified institution-wide algorithm for degree classifications since 2006-07, following work to enhance consistency in response to QAA institutional audit recommendations. The institution-wide algorithm ensures that all students are treated equitably. In summary for FHEQ Level 6 awards:

- the grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5 and 6 count towards the degree calculation, with grades awarded at FHEQ Level 6 having twice the weight of grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5;
- The student must have been awarded sufficient credit at FHEQ Level 5 and above to be eligible for a classified degree. Credits are only awarded where students have met the pass mark. Students may resit failed units on one occasion for FHEQ L5 and above and the resit result is capped at a pass mark.
- Two calculations are used: the weighted mean grade and the distribution of weighted mean grades.
- Where the *weighted mean grade* and the *distribution of weighted grades* both indicate the same class of degree, this is the class of degree awarded. Where one of these calculations indicates a particular class of degree, but the other places the student in the borderline range to that class, they will be awarded the higher class. However, should one calculation indicate a particular class of degree but the other indicates the class below, the student will become a borderline candidate to the higher class. Or if both calculations place the student in the borderline range to a higher class they will also become a borderline candidate to the higher class. In both borderline situations the class of degree awarded will be decided by the Examination Board with reference to the weighted mean grade of the modules studied during the final Level.

The [University General Regulations for First Degrees](#) set out the approach in full.

3.4.2 How you ensure your algorithm and rationale for using it is clearly understood by students and other stakeholders

The method used is available on the University student-facing web pages, supplemented by an animated step by step [guide](#) and is also explained to students in course handbooks and materials provided by their academic department.

3.4.3 Explain whether you use zones of consideration or automatic uplifts for borderline cases, what your resit limits are and whether these are in line with sector norms

In borderline cases the class of degree awarded will be decided by the Examination Board with reference to the weighted mean grade of the modules studied during the final Level.

3.4.4 Credit is only awarded where a student has passed a module. At FHEQ Level 4 a student may resit a failed module on up to two further attempts and the result is capped at the pass mark (40%). At FHEQ Level 5 or 6 a student may resit a failed module once and the result is capped at the pass mark (40%).

3.4.5 Explain any changes you have made or plan to make to your algorithm together with any impacts on your classification profile

Any future changes to the University's degree classification algorithm would only be made following careful consideration of the impact on students, the classification profile and maintaining the value of our awards over time.

4. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

4.1 Explain whether there have been any discernible effects of enhancements to teaching practices, learning resources, student support, curriculum and assessment design on degree classifications

Over the five year period the University has continued to enhance the quality of teaching, resources and academic practice to provide our students with opportunities to reach their potential.

Examples of developments that have contributed to a positive impact on our student outcomes include:

- Since 2015 there has been significant investment (£165.3m) in projects to support improvements to the physical spaces for teaching and learning across the campus, including the £81m Diamond Building. Open 24/7 the Diamond offers a unique range of general and specialist teaching spaces, student laboratory spaces, and social space for 5,000 students.
- In 2013 we opened a specialist skills development centre (301) to provide student skills training, support and development. This is now well established providing [Academic Skills Workshops](#), [1:1 Study Skills Appointments](#) and a [Maths and Statistics Help Service \(MASH\)](#) in our bespoke teaching and study space, as well as administering and facilitating the Sheffield Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) scheme and the Undergraduate Awards. There are also extensive online resources including [Study Skills Online](#), [Maths and Statistics online resources](#) and the [Undergraduate Research Hub](#).
- The University introduced Encore lecture capture in 2017 in response to student demand and over 85% of lectures in enabled rooms are now being captured. This has provided students with a valuable tool to support their understanding, with high usage in particular during revision time.

- The Virtual Learning Environment provides access to online course materials whenever students need them and is heavily used for coursework and to work online with others.
- The University's Library provides high quality services to students and was voted No.1 for Library Services by our students in the 2017 Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey. Our unique collections and digital resources underpin the students' learning experience and library staff are active in their contribution to programme development and delivery. Library teams are supporting departments to embed activities that allow students to develop their information and digital literacy skills (as defined in the University's Information & Digital Literacy Framework)
- In partnership with our Students Union we have developed a University Student Mental Health Strategy, which takes a whole institution approach to promoting positive mental health, and Sheffield Access to Mental Health Support (SAMHS). We provide a single point of access for students to receive a consultation with a mental health professional (SAMHS) and short waiting times mean that students are assured of fast, professional mental health assessment. In addition our Disability and Dyslexia Service (DDS) offers on-going support to students with long-term mental health conditions and the Support Worker Service in DDS offers mentors and support to students with Specific Learning Difficulties.
- University principles of [feedback](#) (adopted 2013) to enhance the use of assessment **for** learning.
- Development of academic practice is encouraged. The University has developed an Advanced HE accredited Learning and Teaching Professional Recognition Scheme to encourage staff to reflect on their academic practice in relation to the [UK Professional Standards Framework \(UKPSF\)](#) and to apply for HEA fellowship at all levels.

4.2 How have these effects been measured and accounted for?

The impact of these enhancements is wide-ranging and direct cause and effect has not been measured and quantified. Future work to monitor APP targets will provide the opportunity to measure the impact of interventions related to assessment outcomes.

5. Identifying Good Practice and Actions (not mandatory to publish this section)

5.1 Any good practice in any aspects of classification e.g. particular subjects or departments (not mandatory to share this publicly)? Any actions arising from this review?

- An updated picture on marking practices in operation currently in departments has been gathered to identify any areas where guidance and policies need to be refreshed via a survey completed by departments (March 2020). Moderation policy to be reviewed.
- Annual reporting and analysis of degree outcomes and factors to be strengthened through explicit inclusion in the annual reflection process. Consideration to be given to any unexplained differences between departments.
- Programme Level Approach – there are case studies on good practice, including for assessment, held on the PLA [googlesite](#) and longer-term there will be an opportunity to review its impact on degree outcomes.
- Examination conventions provide advice for departments on institutional expectations when applying discretion and making decisions where General Regulations allow this.

5.2 Timeline for revisiting the degree outcomes statement and review progress

The data in section 1 will be updated annually and the rest of the degree outcomes statement will be reviewed on a 2- yearly cycle, or if a significant change is introduced e.g. new regulations or assessment policy.

6. Risks and Challenges (not mandatory to publish this section)

6.1 Any risks/challenges/areas for further review ?Any actions to address or mitigate these?

- Improved use of assessment data for different cohorts, for example sub-sets of non-standard entry qualifications, will enable better understanding of any factors affecting assessment performance and inform any changes that need to be made.
- A revised moderation policy will support the consistency of assessment and marking practices across the institution.

Updated 5 June 2020

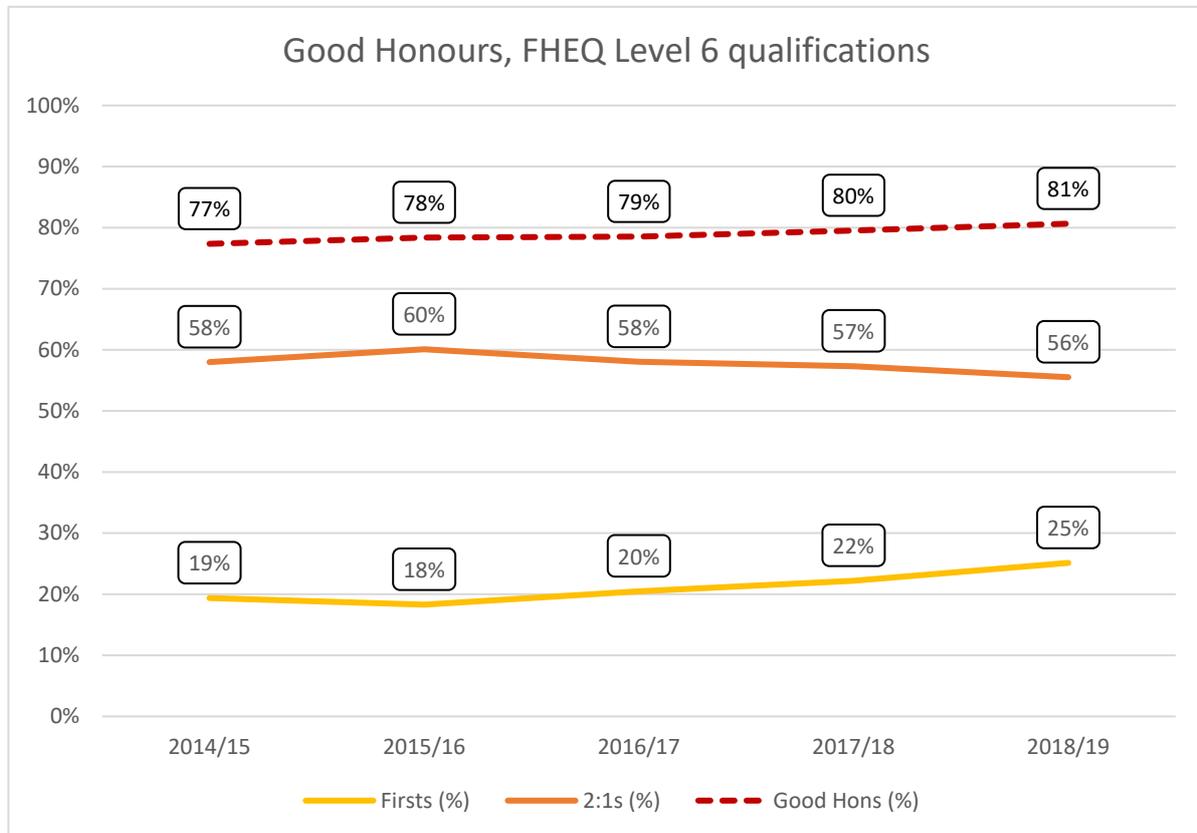
Dr Andrea Bath, Head of Quality and Standards

Academic Programmes Office

APPENDIX 1 University of Sheffield Degree Outcomes Statement

1. Institutional Degree Classification Profile

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The Access and Participation Plan sets out the targets and strategic measures that the University is taking to ensure that these attainment gaps are reduced and will be monitored by the Office for Students.

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The University makes active use of sector reference points including the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the QAA Code of Practice in developing its programmes, its assessment and associated regulations and its policies and guidance. External examiners are appointed for every taught programme of study and provide an annual report in which they specifically confirm whether the programmes and assessment meet these sector reference points and the University regulatory framework.

To ensure consistency in assessment and marking, in 2012, the University introduced an institution-wide set of outcomes criteria for FHEQ Levels 4-7. This forms the framework within which departments publish and use both level and task specific assessment criteria for each major assessment type and the descriptors for degree classifications. This has been reviewed and updated (February 2020) following publication of the QAA Annex D outcome classification descriptions for FHEQ Level 6.

University policies, procedures and guidance are in place to ensure that the marking process is fair and reliable. These include policies and guidance on anonymous marking, graduate teaching assistants, moderation and exam boards.

In addition to policies and guidance, there is comprehensive support and training on assessment and marking practices for academic staff.

The University appoints an appropriately qualified external examiner for every taught programme of study to ensure that the methods of assessment used are credible, rigorous, equitable and are fairly and consistently conducted within relevant University regulations and policies; and that student performance and degrees awarded are of an appropriate standard nationally and are comparable to those delivered by other institutions in the UK. The [code of practice](#) sets out the criteria we use for appointing appropriately qualified external examiners to fulfill this role. The role of the external examiner includes reviewing primary evidence e.g. samples of marked work that have contributed to the assessment of students and confirms whether internal examiners have applied standards consistently and appropriately.

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3. Academic Governance

Council, as the University's governing body, has oversight of the degree classifications awarded and trends through reports from Senate (via the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee). Senate has responsibility for the academic governance of the University and is supported by a number of committees including the Senate Learning and Teaching Committee. Via this route the institutional overview of degree classifications and any trends are considered and policies, guidance and procedures relating to learning, teaching and assessment are developed and approved.

External examiners' reports provide key assurances that marking practices are being followed and standards upheld. In addition to Faculty review and use of the reports in routine quality processes such as Annual Reflection, an overview report is produced annually for Quality and Scrutiny Committee which brings together the findings from the reports and identifies any issues for consideration at an institutional level.

For those FHEQ Level 6 awards where learning and assessment is delivered through partnership arrangements the University appoints the external examiners, the forms of assessment are subject to University approval and there is involvement in the exam board where award recommendations are made. There are currently only 3 partner institutions involved in delivery of FHEQ Level 6 awards and no plans for growth in this area.

4. Classification Algorithms

The University has used a unified institution-wide algorithm for degree classifications since 2006-07, following work to enhance consistency in response to QAA institutional audit recommendations. The institution-wide algorithm ensures that all students are treated equitably. In summary:

- the grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5 and 6 count towards the degree calculation, with grades awarded at FHEQ Level 6 having twice the weight of grades awarded at FHEQ Level 5;
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- Two calculations are used: the weighted mean grade and the distribution of weighted mean grades.
- Where the *weighted mean grade* and the *distribution of weighted grades* both indicate the same class of degree, this is the class of degree awarded. Where one of these calculations indicates a particular class of degree, but the other places the student in the borderline range to that class, they will be awarded the higher class. However, should one calculation indicate a particular class of degree but the other indicates the class below, the student will become a borderline candidate to the higher class. Or if both calculations place the student in the borderline range to a higher class they will also become a borderline candidate to the higher class. In both borderline situations the class of degree awarded will be decided by the Examination Board with reference to the weighted mean grade of the modules studied during the final Level.

The [University General Regulations for First Degrees](#) set out the approach in full. The method used is available on the University student-facing web pages, supplemented by an animated step by step [guide](#) and is also explained to students in course handbooks and materials provided by their academic department.

Credit is only awarded where a student has passed a module. At FHEQ Level 4 a student may resit a failed module on up to two further attempts and the result is capped at the pass mark (40). At FHEQ Level 5 or 6 a student may resit a failed module once and the result is capped at the pass mark.

Any future changes to the University's degree classification algorithm would only be made following careful consideration of the impact on students, the classification profile and maintaining the value of our awards over time.

5. Teaching Practices and Learning Resources

Over the five year period the University has continued to enhance the quality of teaching, resources and academic practice to provide our students with opportunities to reach their potential. Examples of developments that have contributed to a positive impact on our student outcomes include:

- Since 2015 there has been significant investment (£165.3m) in projects to support improvements to the physical spaces for teaching and learning across the campus, including the £81m Diamond Building. Open 24/7 the Diamond offers a unique range of general and specialist teaching spaces, student laboratory spaces, and social space for 5,000 students.
- In 2013 we opened a specialist skills development centre (301) to provide student skills training, support and development.
- The University introduced Encore lecture capture in 2017 in response to student demand and over 85% of lectures in enabled rooms are now being captured. This has provided students with a valuable tool to support their understanding, with high usage in particular during revision time.
- The Virtual Learning Environment provides access to online course materials whenever students need them and is heavily used for coursework and to work online with others.
- The University's Library provides high quality services to students and was voted No.1 for Library Services by our students in the 2017 Times Higher Education Student Experience Survey.

6. Review of degree outcomes statement

The data in section 1 will be updated annually and the rest of the degree outcomes statement will be reviewed on a 2- yearly cycle, or if a significant change is introduced e.g. new regulations, degree algorithm or assessment policy.

June 2020

Academic Programmes Office

Implementation of a "Safety Net Policy" for student assessment and progression

1. INTRODUCTION

Set out below is a guide for academic departments on how to apply the 'no detriment' policy that the University has adopted to underpin student progression and award decisions in the light of the current Covid-19 crisis.

The guidance is underpinned by the following principles:

- It is informed by each student's overall **cumulative performance**
- It is as **fair** as possible for *all* students, regardless of programme of study, and is in line with previous communications.
- It is **robust** in that it uses a combination of prior assessments (where available) to estimate attainment level (the 'benchmark').
- It remains **as close as possible to existing regulations** for progression/degree award calculations.
- It is **simple** to understand and apply.

Marks for individual modules will be awarded as per normal practice and the 'safety net' will be applied to performance across the full academic year. This means that a student's 'year average' for the purposes of progression and/or award may be higher than the average of their individual module marks.

It is important to note that this policy is designed to provide a 'safety net' for all students adversely impacted by the impacts of the coronavirus. It is not expected that the Safety Net will be needed by the majority of students. It is not an alternative to students engaging fully with their studies and planned assessments; it does not require academic colleagues to lower the standards with which they mark summative assessments; and it seeks to maintain academic quality whilst acknowledging the unprecedented environment in which the University is currently operating.

Where students are subject to professional regulation/accreditation, application of this policy will be subject to agreement with the relevant PSRB. Students on such programmes will be advised accordingly.

This guidance is structured as a series of prompts, complemented with a series of FAQs, and works through each level of study. It is important that the principles of 'no detriment' are followed consistently across all departments.

In the event that you require further support or guidance you should contact the relevant FDLT.

2. CALCULATING BENCHMARKS

Individual student benchmarks should be calculated in the following ways:

2.1 Undergraduate and Integrated Masters Programmes

2.1.1 University of Sheffield Levels 2 and above (FHEQ Level 5 to Level 7)

For each student, a benchmark will be calculated based **on the higher of the two following measures**:

- A. The overall average (weighted mean) based on performance on modules completed and assessed¹ between 1 September 2019 and 15 March 2020² (thereafter referred to as 'unaffected' marks), where the student has **40** or more credits of unaffected marks.
- B. 100% of the overall average (weighted mean) achieved in the preceding academic year (on the same programme³).

Where a student does not have 40 or more credits of unaffected marks, only benchmark B will apply.

The application of the benchmark is also subject to students achieving the minimum required threshold for a pass for each module.

The exceptions

- *For direct entry students to FHEQ Level 5 or above, where it is not possible to determine a benchmark based on the above, the benchmark should be determined by taking the average of the best 100 credits over the full year.*
- *For part time students the benchmarks should be applied on a pro rata basis, based on the proportion of unaffected credits taken since 1 September 2019 or since their last progression point.*

2.1.2 University of Sheffield Level 1 (FHEQ Level 4)

For Level 1 students, modules completed after 15 March 2020 (affected marks) will be marked on a pass/fail basis only and no end of year average will be calculated.

Students are simply required to have passed each individual unit (whether affected or unaffected) to progress. It is not therefore necessary to calculate individual student benchmarks.

Where students have failed to pass any individual unit, they will be required to present for subsequent examination.

¹ For clarity, this means that all teaching was completed, and the students had submitted all summative assessments associated with that module, prior to 15 March 2020. It does not require the work to have been marked by 15 March or that the results had been considered by an Exam Board.

² For the majority of programmes this will equate to completed Semester One modules

³ This includes students who may have moved between pathways or between different awards, e.g. BEng/MEng in a given subject.

Whilst there is no requirement to provide individual marks (other than pass/fail) for assessments completed after 15 March 2020. Department may, at their discretion, provide marks for individual pieces of work for the purpose of supporting student learning only.

2.2 Postgraduate Taught Programmes (FHEQ Level 7)

The Safety Net benchmark for PGT students will be set **based on the higher of the two following measures:**

- A. The overall average (weighted mean) based on performance on modules completed and assessed between 1 September 2019 and 15 March 2020⁴ (hereafter referred to as 'unaffected' marks), where the student has **60** or more credits of unaffected marks.
- B. The average based on the best **150** credits over the full year.

2.3 Foundation Level

The Safety net benchmark for Foundation Year students will be set based on the **higher of the two following measures:**

- A. The overall average (weighted mean) based on performance on modules completed and assessed between 1 September 2019 and 15 March 2020 (hereafter referred to as 'unaffected' marks), where the student has **40** or more credits of unaffected marks.
- B. The average based on the best **100** credits over the full year.

Worked examples of the above are available here:

[UG Safety Net Examples](#)

[PGT Safety Net Examples](#)

FAQs

What about programmes that did not start in September 2019?

For programmes that do not operate on the standard academic year, benchmarks should be calculated in the same way, but based on modules completed and assessed before the 15 March and since the last progression point, and the previous year's performance.

Does the student need to sit, and pass, summative assessments taken after 15 March for the safety net policy to apply?

Yes. A student cannot opt out of assessments after the 15 March and rely solely on benchmark performance. These assessments must be completed, and passed, at the minimum threshold required for that programme, to evidence that s/he has met the learning outcomes and can be awarded the associated credit.

⁴ For the majority of programmes this will equate to completed Semester One modules

In the event that a student cannot take an assessment, for example through illness, the usual EC processes will apply.

What if no summative assessment has taken place (and therefore no unaffected marks achieved) before 15 March on a particular programme?

Benchmarks (as described above) allow for these situations in the majority of cases. However, it may be helpful to note that current regulations permit departments, at the discretion of the examination board, to:

- Moderate cohort marks (where there is sufficient evidence that the current cohort is out of line with the performance of previous cohorts)
- Consider whether students who have marginal/borderline fails should be given the minimum pass mark based on previous performance.
- Make reference to students' performance before and after 15 March, including formative⁵ assessments (particularly where this is to the benefit of the student concerned) and to make a holistic judgement of their performance. However, formative assessments **must not** be used to create a benchmark.

In all cases, any decisions to adjust marks must be recorded in the record of the examination board and the reasons for doing so clearly set out.

If there are no summative assessments prior to 15 March, could formative assessments be used instead?

Formative assessments are designed for students to develop and practice their skills ahead of summative assessment, rather than to assess their performance, and therefore **should not be used in calculating their benchmark** performance. A department may however wish to refer to them as per above.

Will the benchmarks be calculated centrally, or by the academic department?

The information on affected and unaffected modules needed to calculate benchmarks is held in departments. It is therefore the responsibility of academic departments to complete this work prior to examination boards.

Individual student benchmarks must be available to the Exam Board and records should be kept.

Does the safety net policy apply to re-sit students who are assessed in the summer resit period?

Where a student has failed a module and needs to resit, the overall module result will be capped at a bare pass in line with [General Regulations for First Degrees/Higher Degrees](#). The safety net policy applies to students who have passed the assessment. The extenuating circumstances process will account for students whose performance has been affected by issues.

What about Group Work?

⁵ Formative assessments are those taken for the purpose of consolidating learning and which do not contribute to progression of award.

It is acknowledged that some students may be advantaged where the benchmark, based on 40/60 credits of unaffected assessment, included a high level of group work. In the spirit of no detriment, this is an accepted risk.

Conversely, for high performing students this may mean the application of a benchmark presents less protection, but good performance in assessments post 15 March should leave them no more disadvantaged than would have been the case had General Regulations only applied.

Are there circumstances in which the student would not benefit from the Safety Net Policy?

The Safety Net Policy is designed to support students in the current circumstances, whilst upholding standards and academic integrity. Should a student use unfair means, appropriate penalties will be used ranging from awarding no grade for the piece of work or failure in an examination through to expulsion from the University in extremely serious cases. In such cases the safety net policy would not be used to compensate for penalties applied.

To benefit from the safety net students must complete all assessments for a given module AND achieve a minimum threshold of performance to evidence that they have achieved the necessary learning outcomes to be awarded the credit. This is to ensure that students continue to engage with their studies and to ensure that minimum quality standards are maintained.

How will students know if they have benefited from the Safety Net Policy?

In the event that a student's overall year average for the purposes of progression and/or award is higher than the average had it been calculated under General Regulations (based on affected and unaffected marks) they can assume that they have benefited from the no detriment policy. Students will still receive individual module marks at Foundation Level and Levels 2 and above.

If a student has failed a module (i.e. if they did not complete all required assessments within a module and/or meet the minimum threshold to evidence they met the learning outcomes needed to achieve the associated credit) they should be counselled as to why the safety net has not automatically assured their progression or award. The safety net will be applied following subsequent examination, so long as the minimum standard has been achieved.

What if a student is taking assessments out of cycle?

The Safety Net Policy should be applied for any students who have both studied for and completed assessment on programmes since 1 September 2019, or for non standard programmes since the last progression point, who have had their study disrupted by the Covid 19 crisis.

What about students on study abroad years?

These students should be considered on a case by case basis, or by group/cohort where students are similarly impacted, taking account of:

- the nature of their studies
- the situation in the country of study
- what adjustments the host institution may have made to level/module marks locally to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19
- whether students have been able to continue their studies remotely from the UK

What about students on a placement year?

Again these students should be considered on a case by case basis, or by group/cohort where students are similarly impacted, taking account of:

- the nature of the placement
- programme regulations (e.g. some faculties apply the 38 week rule)
- PSRB and other external requirements
- The contract of employment with a given employer

What about visiting students?

Again these students should be considered on a case by case basis, or by group/cohort where students are similarly impacted, taking account of:

- the nature of their studies
- what adjustments the host institution may have made to level/module marks locally to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 to ensure to avoid students benefiting twice
- Whether students have been able to continue their studies remotely

What about students sitting modules for credit (e.g.CPD), but not as part of a full programme of study?

Where you have individual students, or groups of students in this category you should talk to the relevant FDLT in the first instance.

3. PROGRESSION AND AWARD

3.1 Calculation of Final awards

The final award should be calculated in the first instance using the University's General Regulations and those regulations specific to individual programmes of study, and based on actual module marks (affected and unaffected).

The mark determined from the above should be viewed against the student's benchmark and the higher of the two marks used to inform the final degree classification/award.

Normal practices around moderation, extenuating circumstances, etc will apply.

Worked examples of the above are available here:

[UG Safety Net Examples](#)

[PGT Safety Net Examples](#)

3.2 Progression between levels of Study

Progression between years of study should be determined, in the first instance, using the University's General Regulations and those regulations specific to individual programmes of study, and based on actual module marks (affected and unaffected) or pass/fail grades.

For progression from Foundation Year, or beyond Level 2, the weighted mean should be calculated, as per the University's General Regulations and those regulations specific to individual programmes of study based on actual module marks (affected and unaffected), and viewed against the student's benchmark. The higher of the two should be used to inform the year average for the purpose of progression, and (where relevant in future years) the calculation of the final award.

As per General Regulations, Examiners may in their discretion recommend that a student who is awarded not fewer than 100 credits at Level 2 be permitted to proceed to Level 3.

Normal practices around moderation, extenuating circumstances, etc will apply.

Normal processes for appeal will apply.

FAQs

What new/additional discretion does the Examination board have to support severely impacted students?

For students impacted by the Covid 19 crisis, Examination Boards may, in exceptional circumstances, offer one or more resit, as a first attempt at a later date, to a student (including final year students) who has had their progress severely and extensively impacted, instead of applying the Safety Net Policy, if it is felt that this would advantage the student.

Equally, should a student request it, they may be offered the opportunity to resit all affected assessments at a later date, and within one calendar year of the original assessment, but a) their mark would then be calculated under normal regulations (without the benefit of a safety net), b) they must accept that the mode of assessment may not be the same as that taken in their first attempt, e.g. where adjustments were made to support remote assessment, and c) they cannot cherry pick which affected assessments they wish to resit.

How are year averages calculated for Level 1 students?

The University has agreed that students completing Level 1, where these are not subject to external requirements such as those set by PSRBs, may be awarded a simple pass/fail for each module completed after 15 March 2020, and for the purposes of progression. So long as students have presented for all summative assessments, before and after the 15 March, and have passed all units at the minimum level required, they can simply be awarded a PASS/FAIL.

Should a student have not passed a module at the minimum level required, but is close to the PASS/FAIL borderline, the examination board may, at its discretion, use performance prior to the 15 March to give the student the benefit of doubt and to award a PASS based on the principles of no detriment.

What will appear on student transcripts?

For Level 1 students, transcripts will provide pass/fail information rather than grades for modules completed after 15 March 2020.

For Foundation Year and Level 2 and above students, transcripts will still show actual module marks achieved.

For PGT students, transcripts will still show actual module marks achieved.

4. EXAMINATION BOARDS

4.1 Information required in advance of the Examination Boards

In making arrangements for examination boards, academic departments must share full details of the Safety Net Policy with their internal and external examiners as well as all members of the examination board.

Individual student benchmarks, and the impact of these on individual student performance must be available to the examination board and set out in a way that is clear to follow. This information, and any decisions taken at the examination board, must be kept on file, including the rationale behind any decisions made, whether relating to an individual student or the full cohort.

4.2 Information the Examination Board will need

The examination board should have available to it:

For each module

- Actual marks achieved for each unaffected module (completed before 15 March 2020)
- Actual marks achieved for each affected module (completed after 15 March)

For each student

- The student's overall grade/average for the year based on performance across all modules and in line with the normal application of general and programme specific regulations
- The student's benchmark

The examination board should then be asked to use the higher to determine progression, or the final degree classification, considering any adjustments, extenuating circumstances, etc.

4.3 Borderline and Complex Cases

As per normal circumstances, there will be individual students where there is a need for examiners to review performance in detail and to consider multiple factors influencing their performance. The Safety Net Policy does not remove or diminish the powers that examination boards are afforded under the University's General Regulations. For example, departments are reminded of Regulation XV: General Regulations for First Degree, para 47 states, ***In every case, the Examiners will recommend the classification which, having regard to all the evidence before them, best reflects the overall performance of the student.***

FAQs

What does the safety net mean for programmes that include a weighted mean grade threshold for progression from Level 2 onto Level 3 of the integrated Masters track?

Where a programme includes a minimum weighted mean grade for progression, and this is achieved through the Safety Net Policy, the department should provide advice and guidance to individual students on the basis of their Semester 2 performance to guide them if transfer to the 3 year Bachelors programme may be more appropriate for them.

Does the safety net apply if a student is resitting/re-submitting their PGT dissertation?

If a student is re-submitting a dissertation for which the original piece of work was submitted before 15 March the safety net does not apply.

If however the student has undertaken a new project, significantly changed the content of the dissertation such to the extent that they might be deemed to have undertaken a novel piece of work, then the safety net should be applied, but caveated with the fact that their overall mark may be capped in line with the programme regulations and that the dissertation must meet minimum quality standards.

What about students on part-time masters programmes?

The safety net applies to all modules where teaching and/or assessment have been directly impacted by the Covid-19 crisis. For part-time students, who do not have a progression point at the end of the 2019/20 cycle, the safety net will need to be applied at the relevant, future examination board.

We teach the same module in Semester 1 and Semester 2. What if one group of students performs better than the other?

It is acknowledged that students taught and assessed on the same module may be advantaged (or disadvantaged) depending on whether their teaching and assessment took place before or after the 15 March. For example, they may have been negatively impacted by the transition to remote teaching, they may have been advantaged by a particular module forming part of the benchmark calculation, and they may have benefited or otherwise by the different assessment methods used depending on the Semester in which they completed the module. In most cases, we would expect some 'balancing out,' however examination boards should be mindful of these disparities and seek to form a judgement such that no group is unfairly disadvantaged.

In these situations departments should liaise with the relevant FDLT for guidance.

How will marks be released to students?

Further guidance will follow from Student Administration Services regarding arrangements for the release of marks to students.

This will also include details of arrangements and deadlines for the provision of module marks for entry onto CIS.

5. NON MODULAR PROGRAMMES

It is recognised that not all programmes operate to modules and semesters. This does not mean that they are exempt from the safety net policy, other than if they are subject to PSRB or other external requirements that prohibit this.

In the majority of cases, programmes can be broken down into time limited units of teaching that are subject to assessment (applied at the unit or cross unit level). If either the teaching and assessment, for these units span the 15 March date then the safety net should be applied. If units completed and assessed prior to 15 March account for a third or more of the overall programme in that year, then a benchmark can be calculated on the same basis as for modular programmes above.

For more advice, please contact your FDLT.

Summary of Student Support during Covid-19 pandemic

The University is taking action on a number of fronts to support students during the Covid-19 pandemic. We recognise that the transition to online learning and the lack of access to campus is more difficult for some, particularly more vulnerable, groups of students. There are also a significant number of students still living on campus and we continue to ensure that they receive all the welfare support they require, including if they are self-isolating with Covid symptoms.

The University has also published an extensive set of [FAQs](#) to help students understand the current situation, the support available to them and the implication for their studies in the current and next academic year.

Helping vulnerable students

The University has made additional contact with students whose particular background characteristics might make them more vulnerable during this period of uncertainty. Care leavers, estranged students, and those with carer responsibilities are being prioritised in particular. **The focus has been helping with any welfare or personal issues and encouraging engagement with peer-led, Student Union, and University led engagement and socialising opportunities.** The “Sheffield mentors” peer scheme has also been utilised to allow Second and Third Year mentors to catch up with their First Year mentees. There are currently around 600 mentors engaging with ~2,000 mentees.

Supporting online learning

- To assist students with IT needs, the University has provided support for (i) purchasing a device where this was required; (ii) getting a broadband connection; and (iii) accessing specialist software via dialling into university workstations with specialist maths, physics, and architecture packages for example. **As of 2 June, the University has provided 341 students with funding to purchase a new device, at a cost of £136,400.**
- **Student Support Services has also worked with Academic Practice and Skills Development to produce guidelines for online [teaching](#) and [assessment](#) for disabled students.** It includes issues of how to ensure that Word and Powerpoint presentations are accessible, and some principles for supporting students with pre-identified exam adjustments and how these should be adapted for online examinations. DSSS has also worked with Exam Teams to ensure that Departments are aware of and prepared for all disabled students’ exam requirements, and contacted disabled students who would usually have exam support workers to suggest assistive technology solutions and offer support and guidance for any concerns they have.

Funding support

In addition to the funding for technological support mentioned in the previous section, the University is also providing financial support in the following situations:

- **Accommodation:** providing funds for temporary accommodation for those returning from abroad or industry but who are potentially out of pocket due to carrying two housing contracts for a period of time; costs of recovery and storage of personal items left in now vacant accommodation here and abroad.
- **Travel:** cost of returning to the UK, mainly for students studying abroad.
- **Loss of income:** the University is using composite living costs as a benchmark for a period of six weeks to calculate hardship grants (c.£500 per student) with the period of support reviewed based on individual circumstances.
- **Additional costs:** variety of individual needs including prescription costs, childcare, to equipment and printing due to remote learning.

Students still in accommodation

- Students were asked at the outset of lockdown to confirm if they were returning home or staying in Sheffield.
- It is estimated that there are around 5,000 students remaining in Sheffield, either in University-owned accommodation or private rented.
- The University has reached out to students still in accommodation, particularly those that are known to be self-isolating to offer regular catch-ups with a member of the welfare team. Online communities, social activities, weekly newsletters and events are being organised by the Residence Life team, the Students Union and the International Student Support team to support students with social distancing and isolation.
- A new Wellbeing Team is reaching out to students and offering online appointments to discuss looking after wellbeing and managing self-care during lockdown. A Wellbeing blog has also been circulated to students and well received.

All the other normal methods of support are still available for students and can be found [here](#).