Dear External Examiner

As we enter the final week of semester 2 assessments here at the University of Sussex, I am writing, as previously promised, with further information on the approach that the University has taken to ensure that student’s awards and progression will not be adversely impacted by Covid-19.

When I wrote to you back in April, we, like many other institutions, were in the process of finalising our No Detriment or ‘Safety-Net’ policy. At that time, we had already taken the decision to:

- Extend and reschedule deadlines for assessment
- Review assessment tasks to ensure that they only test material that had been delivered
- Convert formal in-person examinations to alternative forms of assessment

Many of you will have been consulted on assessment changes and I extend my thanks for your continued support.

We have been following the guidance from both the OfS and QAA with the maintenance of quality and standards being paramount throughout all our deliberations. Key too has been the need to ensure that course learning outcomes have been met before any awards are made. Schools have continued to liaise with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) to ensure that professional requirements are still met where applicable, and these requirements will take precedence over University regulations.

I can now share with you the principles that underpin our policy, how it will be applied to different groups of students, and to explain how this will be presented in the forthcoming examination boards.

Our No Detriment or Safety Net Policy works on the basis of a set of principles designed to ensure that where possible, no student will encounter any detriment in the awarding of grades for semester 2 as a result of Covid-19. The fundamental principles are:

- The safety net will only be applied once a student has passed all their Semester 2 modules
- The safety net will be based on the mean achieved from the modules taken in Semester 1 (including any fails)
- Marks for Semester 2 modules that are below the Semester 1 mean, will be raised to the Semester 1 mean. Where student performance in Semester 2 exceeds the mean achieved in Semester 1, the actual marks for Semester 2 will stand.

Additionally, for students on taught postgraduate courses:

- In order for safety net principle to apply the student must have passed all S2 modules and their dissertation
- The PGT year average will be no lower than the S1 mean. The standard PGT classification criteria will then be applied

From the perspective of what you can expect in the forthcoming boards, our Student Records team and IT Services have worked exceptionally hard to make systems changes that will
automatically apply the no-detriment policy and present this transparently in the paperwork that you will receive in the forthcoming Progression and Award Boards. This means that Boards will be able to see the original marks and the safety-net marks.

I am sharing with you (attached to this email) a set of principles and a series of scenarios for students in different contexts, which I hope will illuminate the depth of our thinking about the range of circumstances affecting our students. These have been shared with our students.

I hope that this update will reassure you that the University has thought through how we can mitigate the terrible impact of the pandemic on our students, but that this has been done carefully and in a measured way, mindful always of academic standards.

If you have any queries about the University’s No-Detriment Policy, or want to find out more please reply to this email address. We are also running a briefing session for external examiners on the morning of the 1 July 2020, which will provide an opportunity to ask questions. You will have already received an invitation to this session.

With best wishes

Kelly Coate