

Imperial College London

Safety Net Policy 2019/20

1. Reasons for a safety net policy

In the past days, we have listened to your concerns raised with your programme teams and your Student Union with regards to our decision of moving to timed remote assessments. The extraordinary circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic are unprecedented, and we recognise the distress and concern the current situation has caused. We will share further rationale on the decision separately.

In particular, the following concerns have been highlighted:

- a. The uncertainty around the College's use of timed remote assessments in place of on-site written examinations, *e.g.*:
 - i. the lack of familiarity with the new assessment format;
 - ii. the reliability of technology and access to it;
 - iii. the reliance on finding quiet space and time for the assessment;
 - iv. the effect of time-zone differences;
 - v. the potential for students to cheat;
 - vi. that the marking of these assessments will affect students' progression and award.
- b. The use of other forms of assessment.
- c. The impact on mental wellbeing of taking assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic period.
- d. Whether the student voice will be heard as the assessment processes are developed and implemented.

2. Principles

The College has therefore developed the following set of principles when considering the impact of COVID-19:

- a. The need to ensure the wellbeing of our students.
- b. The need to maintain the quality of our degree provision to maintain our graduates' employability and ability to qualify for further study.
- c. In order to maintain the quality of our degree provision:
 - i. the need to ensure our students can demonstrate their learning outcomes;
 - ii. the need to comply with the standards set by regulatory bodies, such as the professional bodies (*e.g.* the GMC and Engineering Council) that recognise our degrees and the Office for Students;
 - iii. the need to ensure that our qualifications hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards and deliver courses that meet the academic standards as described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).
- d. The requirement to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on progression and award.

3. Proposed safety net policy

Working closely with the ICU and responding to the results of their COVID-19 *Remote Assessment Survey*, as well as senior Faculty staff, we have decided therefore to implement

a safety net policy. This policy is in addition to the extended Mitigating Circumstances Policy that the College has already adopted to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on individual students.

The proposed safety net augments, where possible and appropriate, practices already approved for special situations in our regulations. These are set out below.

- The processes and methods for marking assessments will be conducted in the normal way.
- Students must satisfy the usual requirements for progression or award, *i.e.* a student must pass modules as specified for their programme for the safety net to be considered.
- Students who do not meet these requirements will retain the right to resit opportunities, as set out in the regulations. We are developing policy to take into account the impact of COVID-19 on resits.
- Students' 2019/20 academic year marks will be initially calculated on the basis of marks awarded for all assessments (pre- and post- COVID-19, defined as 13th Mar 2020).
- Exam boards will apply comprehensive analytics (*e.g.* comparison across years, against performance in previous years and across mark ranges within year) to check that these provisional marks, at the cohort level, are consistent with expected performance. Our usual departmental cohort marking and moderation processes, including the use of mark adjustments and/or scaling, if appropriate and justified, will then be applied in consultation with our external examiners. In the event that the performance of an individual student suggests that there is an issue with academic integrity, the Board will investigate this, in accordance with the normal policy.
- The outcomes of the comprehensive analytics will result in a set of module marks for the 2019-20 academic year which are combined to give the *unmitigated 2019-20 academic year average* mark.
- These marks will be those that are recorded on the transcript. The transcript will not specify whether the safety net has been applied, in line with the practice on mitigating circumstances.
- The *unmitigated 2019-20 academic year average* mark is then combined with the degree weighted marks from prior years of study (if applicable) to calculate an *unmitigated degree weighted average* mark.
- The safety net will then be applied at the individual student level, as follows:
 - **For final year undergraduate students** (not MBBS or iBSc).
The degree classification will be determined by the greater of: the degree weighted average mark across all assessments to 13th Mar 2020, or the *unmitigated degree weighted average* mark, calculated as described above. Where there is a substantial coursework component this academic year, and where a significant amount of the work was completed prior to 13th Mar 2020, the mark for this component will count towards the degree weighted average mark across all assessments to 13th Mar 2020. Where a significant amount of the work was completed after 13th Mar 2020, the mark for this component will count towards the degree weighted average mark across all assessments after 13th Mar 2020. Departments will clarify what is determined as substantial and where work spans these periods.
 - **For first year undergraduate students** (not MBBS or iBSc)
Year 1 is worth 7.5% across all programmes in College. The *unmitigated 2019-20 academic year average* mark is recorded as confirmed. At the end of the degree, the degree classification will be determined by the better outcome of: zero weighting or 7.5 percent weighting of year 1.

- **For other (continuing) undergraduate students** (not MBBS or iBSc)
The confirmed 2019-20 academic year average mark will be the greater of: the degree weighted average mark across all assessments up until 13th Mar 2020, or the *unmitigated 2019-20 academic year average* mark, calculated as described above. This confirmed *2019-20 academic year average* mark will be combined with your prior and future marks, as normal, to determine the degree classification at the end of the degree.
- **For MBBS undergraduate students**
The MBBS programme needs to satisfy its regulator, the GMC, in order to ensure the highest standards of patient safety. Therefore, the safety net policy cannot directly apply to MBBS students. The Medical School is however aware of the potential effect on performance caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and will take these into account in any mitigating circumstances.
- **For postgraduate taught and iBSc students**
For postgraduate taught and iBSc students, the exact policy will differ on a programme-by-programme basis, reflective of the very wide range of assessment models used in these programmes and the various professional body requirements they must comply with. If there is not sufficient pre-COVID-19 evidence to compare against, which will be the case for many of our 1 year research intensive programmes, the 2019/20 academic year average awarded will, if possible, be the mark obtained through the comprehensive analytics process as described above. Where this is not possible or appropriate, there are a number of additional options that we are exploring. We are working with your Departments to find alternative methods of delivery for coursework, both teaching and assessment. This applies in particular to project work, field trips and placements undertaken in the summer term and over the summer. We are exploring what options we have to extend the length of the programme to allow for a return to campus. For students who may wish to take an earlier exit award, such as a PG Diploma and PG Certificate, we are actively looking to offer these where possible and where the requirements for these have been met.