

Should the Students' Union lobby the university to instate a 'no-detriment' policy?

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What do you want?

For the Executive Officers to lobby the university for a 'no-detriment' policy. The method by which this should be approached involves consulting students and collecting both qualitative and quantitative data.

The Executive Officers will work closely with the Deans of Education and the Vice Principal of Education to attain a good 'no-detriment' policy for students. The ideal policy would be implemented across all years and would include: discrediting each students' worst two modules from their overall grade and introducing automatic extensions and grace periods for coursework. Additionally, as part of the 'no-detriment' policy, a 'borderline classification policy' by which all students within 1.5% of a classification borderline will now fall into the zone of consideration to be raised to the next higher level, should be applied. The specific requirements for students within each school should also be supported. For those courses whereby the 'no-detriment' policy is procedurally not applicable (i.e MBBS & BDS), other methods to account for disadvantage caused by the pandemic should be applied. It is to be noted that ultimately, only the university can implement a new 'no-detriment' policy.

The timeline from the start of conversations with university staff to the collective end goal needs to be accelerated imminently, with a policy being released at the end of January. Upon an agreed decision, the university should release a formal statement outlining the 'no-detriment' policy and hold schools accountable for executing this. The university should encourage schools to regularly communicate and update students' regarding the policy put in place.

The 'no-detriment' policy should continue to be administered for the duration of the pandemic and its impact on students.

Why do you want it?

For context, in 2020, when the pandemic began to affect the UK and the first lockdowns were announced, the university released a document introducing a 'no-detriment' policy acknowledging the impact of coronavirus on students. An excerpt of the policy can be seen below:

'The marks for the weakest credits from the year will be excluded in all cases; where the recalculated year average would still bring the College Mark down, the whole year will be excluded from classification.'

Despite this acknowledgement, the policy was discontinued after the 2019/20 academic year was finished. The Executive Officers contend that considering the pandemic is still occurring, the learning environment and impact on students is as pertinent as last year, yet appropriate policies and safety nets to support students are not in place.

We recognise the efforts from university staff to work quickly to transition from in-person to blended learning. However, surveys circulated throughout faculties have shown that this has not been effective for a majority of students and presents its own drawbacks. Moreover, the definition of 'blended learning' has been indistinct and whilst the university prepared for blended learning, they did not prepare for a third national lockdown.

The Russell Group Students' Unions have released a statement in favour of introducing a 'no-detriment' policy and we, as Executive Officers, endeavour to represent the five demands stated in the letter.

As Executive Officers we want to commit to lobbying the university to mitigate the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on students' academic experience and on their general welfare and ability to work effectively in such exceptional times.

Reference to ARCS 'no-detriment' policy of 2020:

<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/media/arcs/docs/quality-assurance/examination-boards/Assessment-Progression-and-Award-2019-20.pdf>

Reference to Russell Group Students' Unions Letter:

<https://www.qmsu.org/news/article/6965/Russell-Group-Students-Unions-Our-response-to-current-arrangements-for-assessments-and-grading/>

What impact will this have?

Indubitably, a reintroduction of a 'no-detriment' policy will not only give students 'peace of mind' but also allow them to academically achieve to the best of their ability and ease the emotional pressures brought upon them by a global pandemic. Students have already been disadvantaged in this current exam period. It is clear that the pandemic has had a detrimental effect on students' academic performance, therefore, many marks have been unrepresentative of a student's ability. In light of this, it would be beneficial for Queen Mary to introduce a 'no-detriment' policy with the aforementioned terms included.

