



## **'No Disadvantage' Policy – May 2020**

Hello everyone, this is a message for all theology students registered on a University of Manchester course, as well as those on the Spurgeon's Diploma in Ministerial Formation and the Spurgeon's Award. I want to explain to you fairly briefly the No Disadvantage policy which the College is operating this summer, which is designed to compensate for the difficulties under which you are studying during this period. I posted the policy on Moodle a few days ago. It follows closely what Manchester themselves are doing and has been approved by their Faculty of Humanities. I won't go through all the details now but just outline the main points.

Each summer we hold two important examiners' meetings, normally in June and September. This year the first of these will take place in early July. These meetings are where we review a grid of every student's marks, listed according to student number so no names are visible. On this basis we decide who has fulfilled the requirements to be granted their degree, diploma, certificate or award, as well as the classification of degrees (1st, 2:1 etc for the BA; Master's students who do really well can get a distinction or merit); who has fulfilled the requirements to go up to the next academic level, e.g. level 4 to level 5; and who has not done so well and may need to be asked to do resits before they can progress further. We also keep an eye on the progress of others who have not reached any of these important decision points to check how they are doing, and if any contact or follow-up about their progress may be required. We have one of these meetings in September as well as June or July, because although some will have finished all the work they need to do early in the summer, others do summer assignments, have extensions or are asked to do resits. The September meeting allows us to make awards, give permission to progress and make decisions about resits for those students who had not completed their work by June.

The marks we consider at these meetings are the total marks you have received for each individual unit of study. As you know, the person who marks your work is normally the person who has taught the unit. All units are also 'moderated' by another College tutor, which means they sample the work and check that the marking has been done fairly; they can ask for a batch to be remarked if they think the marking level isn't quite right, and markers can also ask moderators for advice in cases where they are unsure of the right mark. On top of this, an external examiner samples work from all units at levels 5, 6 and 7, to ensure that internally we are doing our job properly. All of this will continue to happen as normal this year.

What will be different is that for most students, the examination boards will see a 'baseline mark' beside the actual unit marks. This baseline mark should be good news, because it means that even though you can still get a higher mark than this in any your units, you can't get a lower one! In turn, that means that if your performance has fallen below what you would have expected on the basis of your previous work, for any reason - not being able to get hold of the right books, having to home-school your kids, extra pressure

juggling your employment or church duties, or whatever - you won't be disadvantaged. If your final mark for any unit falls below the baseline, you'll get the baseline mark instead, and it'll be the baseline which we'll use in making all the key decisions about what degree or other award you can get and whether you can progress to the next level. Of course, it's always going to be worth aiming higher than the baseline, and it'll always be this higher mark that counts, if you achieve it. The baseline acts like a safety net if you are struggling.

This baseline mark is calculated on the basis of the work you have submitted so far at this level of study, as well as the work you submitted at the previous level. So, for example, full-time students at Level 5 will have a baseline mark calculated from their marks for the first semester this academic year plus their marks for the whole of level 4. If you're mathematically minded there's a document up on Moodle provided by the University called 'calculating your baseline' which explains the formulae that we are using to make this calculation. Our senior registrar, Katie Walsh, will be emailing all of you soon with your baseline mark.

I said that 'most' students would be getting a baseline mark. There are two important exceptions to this. First, if for any reason you have not yet submitted any work for your college course, or very little work, we will not have enough to go on in calculating your 'standard' level. This might be the case if you are on a part-time or distance learning course, or have needed to seek extensions on your first semester work. In these cases, we will still take account of the potential disadvantages you have encountered during this period, but we will do so later, at the point where you would be ready to progress to the next level. In any case, your marks at Level 4 don't count towards your final degree classification; they're just used to see whether you can progress to level 5. So when we make that decision in a year or more we will look at your whole spread of marks over level 4 and see if they justify progression- to make sure you aren't stopped from progressing by some uncharacteristically low marks.

The other exception is that units which fail according to the usual criteria will continue to receive a fail mark, not a baseline mark. This is important to ensure that the standard of your awards is maintained. If you get a mark in the 'compensatable range', that is between 30 and 39 for undergraduates or 40 and 49 for Master's candidates, you will continue to be eligible for compensation up to the normal maximum of units allowed - that means that you probably won't have to resit the unit, but the original mark will stand.

It's important to continue to submit all assignments as set, because any assignment not submitted is considered to have failed by non-submission. It will be listed as a fail in your profile and no baseline will be applied to that unit. If for any reason you are struggling to submit your work on time, please put in a request for an extension in the normal way. We recognise the many delaying factors that could be in play at the moment and carefully consider all requests.

I hope this message has clarified the 'no disadvantage' policy for you. Do look at it carefully and if you have any questions, please speak to your pastoral tutor in the first instance. Finally, congratulations to you all for your perseverance at this difficult time. I wish you all the best as you work on your assignments, and do remember that we are here to help in any way we can.

Stephen Wright  
Academic Director