Hi, my name is Nina Spencer, I am Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality Assurance & Standards) and I can’t be there at the launch today as I will be peering over results sheet and regulations in our exam boards that are taking place all this week.

As the person responsible for quality assurance, I am the keeper of the rules. We all need rules including in higher education. A university is a complex community and, like any community, we need regulations and policies to successfully co-exist. But with that said, at Leeds Arts University we are keen to make sure those rules are there to support our students, not to catch them out, including in their transition into higher education, and in their progression through their studies and beyond.

I would like to think that we have implemented many things here at Leeds Arts University over the years that support compassion in our assessment. We received TDAP in 2016 when we could start writing our own regulations. And with that I wanted to tell you a little bit about one of the things we have done that hopefully allows for our compassionate approach.

**For our postgraduate students…**

In 2017, Leeds Arts University decided to move to a Pass/Fail model for all modules on all of our postgraduate courses. The rationale was that this would better support the practice-based nature of our Masters course and the postgraduate culture of the University and allow students to concentrate on their practice, experimentation and risk-taking rather than chasing marks. The adoption of the Pass/Fail model on postgraduate courses has been positively received by students and staff. The Pass/Fail model supports our vision of a collaborative as opposed to a competitive culture.

In preparation for implementing the Pass / Fail at postgraduate level, we ensured there was a systematic method in place for the provision of formative feedback at key points during the module delivery. We have also continued to monitor and improve the quality of the summative feedback our students receive. This has included ensuring appropriate and useful taxonomy is shared and consistently used. The positive aspect is that detailed, written feedback is provided to the students in the spirit of feedforward. As well as an opportunity to reward the student for hard work, the aim is that individual assessors retain the autonomy to deliver meaningful and pertinent feedback with confidence. Students are provided with distinct directions to move their work forwards and to highlight both strengths and areas for improvements.

**For students in their first year on undergraduate courses…**

The Transition to higher education is something we as a University has been working for some time. Then inn 2021, with the continued challenges posed by the pandemic we introduced, a Pass/Fail grading for all modules on Level 4 – the students’ first year.

These Level 4 students had already experienced significant disruption to their school and college studies following the lockdown in March 2020 and the continuing impact of the pandemic had meant that the transition to Higher Education learning had been more difficult for those entering their first year.

The aim of a Pass/Fail approach has been to enable first year students to focus on their learning, including their development of subject knowledge and transferable skills, including experimentation and risk-taking. The aim was also that the removal of a focus on grades would help the management of pressure and anxiety and support student wellbeing. Students has continued to receive detailed feedback on all modules to help them understand any steps needed to improve.

The University is now in the process of evaluating and discussing next steps with the Pass/Fail approach for Level 4, for this next cohort of first year students in the first instance – and as part of this my colleague Peter Hughes has done some work on the advantages and disadvantages of a Pass / Fail model which he will share with you during this launch. As part of our careful deliberations, we are looking at how we ensure students can develop effective assessment literacy in preparation for Level 5/second year, and again we are looking at the feedback students receive which is even more important in a Pass / Fail model.

One external examiner at our undergraduate exam boards this week said: “You have made a bold move introducing Pass / Fail - and it is a bold move I wish we were bold enough to make ourselves.” Writing a Pass / Fail model into our undergraduate regulations for Level 4 is not one to be taken lightly – and we will be deliberating carefully before deciding how we proceed, with our students at the forefront of our minds.