

UWS UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST *of* SCOTLAND

ASSESSMENT POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

This Assessment Policy sets out the key principles governing assessment practice within the University. These principles aim to reflect best practice in the sector and to indicate in particular how the University discharges its obligations under the Quality Assurance Agency Code of Practice governing the assessment of students¹.

The principles set out in the Policy are intended as a framework to guide the development of and underpin the more detailed Regulations concerning assessment which are to be found in the Regulatory Framework of the University. These Regulations set out the more specific rules, roles and responsibilities through which this Policy is implemented.

Key propositions or precepts are presented in normal font. These are augmented by guidance notes in italic script.

¹ The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Section 6: Assessment of students May 2000 (1st edition) & September 2006 (2nd edition).

SECTION 1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1.1 PURPOSES OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment of students is undertaken for various reasons, among which are:

- Reasons related to the student experience and student achievement
- Reasons related to staff activities
- Reasons related to systems for quality assurance, quality enhancement and the maintenance of academic standards
- Reasons related to the interests of other stakeholders

1.1.1 The student experience and student achievement

Assessment has a principal aim of providing feedback to students to enable them to evaluate the development of their learning, and thus to support, guide and enhance learning, and to provide the student with recognition of their achievements.

This feedback can take two forms: formative assessment is assessment for learning and as such provides guidance to enable students to evaluate their learning development and to guide their future learning; summative assessment involves assigning marks and/or grades against designated work which counts towards overall progression and award decisions, and is used to determine whether the student has achieved the intended learning outcomes for the programme or module. Specific assessments may perform both of the above functions.

Assessment should motivate students to undertake appropriate work and should be used to promote effective learning. Students work more effectively when they are well motivated. If assessment can be demonstrated to provide effective feedback on general performance and learning strategies, as well as being valued as reliable measures of attainment of intended learning outcomes of a module or programme, then the student will be better motivated towards such assessed work.

Assessment should generate valuable student learning activity, and should lead to students producing work which both they and staff value. Students value work for a range of reasons, including: they can relate it to the goals of their programme of study; they may perceive it to relate to their intended career choices; because assessment demonstrates the development of their learning and the enhancement of their expertise.

Well-designed assessment provides an opportunity for students to demonstrate the breadth and depth of their skills and abilities acquired through participation in their programmes of studies and related activities. As well as being a necessary part of a formal record of achievement and informing the processes related to progression and the acquisition of an award on completion of a programme of study, assessment in its various forms is a concrete opportunity for students to demonstrate the range and depth of their portfolio of attributes, including subject knowledge, transferable skills and higher-order cognitive abilities.

1.1.2 Academic staff activities

Assessment has a principal aim of enabling staff appraisal of the extent of student learning, providing guidance to academic staff which assists them in evaluating their teaching, learning and assessment practice. Assessment provides a means for academic staff to demonstrate on a reliable basis to themselves and other stakeholders, that course or module materials and methods of assessment are consistent with the intended learning outcomes of the programme or module. Assessment provides the basis for discriminating between students in the extent of their achievements and informs judgements on progression and awards for individual students.

As with the need to provide students with feedback on their progress and levels of attainment, the same assessment provides academic staff with the means to make judgements as to how far and in what ways students have achieved intended learning outcomes, and with a tool for identifying those students who might be at risk of not achieving programme or module outcomes, and thus triggers appropriate supportive actions.

Academic staff need to be aware of the effectiveness of their learning materials, teaching methods and the contribution of their assessment strategies to the overall levels of attainment of their students in relation to the intended programme or module learning outcomes. By monitoring student performance in assessments – not just in terms of marks or grades, but including evidence of student allocation of effort to assessed work - staff are able to gauge the values placed on such work by students and to assess the likely contribution of methods of assessment to learning outcomes. Evidence of student effort is provided by the quality of assessed work, module questionnaires and other sources of student feedback.

The need to develop assessment materials and methods on a continuous basis stimulates academic staff to interrogate both their subject discipline and their state of knowledge of teaching and learning strategies. In so doing, the teacher is engaging in active scholarship or research that enhances the effectiveness of the teaching and learning strategies and materials that emerge.

The University requires a reliable, valid, fair and transparent system for discriminating between levels of achievement including those that determine progress between stages of programmes, as well as those that ultimately allow for the bestowal of the appropriate award on completion of a programme. Assessment in its various forms provides the main raw materials for informing such decisions.

1.1.3 The University mission, quality assurance, quality enhancement and the maintenance of academic standards

Assessment has a principal aim of demonstrating that the University is achieving its mission, contributing to quality assurance and enhancement processes, and to assuring that appropriate academic standards are being maintained.

The University wishes to demonstrate to all stakeholders that it is capable of delivering what it has promised in its mission statement. One of the key purposes of assessment is the production of information that permits both internal and independent evaluation of the extent to which the University has met its central goals.

The University commits itself to national standards and benchmarks as a means to ensure that its awards embody equivalent academic standards to those of UK Universities at large. In particular, the University takes cognisance of the level descriptors in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), and expects its programmes to meet - where these are applicable - the requirements of Subject Benchmark Statements and the standards set by professional bodies that accredit our programmes. Reliable and valid methods of assessment are a means of testing the extent to which modules and programmes are meeting such standards and are to be seen as part of an on-going system of monitoring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching within the University-wide quality assurance and enhancement framework.

The monitoring of assessment practices, of indicators of student progression and performance, and consideration of external examiner reports and other sources of evidence through this framework provide means of comparing how student achievement varies between modules and programmes and over time. As such, this monitoring contributes to assuring the maintenance of academic standards, including signalling requirements for timely action where there is evidence that standards may be at risk.

1.1.4 External Stakeholders

Assessment practices are a key part of the processes that provide assurance to stakeholders that their requirements regarding the quality and standards of programmes in the University are being met. Chief external stakeholders are the Funding Council (and through this the Scottish Executive) and other funding bodies, agencies charged with the enhancement of quality and assurance of standards, external examiners, professional and regulatory bodies, and employers.

Assessment practices, through their outcomes in terms of the awards of the University and through their place in transparent processes of quality enhancement and the management of academic standards, are required to satisfy this diverse set of stakeholders.

1.2 PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT

The University is committed to ensuring that its assessment practice has the following characteristics:

- *Validity* – That assessment accurately measures what it is supposed to be measuring, in particular the extent of attainment of intended learning outcomes.
- *Reliability* – That assessment measures student attainment in ways that are consistent over time and between assessors.
- *Usefulness* – That assessment facilitates student learning, including the acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and skills but also the “critical, analytical problem-based learning skills and the transferable skills to prepare the student for graduate employment” (University of the West of Scotland Regulatory Framework 2007-08 Regulation 5.5.2a)
- *Equity* – That the forms of assessment are a fair test of the abilities of all candidates and that marking and grading, and the making of progression and award decisions, are

conducted fairly and without reference to gender, ethnicity, disability or any other discriminating criteria.

- *Transparency* – That all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that students are made aware of the nature of assessed tasks and of their links to intended learning outcomes, and receive clear and informative feedback through published marks and grades, and by other means, on the extent to which these outcomes have been met.

1.3 ASSESSMENT AND INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

The design of assessment, feedback to students and the marking and grading process should be guided by the requirement that students are assessed in terms of the extent of their achievement of intended learning outcomes.

The process of assessment design should be considered as an integral part of the overall curriculum design and not as a stand-alone activity. The design of assessment should be closely linked to statements of intended learning outcomes. This is based upon the understanding that there should be a firm and clear link between intended learning outcomes of modules and the aims and intended learning outcomes of programmes to which the module contributes.

For students, linking assessment design to module learning outcomes can provide clarity of expectations for assessment through the provision of guiding statements that underlie varied assessments set. In addition, the link between marking and grading and intended learning outcomes ensures that feedback is against clearly stated objectives and heightens the value of formative assessment.

For staff, clear links between assessment and intended learning outcomes can enhance reflective practice by encouraging critical evaluation of fit between the type and content of assessment and the key purposes of the module and/or programme. Such links also assure the evaluation of student work against set criteria that are clearly and publicly stated (in programme and module documentation) and which have been externally validated and reviewed.

For stakeholders such as employers, professional bodies, external examiners and reviewers, the linking of assessment to intended learning outcomes makes explicit the attributes, skills and knowledge that graduates can be expected to possess.

In adopting an educational approach based on intended learning outcomes, the University has not sought to interpret the latter in terms of narrow competences or in the language of competences alone. It is recognised that the programmes of the University seek to develop higher order cognitive, analytical and problem-solving skills. Therefore, where appropriate, marking and grading rests on the exercise of holistic judgement against broadly defined learning outcomes.

Such judgements may need to be made across a range of student work. It is important to recognise that there should not necessarily be a one-to-one relationship between a piece of assessment and a learning outcome: one assessment may satisfy several different outcomes. Similarly, a single learning outcome may be satisfied through several different types of assessment or assessment tasks. Where this is the case, procedures for weighting and aggregating the outcomes of several assessment tasks need to be sensitive to the need to

maintain the broad connection between the assignment of grades to modules and the achievement of module learning outcomes. This is a central consideration in the design of assessment schemes that can be justified in terms of these outcomes.

1.4 GUIDELINES ON THE QUANTITY OF ASSESSED WORK

Assessment should be appropriately varied but not excessive in proportion to the academic credit awarded for a module.

Assessment should be efficient in the use of staff and student time, but should be sufficient to allow for assessment that performs a formative role in the development of student knowledge, understanding and skills. Assessment should be appropriately varied, recognising that there may be more than one way to assess student learning against a given intended learning outcome. In particular, learners from different backgrounds may be advantaged or disadvantaged by heavy reliance on particular forms of assessment, and therefore variation in such methods may contribute to the goal of equity. The balance between different forms of assessment and their respective contributions to overall marks and grades should be regularly reviewed by module coordinators in the light of student performance and student feedback.

Assessment of the same learning outcomes by different means may therefore be appropriate in some circumstances, but assessment practice should be sensitive to effects on the student experience and student motivation. In order to avoid over-assessment, there should not normally be multiple summative assessments of a specific intended learning outcome within a given module. Nevertheless, over the course of a programme of study, it will often be appropriate to assess the same analytical, transferable or professional skills at differing levels of attainment or sophistication.

Since assessment design is an integral part of curriculum design, the design of assessment should be guided by consideration of the appropriate division of student effort hours between class contact, preparation for and production of assignments, and other forms of independent study. In addition, module coordinators should seek to avoid the bunching of assessments in ways that create an uneven schedule of work for students over the trimester, restrict time for feedback and limit opportunities for reflection.

The Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) in each subject area has a responsibility to monitor the amount of assessed work required of students and to ensure that an appropriate level of comparability is maintained between modules in this respect. Within and between subject areas, the nature of assessed work will vary significantly and therefore any norms governing the amount of assessed work should not be applied in a mechanistic manner. Such norms should also be designed or interpreted within the context of the University policy that, taking into account class attendance, independent study and student work, each module equates to 200 hours of notional student effort.

In those disciplines where assessment includes substantial amounts of discursive written work (for instance, in the form of essays), LTCs are expected to take into account the following norms in order to limit the extent of variation in the amount of assessed work per module.

For modules of 20 credit points, the guidelines are :

between one examination of two hours and an assignment or assignments of 1,000 words (or 3,000 words and no examination)

and one examination of two hours and an assignment or assignments of 2,500 words (or 4,500 words and no examination).

It is recognised that not all forms of assessment in any subject area are amenable to quantification in terms of word ranges or limits. Moreover, in many disciplines the above norms will not be applicable due to the differing nature of the assessments employed. Where the nature of summative assessments in a subject area is not amenable to quantification in terms of word limits, the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) should seek to establish norms that as far as possible enable comparability in the amount of assessed work across modules.

In applying such norms, LTCs should seek to ensure that they are interpreted consistently between modules. Where continuous assessment takes place in class time as an integral aspect of teaching practice, an LTC may consider that such norms should be exceeded in specific modules. In addition, such norms should not be used in a manner that constrains the variety of assessment methods nor innovation in such methods since the latter should be designed above all to be appropriate to the intended learning outcomes of the module.

1.5 DESIGN OF ASSESSMENT IN TERMS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

Since the design of assessment is integral to the process of curriculum design as a whole, then both the appropriateness of assessment instruments and the student performance will be key considerations in quality assurance and enhancement processes.

The assessment strategy for each programme and module will be documented through the programme specification and module descriptor templates respectively. Data on student performance together with comment on assessment methods from external examiners and academic staff, and from students through feedback questionnaires, student representatives and staff-student liaison committees are key resources for the monitoring activities of LTCs. In these ways, the University ensures that assessment strategies are part of a holistic process of curriculum review that includes the review of methods of assessment. Monitoring by LTCs in turn forms a basis for School and University Quality Enhancement Reports and events. Validation and Subject Health Review processes, which entail further external and stakeholder involvement, also focus on assessment as a key aspect of the curriculum.

SECTION 2 ACADEMIC STANDARDS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The academic standards of the University are embodied in the intended learning outcomes of its programmes and modules since these outcomes establish what our students will have learned to do. External reference points for standards in turn inform the design of intended learning outcomes. These reference points include:

The SCQF and, as a working guide, its level descriptors
Subject benchmark statements
Curriculum and other requirements of relevant professional bodies.

In addition, the University Regulatory Framework 2007 - 2008 provides further definition of the level of achievement appropriate to awards from its taught programmes. Regulation 5.5.2b) defines the acquired characteristics of a graduate of the University. Regulation 5.2.13 defines characteristic outcomes from Masters programmes.

The above definitions of academic standards set threshold (and/or median) expectations for progression and awards. In addition, the University employs a system of grades and numerical marks that enable discrimination between student work in respect of further criteria that differentiate performance within any given level in the SCQF. In order to ensure that grading and marking are criterion-referenced processes and to underpin consistency in marking and grading within the University, the marking and grading process should reflect the following grade-related criteria.

The University is committed both to equality of opportunity and to the fair and transparent application of the same explicit academic standards to all of its students.

2.2 GRADE-RELATED CRITERIA

The University employs four main pass grades (A, B1, B2, C) and two fail grades (D, E) as defined below. In addition, the grades 'pass' and 'fail' are used in exceptional circumstances where required by professional bodies. The grade-related criteria should inform grading and marking practice and guide the provision of programme and module information to students regarding the meaning of marks and grades.

The criteria below - in conjunction with module intended learning outcomes that in turn will take account of the SCQF level descriptors - should guide the marking and grading process. This might be ensured directly by the use of these criteria to guide holistic judgements of student work. Alternatively, these criteria should inform the construction of more detailed marking and grading schemes for specific assignments (e.g. through the construction of model answers or by means of marking schedules or menus through which marks for specific characteristics of student work are awarded). Such more detailed schemes should be available to and used by all examiners (including external examiners) involved with a given assignment. Students should be made aware of these schemes – either in advance of an assignment in the interests of clarity of expectations of students – or as part of feedback to students on their assessed work.

Grade	Numerical range (%)	Definition	Descriptor
A	70-100	Excellent Outstanding	Student work very much exceeds the threshold standard. It displays a consistently thorough, deep and/or extensive knowledge and understanding; originality and/or very high ability in analysis, evaluation, problem solving or other process skills; very high ability in professional practice skills (where relevant) including evidence of high degree of autonomy and independent judgement relative to threshold expectations.
B1	60-69	Very good Commendable	Student work is well above the threshold standard. It displays a consistently very good level of knowledge and understanding; high ability in analysis, evaluation, problem solving or other process skills; high ability in professional practice skills (where relevant) including exercise of significant independent judgement relative to threshold expectations.
B2	50-59	Good Highly competent	Student work is clearly above the threshold standard. It displays generally good knowledge and understanding; good ability in analysis, evaluation, problem solving or other process skills; evidences highly competent performance of professional practice skills (where relevant).
C1	40-49	Satisfactory Competent	Student work is at the threshold standard. It displays generally satisfactory knowledge and understanding in most key respects; competence in analysis and most other process skills; evidences competent performance of professional practice skills (where relevant).
D	30-39	Unsatisfactory	Student work is marginally below the threshold standard. It displays some knowledge and understanding but this is incomplete or partial; limited ability in analysis and other process skills; evidences lack of or partial competence in professional practice skills (where relevant).
E	0-29	Very unsatisfactory	Student work is well below the threshold standard. It displays very limited knowledge and understanding; evidences very limited or no analytical or other process skills; very limited competence over the range of professional practice skills.

Where defined on the module descriptor, the following grades are used in exceptional circumstances where required by professional bodies as an alternative to the numerical grading scheme:

Grade	Definition	Descriptor
Pass	Pass	Student has met the criteria for ‘pass’ as specifically defined in the module descriptor
Fail	Fail	Student has not met the criteria for ‘pass’ as specifically defined in the module descriptor

2.3 MARKING AND GRADING SCHEMES

All marking and grading for programmes of the University deploy the standard marking and grading scheme above. Module marks and grades are arrived at where required by aggregation of numerical marks from a number of assessments into a single percentage mark to which the corresponding grade is then applied.

It is widely recognised that all systems of aggregation are open to some criticism. Some Universities have adopted averaging of grades or grade points (for instance on a 20 point scale) in place of aggregation in terms of percentages. Since aggregation contains inherent and widely recognised issues whatever system is employed, academic staff are guided to review assessment strategies and marking schemes in the light of measured student performance and the pattern of module results. In this way, anomalous patterns of results that may arise from particular assessment strategies through aggregation or from the operation of particular marking schemes can be responded to. In this iterative process, the grade-related criteria can play a key role in informing academic staff of anomalies for investigation (for instance, if aggregation produces a pattern of student grades that appears to significantly over- or under-state the quality of the student work produced).

2.4 RULES FOR PROGRESSION AND AWARDS

The University applies common rules for progression and awards as set out in the Regulatory Framework 2007-2008 Regulation 7 and views adherence to these common rules as one key measure to secure equity in the treatment of students and to maintain consistency in the academic standards applied across its programmes. Given the adoption of the SCQF and previously a credit-based system for defining its awards, the University requires a pass (grade of C or above) in each module at a given level as the criterion for eligibility for progression or an award except where regulations on compensation for failed modules are invoked.

2.5 RULES FOR HONOURS CLASSIFICATION

The University currently adopts the honours classification system common to UK Universities. As part of the process of seeking to assure common academic standards for the use of the honours classification system, the University operates a common formula for the determination of the class of the honours degrees that it awards.

The minimum criterion for the award of Honours degrees is a grade of C or above in each of the eight modules or equivalent studied at SCQF level 10 or in the final year stage of the programme.

The following criteria will be applied by the Programme Panel. Where modules whose intrinsic level is lower than SCQF level 10 are taken as a specifically validated part of the honours year stage, then grades for such modules will count towards the honours classification as if these modules were at SCQF level 10.

First class	Mean mark of 70% or above	OR Mean mark of at least 67% and a majority of the modules in the final year stage at grade A
Upper second class	Mean mark of 60% or above	OR Mean mark of at least 57% and a majority of the modules in the final year stage at grade B1 or better
Lower second class	Mean mark of 50% or above	OR Mean mark of at least 47% and a majority of the modules in the final year stage at grade B2 or better
Third class	Mean mark of 40% or above	

Modules which are assessed on a 'Pass' or 'Fail' basis can not contribute to the classification of an Honours degree.

Where a student has undertaken a resit in one or more modules at SCQF level 10 or in the final year stage of the programme, then the resit mark will stand on the student's academic record but a mark of 40% and grade C will be used in the classification of the Honours award.

2.6 POLICY WITH RESPECT TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity by avoiding less favourable treatment of students with disabilities and by making reasonable adjustments to learning, teaching and assessment so as to preclude such treatment. Assessment, as a key component of the curriculum, should be designed to anticipate student needs and to meet the requirements of accessibility.

Adjustments to the curriculum and assessment in the light of the needs of potential students with disabilities should be incorporated at the initial design stage, during the approval or review of modules and programmes. The Disability Discrimination Act as amended in 2001 places an obligation on staff to anticipate the likely needs of disabled students rather than relying on ad hoc adjustments in the light of specific student needs.

The University has established procedures for putting in place reasonable adjustments to

teaching, learning and assessment. These procedures involve creating opportunities for students to disclose disabilities, professional assessment where appropriate, and procedures for specifying reasonable adjustments that academic and administrative staff may make in the case of specific student needs. Effective support relies on communication and partnership between academic and administrative staff, special needs advisers in Student Services, and the student.

The University advises staff to take appropriate advice before refusing any proposed adjustment to the form or conditions of assessment so as to ensure that such action is not discriminatory. The University accepts that such adjustments must be consistent with the maintenance of academic standards and with fairness to all students. Where concerns are raised regarding academic standards, the appropriate course of action is the consideration of alternative adjustments. In the rare case of disagreement that cannot be resolved between any two of the relevant academic staff member, special needs adviser and student, matters relating to propose adjustments must be referred to the appropriate Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) and in exceptional circumstances to the Vice Principal (Learning and Teaching). University regulations will afford the latter the power to adjudicate on such disputes.

The published academic standards that all students must meet are embodied in intended learning outcomes of programmes and modules. Criteria for marking and grading – for instance, in the case of formal qualities of student work such as grammar and spelling – must reflect the stated academic standards.

Marking criteria may only include specific and independent criteria relating to grammar, spelling or similar general characteristics of student work where these are explicitly set out in the intended learning outcomes. In all other cases, student work must be marked on content or meaning alone, whilst acknowledging that where grammatical or presentational features of student work prevent this meaning from being discerned, then the marks and grades awarded will be adversely affected.

2.7 COMPENSATION

From session 2007-08, compensation for failure may not be applied by a programme panel with respect to any student.

2.8 MITIGATION

The policy of the University with respect to mitigating circumstances that may have affected student performance in assessments is that the student will have a right to be re-assessed as if for the first time (or in the case of a second attempt having been affected, as if for the second time). This will apply only where a claim of mitigation is demonstrated through designated procedures on the basis of written evidence. (See Regulation 7.7 for more details of the mitigation process.)

SECTION 3 MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

3.1 MANAGEMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Each of the academic Schools of the University, through the Dean, is responsible for:

- The management of the assessment process to ensure its integrity and effectiveness
- Setting and maintaining academic standards
- Quality assurance of standards (as outlined in section 1 above).

These responsibilities are discharged through:

- The appointment by the Dean of, and responsibility for, module coordinators and moderators who are charged with the organisation of assessments (and with scheduling and administering assessments apart from formal examinations organised by Student Administration) and the setting of marks and recommended grades and decisions on each module
- The appointment by School Board on the proposal of the Dean of, and responsibility for, Subject and Programme Panel chairs.

3.2 INTERNAL EXAMINING AND MODERATING

Internal markers and moderators are responsible in the first instance for the accuracy and integrity of assessment marks and grades. The responsibilities of module coordinators for the coordination of assessment processes are set out in regulation 5.2.16. The University has approved guidelines for module moderation (regulation 7, appendix 2) and it is the responsibility of module coordinators and of moderators to ensure that these are followed.

3.3 EXTERNAL EXAMINING

It is University Policy that there are external examiners associated with each module and programme and their responsibilities are set out in regulation 7.12.1. The University views external examiners and their annual reports as key mechanisms in managing and maintaining academic standards. In consequence, the functions of external examiners relate primarily to the oversight of the academic standards embodied in assessment tools and the marking and grading process. External examiners are not viewed primarily as arbiters between differing judgements of University academic staff. Therefore, although external examiners have powers in relation to the individual marks and grades of students, the University expects that they will in all cases be presented with definitive marks and grades approved through internal marking and moderating processes.

Guidance to external examiners (regulation 7.12.6) states that they are expected not to alter the marks and grades of particular students (but may amend the marks of all students) unless the whole of the student work from the relevant cohort has been available to them. This guidance is aimed at ensuring consistency of treatment between students in the marking and grading process.

3.4 ASSESSMENT PANELS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

Assessment Panels are the key committees that approve the marks and grades for modules and which take all decisions relating to student progression, re-assessment and conferment of awards of the University in respect of its taught programmes. University policy is to separate the decision process into two stages through the distinction between Subject Panels and Programme Panels, each with associated external examiners.

Subject Panels approve the marks and recommend grades and decisions regarding the results of students in individual modules. These are the primary locus of academic decision-making and this is reflected in a number of aspects of these Panels. These include a broad membership representative of the academic staff engaged in the teaching and assessment of students, and a responsibility for the accuracy and reliability of marks and grades for student work.

Programme Panels make decisions on student progression and awards, and confirm decisions regarding re-assessment requirements where necessary. These Panels are primarily concerned with ensuring fairness and equity in the application of University regulations for progression and awards. In relation to the impact of mitigating circumstances on re-assessment requirements, the Panels act on the decisions of the Mitigation Panel. Being concerned largely with ensuring formal or procedural equity and accuracy in the application of regulations, Programme Panels are not primarily fora for academic judgement and will have a less widely representative membership. In particular, there is no requirement that all subjects or disciplines are represented in Programme Panels by internal and/or external examiners.

3.5 ANONYMOUS MARKING

As a further safeguard of equity and of the application of common standards in the assessment of students, the University has adopted the principle that marking and grading should be conducted under conditions of anonymity up to the point at which markers and moderators have agreed the final marks for all students undertaking a given module assessment.

The above policy will apply to all assessments except those where anonymity is not possible due to the nature of the assessment itself. The exceptions will relate mainly to instances where the student is assessed in a face-to-face manner as in oral assessments and presentations and in some assessments of professional practice. In all other cases, anonymous marking procedures should be followed.

3.6 STUDENT CONDUCT, CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM

In order to safeguard academic standards against relevant forms of student misconduct, the University has approved specific regulations with respect to cheating and plagiarism (to be found in the Code of Discipline for Students : Regulation 12 Appendix 2) and with respect to conduct in examinations (Regulation 12 Appendix 1).

SECTION 4 ASSESSMENT AND STUDENTS

4.1 GUIDANCE TO STUDENTS ON ASSESSMENT TASKS

Students should receive timely and clear written guidance from module coordinators on the assessment schedule for each module and on specific assessment tasks.

This information should include the timing (including submission dates) of and nature of each assessment task and the allocation of marks between such tasks for the module as a whole. Information on specific tasks should include guidance on the intended learning outcomes that are being assessed, the nature of the task (including guidance on the format and length of written work to be submitted) and in most cases a reading list or list of learning resources that might be or must be consulted. Normally, the above information should be provided in the module handout or handbook at the beginning of the trimester in which the module is undertaken.

The module handout or handbook should indicate clearly the consequences of non-completion of each assignment, including arrangements covering late submission and any restrictions that apply in relation to resit opportunities in the event of failure or non-submission. Procedures for late submission of coursework should reflect University regulations as set out in the Regulatory Framework 2007-2008, Regulation 7 Appendix 4. This allows for work submitted within one week of a coursework deadline to be accepted but to be subject to a penalty of ten percentage points deducted from the percentage mark for this coursework.

4.2 GUIDELINES ON FEEDBACK TO STUDENTS ON ASSESSMENT

Sufficient written feedback should be provided both in terms of frequency and detail.

Feedback has to be quite specific to be useful - both in relation to the content (the particular course material) and in suggestions for further study.

Feedback should focus on learning and on actions under students' control, rather than on the students themselves and their characteristics.

Feedback should concentrate on the qualities of the student work rather than on the characteristics of the student, and for this reason anonymity in the marking process should not inhibit the effectiveness of feedback. Formative feedback should avoid being negatively judgemental or demotivating. Feedback should identify clearly where student work needs to be improved, and where and how students can assist themselves to do so. Students should be given options for action, rather than judgements about character. Positive reinforcement – particularly at the beginning and end of feedback – is more likely to be effective in motivating students.

The feedback should be timely so that students receive it while it still matters to them, and to allow them to pay attention to further learning or receive further assistance. Students should receive feedback no later than four weeks from the date of submission or of the assessment in question, and earlier wherever possible. In particular, students should receive feedback on a given assignment before the date of the next assignment. This feedback may take a form

other than written comments on the work of the individual student.

In all cases, including any exceptional cases where feedback will not be available within the period of four weeks specified above, students should be informed at the start of each module of the nature of the feedback that they will receive and of the date by which this feedback will be made available.

Delays in feedback may mean it is irrelevant or out of date, and unlikely to lead to improved learning. Sometimes there can be a trade-off between rapidity and quality of feedback: imperfect but useful feedback from peers given promptly, for example, may have more impact than more fully considered feedback from a lecturer four weeks later. Useful feedback may be given by providing model answers or commentary to the whole class, rather than by written comment on the work of an individual student.

Feedback should be appropriate to the purpose of the assignment and to its criteria for success.

For students, maintaining motivation may be a key issue when they look to feedback from an assignment – especially a first assignment. If grades are involved, feedback should clarify why that grade is awarded. All assessment criteria need to be explicit and understood by students. Members of a programme team or LTC should agree assessment criteria set out on a clear pro forma. These may be issued to students with details of the assignment, and used as a guide to marking. All LTCs should develop a pro forma for feedback to students in order to ensure consistency between markers within and between modules regarding marking criteria and with respect to the quality of feedback to students.

Feedback should be provided in circumstances where it has a good chance of being attended to and acted upon.

Students may ignore or discard feedback even when it is timely, specific, realistic, forward-looking and of good quality; but if it is none of these things then the chances of it improving learning are slim. Some ways of increasing student engagement may be to invite students to specify exactly which features of an assignment they wish to have feedback on; or making assessment a two stage process – with self-assessment as an option as part of stage one.

Research underlines that feedback on its own is more likely to be heeded and have a greater impact than feedback with a grade, or a grade on its own. Giving a grade only after self-assessment and tutor feedback has been provided is an effective sequence. Feedback should encourage adjustments to learning, and give opportunities for students to internalise standards of good practice.

Where appropriate, students should be encouraged to participate in the process of assessment and feedback.

Student participation in assessment can contribute to engaging students in productive learning activities. Methods of peer and self-assessment if introduced carefully (and allowing for moderation by staff) can have real benefits deriving from student involvement. Attendance and other measures of participation may improve in association with peer assessment, and students tend to regard the assessment process as more fair. Self-assessment can be part of a critical process of reflection on learning. Students can also be consulted when drawing up assessment criteria (reinforcing the intended learning outcomes).

Feedback should assist students in their Personal Development Planning (PDP) activities.

From September 2008, all students will be engaged in PDP activities. Feedback on these activities will be used by students as a basis for reflection on their personal development. It is important therefore that academic staff provide feedback not only on the discipline specific nature of student work but, where relevant, on the more general features of their work, eg writing skills, numeracy, problem solving ability. The additional feedback will help students build a more informed profile of their development as learners and professionals