

## ASSESSMENT POLICY

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 Assessment is a generic term for a set of processes and procedures that gauge learning outcomes in terms of knowledge acquired, understanding developed and skills gained, and is central to the learning processes. It also provides a context within which learning experiences can be explored, attitudes expressed and critical insight demonstrated.
- 1.2 This Policy sets out the principles, processes and procedures that guide assessment across all programmes offered by the University.
- 1.3 The Policy aligns with assessment practices, which are published separately, in the section of the Student Regulations Framework entitled 'Assessment Practices'.
- 1.4 The aim is to ensure that all students are able to engage in the assessment process develop an understanding of the standards required for their programme of study and an understanding of what is required to achieve these.

### 2. Principles

- 2.1 The University recognises that assessment can serve many purposes:
  - It plays a significant role in the learning experience of students. It determines their progression through programmes and enables them to identify, monitor and improve their learning.
  - It enables students to obtain appropriate feedback on their learning which helps them improve their performance and optimise their learning experience.

- It enables staff to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and their students' learning.
- It provides a measure of student achievement and forms the basis of decisions on whether a student is ready to proceed, to qualify for an award, or to demonstrate competence to practise.
- It provides the main basis for recognition of student achievement leading to the recommendation of an appropriate award of qualification and / or credit.

2.2 These principles are closely informed by the Quality Assurance Agency's UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance chapter *Assessment* (2018).

2.3 *Assessment should be explicit and transparent*

Assessment processes and procedures need to be clear, consistent and accessible. To this end the University publishes generic level and grade descriptors to aid this process and requires programmes to use these to inform their own assessment guidelines. All assessment must be appropriate to the level of study (FHEQ level) and informed by reference to relevant external publications (e.g. subject benchmarks). The assessment processes and procedures used by a programme must be made available to its students.

2.4 *Assessment should be valid*

There should be a direct link between programme learning opportunities, assessment tasks and module learning outcomes. Different assignments may be focused on specified module learning outcomes. Assessment should not only be something which provides evidence of what the student has learnt (assessment of learning), it should also enable the student to learn (assessment for learning). Validation and external examining procedures ensure that learning outcomes are assessed appropriately and in relation to mode, quantity, level and content.

2.5 *Assessment should be reliable*

Assignments should be marked to defined standards with assessors being able to consistently apply these standards. This requires clear, consistent processes for the setting, marking and moderation of assignments which encourage effective learning. External confirmation of the

standards comes through external examination and periodic review / validation. The standards are made clear through the University's generic level and grade descriptors.

Whilst generic level and grade descriptors have been developed, in order to promote comparability across all University programmes, each programme needs to adapt these to ensure that they closely reflect the nature of the programme / subject (i.e. they are relevant to the programme of study and written in a style which reflects the programme aims and outcomes).

#### 2.6 *Assessment should demonstrate continuity and progression*

Students will deepen and improve their knowledge, understanding and skills as they progress through their programme. In addition, they should be able to identify links between learning at different levels and become progressively more independent in their learning. The learning outcomes of the modules should enable the developing subject specific and generic graduate skills to be met. University-wide generic level descriptors guide the work of programmes in building continuity and progression into their courses. The nature of the assessment should reflect this progression.

#### 2.7 *Assessment should be equitable and inclusive*

Assessment processes and procedures must ensure that the tasks set do not discriminate between students or disadvantage any group or individual. Within any programme there should be a range of assessment methods that reflect differences in students' learning preferences and student needs. Validation procedures ensure that assessment opportunities are closely aligned with University Policies / Procedures and all relevant legislation.

### **3. Guidance**

#### 3.1 *Feedback on assessment*

Students are entitled to receive helpful and timely feedback on all aspects of their performance. Feedback should be provided on all assessed work and returned in good time to enable it to be used to improve performance both within a module and across the different levels of the programme. Equally, students are invited to feedback on their assessment experiences.

### 3.2 *The amount and timing of assessed work required should be carefully monitored*

The amount of assessed work required should be sufficient to provide a reliable and valid profile of achievement without being burdensome to both students and staff. Validation procedures should ensure that effective and appropriate measures of the achievement of learning outcomes can be made. Validation should also include a review of the student assessment workload including the proposed timing of assessments so that this workload is manageable and feedback on assessments can be used to further develop learning. The timing of assessment is determined by programme teams, and every effort will be made to spread the load of summative assessments across the module.

Students should be given clear instructions for assessment which include target word counts or equivalents for all assignments, and the consequences of not adhering to these in accordance with prevailing University regulations.

### 3.3 *Forms of assessment*

Forms of assessment used in the University include summative, formative and diagnostic. Summative assessment provides a measure of achievement, including failure, in relation to the intended learning outcomes of a module within a programme of study. Formative assessment provides learners with feedback on progress and informs their development. Reflective practice by students may also contribute to formative assessment. Diagnostic assessment provides an indicator of a learner's aptitude and preparedness for a programme of study and identifies possible learning strengths and problems. Diagnostic assessment is used in the assessment of additional needs and for the accreditation of prior learning (APL). Diagnostic assessment during a programme can also help students to profile their own skills and abilities (and could be useful for Personal Development Planning - PDP).

Any assessment task may combine two or more of these types of assessment (e.g. summative assessment is typically also formative).

### 3.4 *Diversity of assessment modes*

Diversity in assessment modes is encouraged. The modes of assessment should be sensitive to the diversity of students registered on the programme (where diversity of students is used in its broadest sense to include differences in entry qualifications, differences in social and cultural backgrounds, ethnicity, gender, age, religion / belief, sexual orientation and disability).

Where students with recognised additional needs experience difficulties with the University's normal assessment procedures, an alternative assessment may be offered. This may take the form of a change to the place, time or mode of the assessment / re-assessment, and it will be determined by the programme team in collaboration with the University's Disability and Inclusion Advice Service (DIAS).

The modes of assessment selected should enable authenticity to be evidenced (enhancing the academic integrity of the assessment). The precise choice and balance of assessment methods is closely aligned with module learning outcomes and is determined by programme tutors. Programme specifications provide a summary of the modes of assessment offered and include a glossary of terms for these.

### 3.5 *Elements of the assessment process*

The elements of the assessment process provide a basis for designing, marking and grading assignments using level descriptors, grade descriptors, learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

The positive aspects of assessment involve supporting learning, which may include peer / self-assessment activities, and access to Student Support, and the services they provide.

### 3.6 *Level descriptors*

The University maintains generic level descriptors for all undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. These indicate the generic characteristics of learning at each level of an award and are used to define whether a student has achieved a qualification at a particular level. To achieve the qualification, students must normally demonstrate that they have reached the *threshold level* in all of the stated abilities and skills. Level descriptors are crucial in defining grade descriptors and in developing module learning outcomes and assessment criteria. They provide an indication of what is required to successfully progress from one level [of study or stage of learning] to the next.

### 3.7 *Grade descriptors*

The University's generic grade descriptors provide a measure of student performance within a set task. They are designed to provide a guide as to what is expected of students in order for them to gain a specific mark, or grade, for a piece of work. Students should be encouraged

to use grade descriptors to assist their own learning journey, by evaluating their own work against the descriptors to gain an understanding of how marks are awarded (both pre- and post-submission of their assignments).

### 3.8 *Learning outcomes*

Learning outcomes describe the knowledge, understanding and skills that a student studying a particular module is expected to achieve. They are derived from level descriptors but set out expectations more precisely. Learning outcomes are used to define the threshold level (the pass/fail boundary) for a module or assignment. In designing assignments, tutors select modes of assessment that relate well to the learning outcomes.

It is not always possible to make a mechanical link between all learning outcomes and assessment as there are likely to be additional, and sometimes unexpected, learning outcomes of a module. These may or may not be assessed. It is important that assessment is designed to enable the student to learn, rather than simply test outcomes.

### 3.9 *Assessment criteria*

The assessment criteria should be linked to the module learning outcomes. They should provide a description of what the student is required to do to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved. Programmes take responsibility for deriving their own criteria for marking assignments (using level descriptors, grade descriptors and learning outcomes). These are published in programme / module information, or in a module assignment brief (which may be available on the University's VLE, Learning Space (LS)). For each assignment students will need to know what is required for them (i.e. if certain criteria are being prioritised and, more importantly, if these are different from the 'normal' criteria used in the programme).

### 3.10 *Feedback on assessment*

Students should receive constructive and timely feedback on all aspects of their performance. Summative feedback on coursework provides provisional marks / grades; formative feedback helps students to recognise positive aspects of their work and also identifies any weaknesses. Above all, the feedback should motivate and encourage the student to improve on their performance.

Marked work should be returned to students with feedback within twenty-eight calendar days of the submission deadline. If there are reasons why this is not possible, the module leader must inform all students in writing in a timely manner of the reason for the delay and state the date by which students can expect to receive their coursework.

The nature / tone and language of feedback provided are especially important. It should be personal and, whatever the short-comings of the work might be, needs to be presented in such a way to direct the student to improving their future work. Students may also be directed to obtain help from a variety of sources, including published sources; on-line resources; Personal Development Tutors (PDTs); or other support units available.

Feedback should enable students to identify strengths and aspects for improvement, which can be put into practice in future work.

Feedback on coursework / assignments should be completed for each assignment submitted, which should include a summary of the key points (typically this would include strengths, weaknesses and priorities for future work). It is good practice to provide additional feedback within the assignment, which is not simply 'corrective' but which highlights where the work is particularly good and where there are gaps / omissions, taking care to identify what else is required to improve the work.

Students will have the opportunity to discuss the written feedback received, especially if they have any questions about it, or do not understand what is being asked of them, through meetings with their module tutors and their PDT. It is good practice for module leaders to offer students this opportunity (and notification of this opportunity can take many forms – for example in the programme documentation; by the tutor in the timetabled sessions; or even seminar time set aside for group discussion of assignments incorporating elements of peer feedback too).

### 3.11 *Grading assignments*

Module leaders are responsible for making arrangements for marking coursework, and for second marking / moderating work to ensure that the standards are being applied consistently.

An agreed minimum sample of work from each assignment must be double marked / moderated, as set out in the Student Regulations Framework.

3.12 The University recognises that distinctive approaches may be adopted to reflect the nature of the discipline, identified through a range of external reference points (e.g. Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)).

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