

Higher Education: Principles of Assessment
August 2017

Version I

Next Review in August 2019

Key Purpose and Objectives

Whilst taking into account regulations within partner Universities and awarding organisations, this code of practice makes clear the processes that must be adopted within higher education at Moulton College in relation to assessment of students. Assessment is described as any process that appraises an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills. The code of practice is a reflection of the College's commitment to ensuring students are given appropriate opportunities to achieve intended learning outcomes for a module or programme with rigour, fairness and probity and relates to undergraduate assessment.

For further advice on how the code of practice works, you should contact the HE Office.

Key Responsibilities

Head of Higher Education

- Establish and review policy
- Advise on guidelines and procedures
- Facilitate the Academic Standards & Quality Committee

Higher Education Manager

- To assure that consistency and compliance with approval processes are occurring

Course Managers & Teaching Staff

- Follow guidelines and procedures

Policy and Legislative Connections

Additional guidance can be obtained by visiting www.qaa.ac.uk and referring to UK Quality Code: Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning (2011).

Further references to other sources of information can be found at the end of this document.

Higher Education Appeals Policy

Policy reference: HEQHB6

1. Role of Academic Board

1.1 To secure the academic standards of the College's higher education courses, the Academic Board, mindful of the regulations specified by partner Universities who are in most instances the final arbitrator of quality and standards, has instigated procedures for:

- a) implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that ensure student performance is equitably judged against this standard;
- b) designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing all forms of assessment, including those for the assessment of prior learning;
- c) evaluating how effectively assessment practice maintains academic standards and promotes effective learning.

1.2 The Academic Board assures itself of the sound implementation of its procedures through:

- a) its course development and approval process;
- b) policy and practice debates at the Academic Board and the ASQC;
- c) effective annual reporting at course and institutional level;
- d) the analysis of student data;
- e) comprehensive arrangements for the student voice to be heard;
- f) underpinning staff development and practice activities.

Explanatory notes

- This document, which forms part of the HE Quality Handbook is designed to ensure that the College's HE assessment principles, regulations and processes, including those for the recognition of prior learning, are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences.

2. Assessment strategy and Planning

The volume, timing and nature of assessment are strategically planned at course level, enabling students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved intended learning outcomes. Moulton College aims to offer assessment that is realistic, holistic and integrative across a whole course, rather than piecemeal across modules.

Requirements

2.1 Each course team must develop and publish, on the course Moodle page, an explicit assessment strategy for the course to demonstrate that:

- a) balanced design of assessment is an integral part of course planning and design;
- b) assessment tasks are appropriate to the level and standards of the course
- c) clear and high expectations are communicated to students with exemplars for all summative assessments;
- d) assessment tasks are explicitly related to module learning outcomes;
- e) all course level learning outcomes must be assessed in at least one, but preferably more, modules. For Foundation Degrees, the curriculum map provides a key source of evidence for this while for HNs, units must be carefully chosen according to Pearson specification for the qualification;
- f) assessment methods are selected that are the most effective in enabling students to demonstrate specific outcomes and to enhance learning (which may mean that a limited range of assessment types are used);
- g) many regular formative assessment and feedback opportunities (often in class) are provided to support students to prepare for their summative assessments and are planned across all levels of the course;
- h) frequent feedback is provided which makes use of peer and self-feedback mechanisms;
- i) staff and students are informed of the assessment methods and their operation, and consistency in approach is achieved;

Explanatory notes

- A course's assessment strategy and the design of the assessment scheme should be planned at the course level. Consideration should be given to the ways in which formative assessment opportunities can take place across the levels of the course.
- The outcomes that are assessed must be made clear to students.
- Courses should avoid excessive summative assessment points.
- Courses teams are encouraged to reflect on the inclusivity of their assessment practices
- When designing a new course or reviewing an existing one, colleagues are encouraged to consider assessment on the course as a whole rather than module by module. This will ensure that students undertake an appropriate range of assessments across the course and that these are complementary.

3. Assessment criteria

The standards and criteria against which judgments on assessment will be made are provided to students and to staff involved in the assessment process.

Requirements

- 3.1 Module tutors must provide students with clear and accurate information about the means through which they will be assessed. Students can expect that at the start of each module or unit they will be provided with a module handbook (in the form of the module page on Moodle), that will articulate further guidance on assessment tasks, including:
- a) the learning outcomes to be assessed;
 - b) the nature of the assessment to be achieved e.g. case study, report, presentation
 - c) the assessment criteria and how they relate to the intended learning outcomes;
 - d) whether the assessment is formative or summative;
 - e) guidance on the task, including word count;
 - f) submission deadlines and penalties for late submission;
 - g) how and where to submit work;
 - h) information on the arrangements for communicating feedback and for the return of work.
- 3.2 The assessment criteria must be aligned to the Marking Descriptors as set out in awarding body/HEI regulations.
- 3.3 Module tutors must ensure that assessment titles and/or criteria and other assessments such as examinations scripts are modified each time an assessment is released/ published to students. This includes 'titles' and/or criteria released to students for reassessments unless otherwise stated. The 'nature' of the assessment need not be changed (such as in cases of an essay, report, presentation).
- 3.4 The requirement for changes in assessment titles and/or criteria forms part of the College's commitment to reducing opportunities for plagiarism and to ensuring that teaching, learning and assessment methods are revised, updated and remain relevant and appropriate.
- 3.5 In some instances assessment titles and/or criteria may not need changing as a 'routine' annual process. This is likely to be in situations where assessments do not lend themselves to ease of copying from other students who may have previously completed the same assessment. For example, this may include assessments that require the student to produce art work or to give a practical performance.
- 3.6 Students should note that the information provided about assessment is defined, approved and governed by the awarding Institution or awarding body through which their programme of study

is validated. For example, assessment type, word count and weighting are validated according to the respective awarding Institution's assessment regulations. If a student wishes to access these regulations, they can do so by contacting their course leader or the College's HE Office.

- 3.7 All written assessments are given a word count; in some instances some tutors may use a word limit range.
- 3.8 Word counts exclude (unless otherwise stated) footnotes, reference lists, bibliographies, diagrams, appendices, graphs, charts, tables and other similar features.
- 3.9 In instances when the word count is 10% or more over the word count or uppermost limit specified, then the following penalty will apply in the case of Higher Nationals;
- If a student is 10 to 20% over the word count or upper limit, a grade reduction will be imposed upon the summative assessment element which is overlength e.g. a Distinction becomes a Merit, Merit becomes a Pass, Pass becomes a Refer;
 - If a student is 21% or more over the word limit, a mark of Refer will be applied to the summative assessment element which is overlength;
 - Other penalties must not be used.
- 3.10 In the case of Foundation Degrees, students will be penalised for an excessive word count according to the regulations of the validating HEI.
- 3.11 Reasonable adjustments to examination and assessment arrangements may be made to enable students with disabilities to demonstrate their abilities. This must not change the purpose of the assessment but may alter the method. It is important that academic standards are maintained and therefore when reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities are made, the procedures must be used to ensure parity for all students.
- 3.12 The person responsible for the assessment must consider appropriately the needs of any student with a particular health or other problem. Students with alternative needs are assessed by the HE Learning Support Coordinator and changes to the arrangements of assessments for these students must only be made on their advice. This applies equally to summative and formative assessments.

4. Assessment feedback

Course teams ensure that feedback on assessment is timely, constructive and informative. Within such feedback, students are provided with opportunities to develop an understanding of good academic practice. Constructive feedback supports students in reflecting on their progress, guides them in enhancing their future academic work and helps them become increasingly independent in their learning.

Requirements

- 4.1 Students receive individual feedback, including an individual grade, on all assessed work within three weeks on the submission date. Large pieces of work, for which the student should receive feedback on work in progress, may be exempt from this requirement. Module/unit

grade feedback may be given by tutors but overall qualification grades should not be provided in advance of a final Board of Examiners' meeting.

- 4.2 Large pieces of work (for example, a portfolio, final year project or dissertation) still require individual written feedback. In recognition that such work requires considerably longer to mark than other coursework, the feedback (and grade) may be provided outside the standard 3-week period. *This exemption may only be used where formative feedback has been provided on work-in-progress.*
- 4.3 The three-week period excludes College closure days. Course Assessment and Feedback Plans should be used to manage submission deadlines so that the extended period of closure at Christmas does not negatively impact the overall student experience of feedback on their course.

Explanatory notes

- Schools should be mindful of managing staff leave and illness when implementing these requirements
 - Feedback may also be used by:
 - module tutors in reflecting on the assessment strategy;
 - tutors in advising their tutees in course tutorials;
 - external examiners as part of their monitoring of standards and quality
 - Underpinning these purposes is the belief that assessment itself functions not only to evaluate learning, but also to develop learning. In all of this, the shared responsibility of student and tutor is recognised.
- 4.4 In all instances, there should be clarity about the date by which feedback will be provided as articulated in the Assessment and Feedback Plan. The course manager, with the support of the course team, should engage in annual assessment planning to create the Assessment and Feedback Plan.

This Plan will include:

- a) Assessment types;
- b) Assessment dates;
- c) Feedback schedule and rationale, including:
 - Feedback types and formats;
 - Feedback points and/or periods across the year;
 - Where there will be opportunities for students to reflect on feedback with their tutor.
- d) Return dates for student work and feedback.

Explanatory notes

- Course teams should consider which feedback types and formats, or combination thereof, are fit for context and should articulate the pedagogic rationale for their decisions in the Assessment and Feedback Plan.
- The feedback schedule in the Plan should refer to all feedback that will be offered. This would include, for example, feedback offered in preparation for an assessment, on work-in-progress, or after an assessment task. The nature of feedback offered may be group, individual, tutor, peer. The medium in which feedback is conveyed may be written, on-line, verbal or audio.
- Where feedback is offered to students on drafts or other work-in-progress, then it is advisable to specify clearly the extent of this and the means by which it will be undertaken.
- It is advisable to emphasise that it is each student's responsibility to take up feedback opportunities and to engage with the feedback offered. However it is a course team's responsibility to ensure that students are trained in how to engage with feedback.

4.5 Course teams should have in place mechanisms for reviewing and monitoring the nature and timeliness of feedback for all forms assessment. There should be ongoing reflection on the Assessment and Feedback Plan at key points of the year and particularly during course team meetings. Staff should be in a position to outline their approach to strengthening the effective use of feedback.

Explanatory note

- It is useful to consider the setting of, and reflection on, the Plan in the context of course monitoring and annual reporting, and the formal production of the Rolling Action Plan (RAP). The RAP should report on significant outcomes (including enhancements) of the team's approach to provision of feedback (if appropriate in any given year).

4.6 The Assessment and Feedback Plan should be communicated to students in the course handbook, or equivalent in Interact, and in module information.

4.7 The feedback offered to students should be related to learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and be consistent with the grade/mark awarded.

- 4.8 The feedback should inform students on their progress and help them to improve their future performance. Tutors should ensure that students have opportunities to reflect on their performance and development, while recognising that it is each student's responsibility to take up these opportunities.
- 4.09 Students should be enabled, by engaging in feedback activities, to participate in the process of evaluating their learning and development.
- 4.10 In communicating feedback, or facilitating peer feedback, tutors should be mindful of the diversity of students on the course. There should be equity in the provision of feedback to students.
- 4.11 The Academic Board should keep under review procedures for feedback to students on assessments and identify any salient points in the course annual report (RAP), so that processes across the college can be monitored and enhanced.

5. Marking and moderation

Course teams follow processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks that are clearly stated, understood and consistently operated by those members of the course team involved in the assessment process.

Requirements

- 5.1 Moderation of assessment starts at the initial stage of planning of assessment and extends through to the determination of grades/marks and results.
- 5.2 Course teams should ensure that – at the planning stage of assessment tasks – appropriate peers (other module tutors and/or external examiners at levels that contribute to the final award) are consulted to check the validity of the tasks being prepared and moderation forms completed accordingly.
- 5.3 In implementing this policy, staff should ensure that documentary evidence is always kept to enable demonstration of the moderation processes that have been used.
- 5.4 The moderation plan for the course must ensure that :
- a) assessments are related to the aims and aligned with the learning outcomes of courses and modules;
 - b) assessed student work is marked consistently across courses and modules;
 - c) the outcomes of assessments are clear, reliable and valid; and
 - d) fairness is achieved for students in all their assessment elements.
- 5.5 The course manager has the lead responsibility for ensuring application of the HE assessment principles within the different levels of the course and across the course as a whole.

- 5.6 The course committee/team should review overall assessment coherence as part of the normal course monitoring process and report on any action points within the RAP. This report enables the College to consider standards and assessment procedures and processes across all courses within its Self-Evaluation Document.
- 5.7 In line with the terms of reference for Boards of Examiners, an opportunity should be provided at their meetings to discuss aspects of assessment design, tasks and coherence and provide advice to course leaders, committees and teams on assessment issues that have arisen through the marking and moderation processes. The consideration of this item and the advice offered should be recorded in the minutes of the board.
- 5.8 All assessment tasks and supporting material should be checked (IV'd) by an academic peer, who might be the course leader, the higher education manager, a mentor or another member of the course team *prior to release to students*. Where the assessment contributes to the classification of the final award, the external examiner might also be included as one of the academic peers. Course committees/teams must specify and record who is responsible for undertaking this checking procedure and complete the moderation form. This peer moderation process should involve checking:
- a) the alignment of assessment with the relevant learning outcomes;
 - b) the clarity of the task description;
 - c) the clarity of any additional guidance notes accompanying the tasks;
 - e) the available guidance for markers, e.g. model answers;
 - f) the academic challenge of the tasks in relationship to the level;
 - g) the workload/time requirement of the assessment tasks.
 - h) the clarity and consistency of published submission deadlines.
- 5.9 The agreed assessment information should then be systematically communicated by staff to students at the appropriate time to support their learning and achievement.
- 5.10 The main effort in moderation of marking and results should be targeted at assessments which contribute to the final award.
- 5.11 Course committees/teams are responsible for planning appropriate moderation and for ensuring clarity and explicitness of:
- a) the marking arrangements;
 - b) the forms of moderation to be employed;
 - c) the sample to be reviewed (size, range and threshold cases); and
 - d) the nature of the sample to be referred to the external examiner(s).
- 5.12 Moderation of marking (assessment decisions) is generally undertaken by reviewing a sample of students' marked work. This involves the moderator in reviewing (rather than marking in the full sense) an agreed sample of work to establish whether the marking is at

the appropriate standard, consistent and in line with the explicit assessment criteria. Documentary evidence is produced in the form of the Moderation Form.

- 5.13 The sampling process should concentrate at the boundaries of classifications and should normally involve 25% of assessed student work and included all referred/failed work.

Explanatory notes

- Where a small cohort of students is involved, or where a tutor is in the first year of HE teaching, the proportion of the sample should increase appropriately.

- 5.14 Moderation can be completed in specific instances through double marking of the sample. In this case student work is independently marked by more than one marker. Double marking can be undertaken as blind marking, where each marker is unaware of the grades/marks allocated by the other(s), or as second marking, where all markers are aware of the grades/marks they have assigned.
- 5.15 Double marking of the sample should be used as the norm for the moderation process for dissertations and major projects/studio work at final award level; in course with small cohorts it may be possible to double or team mark the work of the whole student cohort.
- 5.16 The external examiner should monitor the moderation process at appropriate stages. The course committee/team should indicate in their moderation planning precisely how the external examiner will be involved. The involvement of the external examiner should include reviewing a sample of moderated student work, but may be limited to receiving for comment the assessment tasks and checking the final results spreadsheets. The nature of the external examiner involvement in such cases is a matter for negotiation between the course leader and the external – the review of samples of assessed work undertaken by external examiners should normally take place on site.
- 5.17 Statistical analyses (means, standard deviations) should be undertaken as part of the moderation process to identify anomalies and trends, which can then be addressed by one or more of the preceding moderation techniques. Such statistical analyses can be effectively used to inform decisions of Boards of Examiners and the further development of the course's assessment strategy.
- 5.18 Where assessments do NOT contribute to final award classifications, moderation should be focused at the pass/fail threshold, which is the crucial determinant for progression to the next stage of the course. In cases where there are no students at that threshold, then the assessed work of the five nearest students should be moderated. Course committees/teams may wish to extend the range of moderation in these non-qualifying assessments in relationship to particular issues of interest or concern.
- 5.19 Course Teams need to ensure that mechanisms are in place to ensure the validity of assessments and the resolution of differences in cases where the moderation procedures outlined above demonstrate unacceptable variations in assessment approaches and outcomes.
- 5.20 In cases where differences remain unresolved in the moderation of marking (for example, those occasions where the moderator's grade/mark or review may indicate a significantly

different outcome, rank order or distribution of assessments at the clarification borderlines), the marker and moderator should review the assessment criteria and their interpretation of them.

- a) If a divergence of understanding or interpretation is identified and resolved, re-marking and further moderation should be undertaken as appropriate.
- b) If no divergence in interpretation of assessment criteria is identified but a difference in marking remains or if an identified divergence remains unresolved or if re-marking and further moderation still identify inconsistency between marker and moderator, the matter should be referred to the course leader, who should investigate the case and determine a course of action.

5.21 The course manager may:

- a) arrange for a second moderator to sample the student work;
- b) arrange for a second marker to mark all the students' work;
- c) mark the assignment(s) her/himself and recommending these grades/marks to the Board of Examiners.

Explanatory note

- The external examiner should NOT be used to reconcile differences between internal assessors, but might be called upon to advise internal markers on their resolution of differences. The external examiner's role is to monitor the standards achieved by students on the course and the consistency and effectiveness of the assessment processes

5.22 In implementing this policy, staff should ensure that documentary evidence is always kept to enable demonstration of the moderation processes that have been used.

6. Fairness in assessment and anonymous marking

College assessments are designed and delivered inclusively, and carried out equitably and securely. The assessment of a student's work without knowledge of the student's identity (anonymous marking) is used to limit the possibility of grades/marks being inadvertently influenced by factors other than the qualities of the work under consideration.

Requirements

6.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, the College has a duty to ensure that disabled students are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with their non-disabled peers. This duty

applies to modes of teaching and learning and to assessment methods. If a student is unable, through disability, to be assessed by the normal methods set out in the course specification, the Board of Examiners may make reasonable adjustments to ensure that such students are not substantially disadvantaged, provided that such adjustments enable academic or other prescribed standards to be maintained.

6.2 It is the responsibility of the course leader in consultation with module leaders and referring to Student Support Services and the HE Office for guidance as necessary, to:

- a) implement modes of teaching and learning which provide the student with an equal opportunity to acquire the stated learning outcomes;
- b) agree new or modified methods of assessment which will enable to student to demonstrate that they have acquired the stated learning outcomes.

6.3 The course leader should ensure that any adjustments to the assessment methods are notified to the Board of Examiners, with due regard to requests for confidentiality from students in relation to communication about the specific nature of the disability.

6.4 It is the responsibility of each course committee/team to identify and agree which of the assessed tasks will or will not be marked anonymously and to have a clear rationale for the decision in each case. Anonymous marking will be used for ALL timed written examinations, for which papers will be identified only by student numbers.

Explanatory note

- While anonymous marking is relatively straightforward to undertake in relation to formal written examinations and in some forms of coursework, there are other assessed tasks for which the identity of each student is inevitable and unavoidably available to the marker: examples include those requiring direct observation of student performance and those tasks that are unique to each student.

6.5 The Academic Board has responsibility for ensuring that (a) course committees/teams/subject areas are operating this policy and (b) systems are in place within the school to support anonymous marking and that staff receive clear guidance on the operation of those systems. This policy will have to be sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities.

7. The language of assessment

The language in which assessment is conducted is normally that used in the associated teaching. Where this is not the case, the College will assure itself that academic standards are not compromised.

7.1 The language of assessment and teaching will normally be English. If, for valid reason this is not the case, the course team should ensure that standards are not at risk. The course team will be expected to demonstrate at approval:

- a) how individuals with the necessary expertise in the appropriate language(s), subject knowledge and assessment methods will be identified and employed;

- b) how suitable external examiners fluent in the relevant language(s) will be identified; appointed and involved with the assessment process;
- c) if translation is used, how the reliability and validity of the assessment judgements arising from the marking of translated assessments will be assured.

7.2 The moderation procedures for the course should reflect the approved arrangements.

8. Boards of Examiners

Membership, procedures, powers and accountability of Boards of Examiners boards are clearly specified, and this information is available to all members of such boards.

Requirements

8.1 Each award-bearing course must have a Board of Examiners to:

- a) ensure there are consistent and fair arrangements for assessment;
- b) make academic judgements on the progress of students;
- c) make academic judgements on the conferment of awards;
- d) consider any case of student performance that is giving cause for concern.

8.2 A Board should operate with due regard to:

- a) the course specification;
- b) any Academic Board agreements with other validating, accrediting or professional bodies (or a collaborating centre) as appropriate;
- c) principles and policies on assessment as set out in the QH.

8.3 A Board may be responsible for more than one course provided this is approved at HE Academic Board.

8.4 The Higher Education Appeals Policy details policy and procedure relating to appeals against Exam Board decisions.

Explanatory notes

- The full membership, terms of reference and key duties of members of Boards of Examiners are available as Quality Handbook: Examination Board Procedures

9. Academic irregularities

The College implements fair and effective arrangements which enable academic irregularities to be detected and penalised.

Requirements

- 9.1 The College takes seriously all forms of academic irregularity in its various forms. Course teams must ensure that students are fully aware of the College's requirements.

Explanatory notes

- The College's full requirements for Academic Irregularities are contained in Quality Handbook: Academic Irregularities Policy

10. Academic regulations

The College applies clear regulations for progressions within a course and for the attainment of an award.

Requirements

- 10.1 All courses of study validated by University of Northampton will adopt the appropriate Assessment Regulations for Validated Centres (OWA)
- 10.2 Courses approved by Pearson will adopt the Higher Nationals Coursework Policy

11. Assessment of prior learning

Candidates who might be eligible for recognition of prior learning (including currently registered students) are made aware of the opportunities available, and are supported throughout the process of application and assessment.

Requirements

Explanatory notes

- The College's full requirements for APL are contained in APL Policy

12. Support for assessment

The College seeks to ensure that all staff involved in assessment processes, including the recognition of prior learning, are suitably qualified, supported and developed. Assessment (and feedback) practices are informed by reflection, evaluation of professional practice, and subject-specific and educational scholarship.