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UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Assessment Policy (revised November 2007)

1. Introduction

The University of Plymouth takes its responsibility for ensuring the quality and reliability of assessment very seriously. It recognises that high quality assessment practices are an important element of the student experience and that the outcomes of assessment influence students' future lives. The University Mission Statement emphasises the importance of providing teaching of international repute (this includes assessment) and the University Teaching and Learning Strategy recognises the need for well designed assignments. This policy outlines the purposes and principles that guide assessment across all programmes offered by the University and identifies where the major responsibilities for assessment lie.

2. The purpose of assessment

The primary purpose of assessment at the University of Plymouth is to enable students to develop and demonstrate their potential. More specifically, the University expects assessment to:

- assist student learning by providing appropriate feedback on performance;
- measure students' achievements objectively against the learning outcomes of modules;
- provide a reliable and consistent basis for the recommendation of an appropriate grade or award;
- assist staff in evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching.

Beyond this the University takes the view that assessment processes are multi dimensional and highly contextualised. This is reflected in the distinctive and diverse assessment processes found in its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of study.

3. General principles of assessment

The general **principles** on which the assessment of taught programmes is based are made explicit in this section of the policy. The **expectations** in relation to each principle are described briefly. These principles draw on published guidance on best practice in assessment in higher education (LTSN generic centre/HEA assessment series, 2001) and have been revised to reflect the code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 6: Assessment of students (QAA, 2006).

3.1 Assessment will be reliable

Reliability refers to the need for assessment to be accurate and repeatable. This requires clear and consistent processes for the setting, marking, grading and moderation of assignments.

3.2 Assessment will be valid

Validity ensures that assessment tasks and associated criteria will effectively measure student attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

3.3 Information about assessment will be explicit and accessible

Clear, accurate, consistent and timely information on assessment tasks and procedures will be made available to students, staff and other external assessors or examiners.

3.4 Assessment will be inclusive and equitable

Inclusive and equitable assessment will ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual.

3.5 Assessment will address all of the programme/stage aims and outcomes

Assessment tasks will primarily reflect the nature of the discipline or subject but will also ensure that students have the opportunity to develop a range of generic skills and capabilities.

3.6 The amount of assessed work required will be manageable

The scheduling of assignments and the amount of assessed work required will provide a reliable and valid profile of achievement without overloading staff or students.

3.7 Formative and summative assessment will be included in each programme/ stage

Formative and summative assessment will be incorporated into programmes/stages to ensure that the purposes of assessment (Section 2 of this policy) are adequately addressed. Many programmes will also wish to include diagnostic assessment (see glossary for definition of terms).

3.8 Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process

Students are entitled to feedback on all (submitted) formative and summative assessment tasks. The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be clear to students in advance.

3.9 Each programme/stage will include a variety of assessment types

Variety in assessment promotes effective learning and allows a range of intended learning outcomes to be appropriately assessed. In addition, varied assessment tasks support a range of approaches to learning and ensure that inclusivity is planned for and addressed.

4. Implementing the University's assessment policy

The University has adopted an **implementation strategy (annexe one)** to support this policy. It describes procedures that will ensure that the policy is implemented effectively. Programme teams will be expected to reflect the policy's purposes, principles and procedures in their own strategies. Beyond this expectation, programme teams are encouraged to adopt distinctive assessment approaches that reflect the nature of the discipline or programme, the requirements of professional, statutory and/or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and guidance from other external reference points (including subject benchmarks). Within the framework described by the policy and implementation strategy, diversity and innovation are encouraged.

5. Responsibility for assessment

5.1 The day to day responsibility for assessment lies collectively with programme teams.

5.2 Heads of schools, chairs of Examination Award Assessment Boards, External Examiners, Subject Assessment Panels and Award Assessment Boards have significant responsibilities for the security of assessment processes and for maintaining standards on particular programmes. (see **University Academic Regulations, Notes for Guidance and Procedures for Taught Programmes**).

5.3 Responsibility for the University's assessment policy, procedures and regulations lies with the Academic Board and its sub-committees. (see **University Academic Regulations, Notes for Guidance and Procedures for Taught Programmes**).

5.4 Further details, support and guidance are available in **annexe two**

6. Review and compliance

6.1 This policy forms one element of the University's strategic plan and is subject to annual processes of review.

6.2 The policy is monitored by the appropriate sub-committees of the Academic Board to ensure that it is responsive to external and internal requirements. Agreed regulatory changes are published in the **University Academic Regulations, Notes for Guidance and Procedures for Taught Programmes**, which are reviewed, revised and re-issued on an annual basis by the University Secretariat.

6.3 The policy provides evidence of the University's compliance with the QAA Code of Practice on Assessment of Students (2006). It also reflects, where appropriate, the University's compliance with the other aspects of the code.

Glossary

Formative assessment has a developmental purpose and is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance.

Summative assessment is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria used to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or programme.

Diagnostic assessment provides an indicator of a learner's aptitude and preparedness for a module or programme, and identifies possible strengths and gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills at the start of a programme.

Any one assessment task may combine two or more of these.

References

LTSN Generic Centre/HEA (2001) Assessment Series

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (September 2006) Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education. Section 6: Assessment of students. Gloucester: QAA

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Assessment Policy

Annexe One

Implementing the University's Assessment Policy

Background

Why do we need a University assessment policy?

The Academic Board originally adopted the University Assessment Policy in June 2002. The rationale behind this was that:

1. The policy would reflect the recommendations of the QAA Code of Practice (2000) and clarify to other external agencies how we meet their criteria and reference points.
2. Internal and external institutional and subject reviews had highlighted a range of issues and concerns relating to assessment practice and procedures that the policy might address.
3. By debating and articulating our assessment purposes, principles and practices we can support colleagues and students in achieving higher standards.
4. There are other internal agendas that can be partially addressed through reviewing assessment practices. These include:
 - increased student/staff ratios
 - widening participation
 - employability
 - levels of retention
 - inclusivity and the needs of students with disabilities
 - the prevention and management of academic dishonesty

The revised University Assessment Policy (2007) is substantially unchanged but reflects:

- recent changes in the QAA code of practice (2006)
- updated terminology

How has the policy been devised?

The original (2002) policy was extensively discussed across the University in a number of workshops and in faculties. Faculty representatives circulated the policy amongst colleagues and the University's Partner Colleges were sent copies and were invited to comment. The 2007 revisions have been circulated to the Assessment Review Group which has cross Faculty and University representation.

Responsibilities, processes and deadlines

What needs to be done?

This University has a long history of excellence in teaching, learning and assessment and, therefore, the University's Assessment Policy largely articulates common principles and builds on existing practices that have been in place for many years. However practices still need to be reviewed to ensure that they reflect the principles of the Assessment Policy. In particular, to review whether the emphasis on ensuring that assessment contributes to student learning (QAA code of practice 2006, precept 3) is built clearly into current practices.

Who is responsible?

The primary responsibility for the quality and standards of assessment lies close to the point of delivery i.e. with the individual tutors. However, effective leadership and good management are also vital to ensure that tutors are supported in implementing assessment strategies.

Programme/module team responsibilities

Programme teams are responsible for describing assessment methods and processes in their programme specifications and handbooks. Teams are required to ensure that they are using the following assessment processes for all programmes/schemes:

1. Level descriptors and grade descriptors. These can be common for all programmes within a school or faculty or may be differentiated;
2. Assessment criteria linked to the learning outcomes for each module;
3. Assignment briefings for each assignment.

These processes have been in place since 2002 and should be common practice; where they are not currently used teams should start to work towards implementation as soon as possible.

Faculty/school/subject group responsibilities

Assessment practices are discussed and reviewed at subject level and standards are confirmed by Subject Assessment Panels. Some faculties or schools may operate common practices across schemes or sets of programmes. As appropriate, Faculties/ Schools/Subject groups are asked to:

1. update current assessment strategies and action plans to ensure their assessment practices fully embody the principles of the revised University's Assessment Policy and QAA Code of Practice.

2. use Periodic Review to address strengths and weaknesses of current programme assessment practices and evaluate how well they reflect the principles of the Assessment Policy.
3. incorporate key actions relating to assessment in the Faculty overview report. Some of these will have resource implications. These should be included in the Faculty Strategy and Business Plan and form part of the Faculty's academic planning process.
4. ensure that up to date information about assessment processes and regulations is made available to all academic staff and administrators as appropriate.
5. facilitate staff development activities relating to assessment.

Leadership

Academic leaders in the University will take forward the agenda relating to assessment and work **beyond** the framework of institutional and external compliance. They will:

1. Ask strategic questions..... How does assessment work in my area? Are there general weaknesses that need to be tackled? Are we keeping abreast of new developments?
2. Envision the possibilities.....What needs to be done? Can new approaches to assessment improve quality without overburdening staff and students?
3. Acquire sufficient support to bring about changes.....What are the practical issues associated with the proposed changes? Where are the resources coming from?

Teaching and Learning Committee responsibilities

The Learning and Teaching Committee will:

1. Monitor the implementation of the policy across the University;
2. Commission occasional summary reports on implementation drawing on the outcomes of periodic review and external examiners reports.

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Assessment Policy

Annexe Two

Implementing the assessment principles

Assessment principle 1

Assessment will be reliable

Explaining the principle

Students need to be confident that their work is being assessed fairly; the University needs to be sure that its academic standards are being upheld. This is why the principle of reliability is important. Reliability refers to the need for assessment to be accurate and repeatable. This requires clear and consistent processes for the setting, marking, grading and moderation of assignments.

University regulations

The University's *Academic regulations, notes for guidance and procedures for taught programmes* define the assessment and progression regulations for all programmes across the University.

These also incorporate procedures for ensuring the authenticity of student work and for dealing with academic offences.

The University has adopted the **SEEC Level Descriptors**, which describe the generic characteristics of learning at each level (see Appendix A). The level descriptors should be used when designing programme and module assessment strategies (see Insight 1).

Faculty/School responsibilities

The Faculty/School Learning and Teaching Committees are responsible for monitoring processes for maintaining standards of assessment across programmes.

Subject responsibilities

The subject assessment panels and award assessment boards have overall responsibility for maintaining standards and ensuring reliability. The Secretariat provides training for tutors on subject assessment panels and award assessment boards.

Subjects should define procedures to help groups of assessors achieve a high measure of agreement. As stated in the Code of Practice on Marking (Appendix B) assessors should know:

- the proportion of assignments to be second marked (this may vary between years and for different types of assignment);
- whether they are 'blind' marking or, if not, the method used;
- the protocols used for agreeing the final mark;
- the role of external examiners in verifying standards.

This information should be widely available for tutors and students.

Programme/module team responsibilities

Assessment tasks should be marked to defined standards and assessors should consistently apply these standards. This involves:

- using common definitions of what constitutes work of a particular grade (see Insight 2);
- defining assessment criteria (see Insight 3).

In some cases programmes will be working closely to professional and vocational standards. It is the responsibility of programme teams to ensure that these are addressed in conjunction with the SEEC descriptors.

Guidance and support

The challenges we face in attempting to ensure reliability are widely discussed in the literature on assessment (Biggs, 1999; Race, 2001). The theory tells us that indications of high levels of reliability are that:

- a tutor should come up with similar results if they mark the same work twice;
- when more than one tutor marks the same work their results should be similar.

It is surprisingly difficult to achieve either of these outcomes and there is considerable disagreement about whether, in any case, they should dominate when planning assessment.

On one hand, we are advised that absolute reliability is important and requires objectivity, accuracy and repeatability (Knight, 2001). On the other, it is clear that it is almost impossible to achieve this unless we use over-simplified types of assessment which often fail to measure the complex achievements that are the expected outcomes of higher education (Biggs 1999). Race & Brown (2001) ask whether the quest for reliability means that we are spending far too long measuring things that are not really important?

A pragmatic solution to this is to combine several different types of assignments; in any one programme include highly objective approaches (multiple choice, computer assessed, factual reports) but also include open ended approaches (creative writing, portfolios, in tray exams, open-ended projects).

Dealing with academic offences is a particular, and often not very pleasant, aspect of ensuring reliability. The University regulations on this are very clear and should be followed precisely to ensure that students are treated consistently and to reduce the possibility of protracted appeals. The best approach is to devise assignments that minimise the opportunity for plagiarism or cheating.

Staff development

In order to test the reliability of marking procedures some subject groups hold a 'mark in' at which several colleagues mark the same piece of work. They discuss the variations in the results and decide whether there are ways in which assessment processes might be changed to minimise the differences.

Further resources or support

To ensure that your own practice align with the current University regulations consult the *Academic regulations, notes for guidance and procedures for taught programmes*

Guidance on

- selecting reliable assessment approaches;
- minimising opportunities for academic dishonesty;

can be found in the Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT) publication 'Good practice in assessing students'.

Insight into..... the use of level descriptors**Insight 1****What are level descriptors?**

Level descriptors describe generic characteristics of learning at each level of an award. They reflect how our expectations of students will increase between levels as they deepen their knowledge and understanding and develop their skills.

The University (along with most other HEIs in Southern England) has adopted the **SEEC level descriptors** (see Appendix A) to be used when planning undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and modules. The SEEC descriptors provide **guidance** on expected achievement (this is sometimes called the threshold of achievement) – what the learner must do to pass a module.

How might you use level descriptors?

Level descriptors are used by all University programmes to help judge whether students can be credited for their achievements at a particular level.

However, to achieve credit in any programme it is not necessary to demonstrate that **all** of the SEEC descriptors are present at that level. This is a matter for professional judgement by the programme team.

The best approach is normally to use the **QAA subject benchmark(s)** to help guide your decisions on which level descriptors to include in your programme and modules. Teams generally find that most of the level descriptors are relevant in one way or another but they often find it necessary to 'translate' the descriptors into subject specific language. Many programmes also relate to external vocational or professional descriptors which may supplement, or occasionally even supersede the benchmarks and SEEC level descriptors.

Once the level descriptors are built into the programme they are used to inform the development of grade descriptors (see Insight 2), module learning outcomes and assessment criteria (see Insight 3). Level descriptors should be reflected in the marking standards applied to students' work. Students must normally demonstrate that they have reached a satisfactory level for each of the **selected** descriptors.

Information about level descriptors should be readily accessible to students, staff, placement assessors and external examiners.

Useful guidance on using level descriptors is found in:

'Designing your programme and modules' and 'Good practice in assessing students'.
Moon, J. (2002b) Levels and Level Descriptors, Chapter 3 in: J. Moon, The Module and Programme Development Handbook. London: Kogan Page
Moon, J. (2002a) How to Use Level Descriptors London: SEEC

Copies of these references can be obtained through Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT)

The QAA subject benchmarks are online at www.qaa.ac.uk

Insight into the use of grade descriptors.**Insight 2****What are grade descriptors?**

Grade descriptors differentiate between student performance at each class of the degree classification (or this may involve an alternative type of marking scale). Within the University of Plymouth individual programmes may use conventional numerical marking ranges (0-100%), an alternative marking range (e.g. categorical marking), literal grading systems (A, B etc) or textual descriptors (e.g. pass/merit/distinction). Whichever system is used, it is important to provide grade descriptors that relate directly to that system. From the student's point of view, grade descriptors indicate what they need to do in order to achieve a particular grade or degree class.

They may be provided for:

- performance in general across the programme and for all sorts of assignments. These are highly generalised statements
- performance at a particular level of the programme. These allow progression between levels to develop in the grade descriptors.
- performance in a particular assignment. These allow the differences between criteria used for e.g. written work, oral presentations or displays to be judged using precise grade descriptors
- some combination of these

How might you use grade descriptors?

The most widely used approach is to decide on the assessment that will be included in the programme and then define the grade descriptors. The subject benchmark and the level descriptors should help you with the precise wording of grade descriptors. A balance needs to be found between excessively detailed descriptors which will prove difficult to use efficiently and over generalised descriptors which you will find difficult to apply to every assignment. Many programmes have devised these criteria already and it is sensible to find examples of these as a starting point – it will reduce the work load considerably.

Useful guidance on using grade descriptors is found in:

‘Good practice in assessing students’.

Gosling, D. and Moon, J. (2002) How to Use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria. London: SEEC

Copies of these references can be obtained through Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT)

Assessment principle 2

Assessment will be valid

Explaining the principle

Validity ensures that assessment tasks and associated criteria will effectively measure student attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

University regulations

The University Review and Approval procedures require all programmes to submit and maintain programme specifications and module descriptions (the Definitive Module Record or DMR). In order to ensure that the assessment is aligned with learning outcomes you are asked to include in your DMR:

- a list of assessed learning outcomes including those relating to key skills
- assessment elements (coursework/examinations and their weightings)

and, optionally,

- the assessment mode and criteria

As part of both the approval and the periodic review process you will be asked to indicate how your assessment is aligned with the programme aims and outcomes and with the learning outcomes of the module.

If you change your module learning outcomes you may need to change the assessment elements (and vice versa). These changes need to be approved through Faculty Quality processes and they must be retained as a definitive record.

Faculty/School responsibilities

Faculty scrutiny panels are responsible for checking the rationale of the programme specification and the DMRs. As part of this process they will need to ensure that the assessment is clearly linked to the learning outcomes.

Subject responsibilities

Subject leaders take responsibility for staff development activities to ensure that new colleagues are appropriately inducted into valid assessment procedures. There may be a need for wider staff development in relation to aligning learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT) can provide tailored sessions to support subject groups.

Programme/module team responsibilities

Module teams are responsible for designing valid assessment tasks and assessment criteria (see Insight 3). Validity is achieved by designing assessment tasks and using assessment criteria that are aligned with the module learning outcomes.

Guidance and support

Providing students with valid assessment tasks is probably the most important assessment principle of all. Race (2001) stresses the importance of devising assignments that clearly assess what it is that you really want to measure. In other words the assignment you set and criteria by which you judge whether the student is successful should be designed by referring to the learning outcomes. Biggs (1999) calls this the process of “constructive alignment”.

As an example, if you want to assess problem solving skills and you ask students to write a report on their solutions to a problem, then the assessment should be primarily dependent on the quality of the solutions devised, not on the quality and style of the report. This may sound obvious but research has shown that many assessors fail to provide valid assessment opportunities for their students (Race, 1998).

It is important to understand that this approach to assessment is based entirely on **criterion referencing**. In this system it is possible for all students to end up with similar marks if they have met the criteria. This is very different from **norm referencing** in which tutors aim to rank students and to produce a good distribution of marks. It is now generally accepted that assessment in HE should be based on criterion referencing (Biggs, 1999).

The most effective way to go about designing valid assessment tasks is described in detail in the resources listed below. Designing valid assessment is helped considerably if the learning outcomes are written using precise terms like ‘describe’ or ‘apply’ rather than abstract qualities like ‘understand’.

Staff development

Discuss whether your current assessment system is based on criterion (CRA) or norm (NRA) referencing. (Many colleagues explicitly support criterion referencing while implicitly practising norm referencing).

Use this question as a stimulus for discussion:

I am assessing two students in a criterion referencing system and note that I have awarded Robert a B and Susan an A. I then take a second look and decide that Robert’s paper is as good as Susan’s, so I give both an A. Is this now NRA (comparing students) or CRA (judging on standards)? Why?
Source: Biggs (1999) p.149

Further resources or support

For more information on writing appropriate learning outcomes and assessment criteria see:

‘Good practice in assessing students’.

Gosling, D. & Moon, J. (2002) How to use learning outcomes and assessment criteria London: SEEC

For descriptions of the differences between norm and criterion referencing and why we favour criterion referencing see:

Biggs, J. (1999) Teaching for Quality Learning at University pp.143-149
Buckingham: Open University Press

Knight, P. (2001) A briefing on key concepts York: Higher Education Academy

Insight into..... assessment criteria**Insight 3****What are assessment criteria?**

Assessment criteria are descriptions of what the learner has to do in order to demonstrate that the learning outcomes have been achieved. It is important that the criteria are stated as a **threshold standard** – in other words the minimum expectation in order to satisfactorily achieve credit for learning. Some people find this difficult to accept, believing that it may encourage students to work at a low level of achievement. However, there is no evidence that this happens and, if you also give your students grade descriptors (see Insight 2), these will encourage higher levels of achievement.

Example: Extract from a DMR: stage one of a dissertation or project**Learning outcomes**

At the end of the module students will be expected to be able to:

- Plan and structure a major piece of work
- Use referencing appropriate to a published paper

Assessment Task

In week 9 you are required to submit a plan for the dissertation. The plan should include the following:

- a summary of the main argument of the dissertation (200 words);
- an indication of the structure, section headings and outline of the content of each section (500 words);
- indication of, and full references for, texts consulted and texts to be discussed in the dissertation.

Assessment Criteria

- Evidence of study/reading in preparation of the plan (20%)
- Articulation of a clear idea/theme to be discussed in the dissertation (30%)
- Design of a workable and defensible structure for the dissertation (30%)
- Identification of texts to which the dissertation will refer using the Harvard referencing system (20%)

Writing your criteria

Try using the following six step plan:

1. Consider the learning outcomes being tested.
2. Consider the assignment you wish to set.
3. Brainstorm requirements for, or attributes of, successful performance in the assignment.
4. If necessary, specify the level of difficulty and the particular context for the assignment.
5. Focus on what is essential and categorise the requirements into clear criteria.
6. Check that criteria are assessable (valid and reliable) and that they are clearly worded and unambiguous (get a colleague to check them; ask students to explain what they think you mean).

(based on an example in Gosling and Moon, 2002)

Although it is important that criteria are clear, this does not mean that they have to be excessively prescriptive or mechanistic. It is best to provide more detail early in a student's course or where there is a very precise vocational outcome to be tested. Later in a course criteria may be less prescriptive, referring to more generally to creativity and autonomy for example (see Appendix A: SEEC Level Descriptors).

Criteria for every assignment or shared criteria?

Although teams may create a common set of assessment criteria for a programme in some cases they may be written for individual assessment tasks. A combination, using a common set of agreed criteria and, if necessary, adding some special criteria for an assignment, is often the most efficient and successful approach.

Letting students know

Research confirms that assessment is the most powerful driver affecting what and how students' learn (Biggs 1999). Therefore, it is vital that students know about assessment criteria early in the module and that they spend time working with the criteria so that they really understand them. Race (2001) argues that the most effective approaches involve students in formulating criteria themselves or in using criteria to mark samples of work.

Marking with assessment criteria: analytical or holistic?

Practice varies. You may allocate marks separately for each criterion – this analytical approach tends to produce more consistent and reliable marking especially if you allocate a weighting to each criterion; the alternative is to mark holistically –this involves using your overall judgement of the work. Biggs (1999) argues that if you are assessing higher order skills and understanding (as we tend to do in the later levels of higher education) it is important to use your own judgement – this is one of a teacher's basic professional responsibilities.

Useful guidance on using assessment criteria is found in:

University of Plymouth guidance and support 'Good practice in assessing students'.

Moon, J. (2002) Writing and Using Assessment Criteria, Chapter 6 in: J. Moon, The Module and Programme Development Handbook. London: Kogan Page

Moon, J. (2002) How to use learning outcomes and assessment criteria London: SEEC

Copies of these references can be obtained through Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT)

Assessment principle 3	Information about assessment will be explicit and accessible
Explaining the principle	Clear, accurate, consistent and timely information on assessment tasks and procedures will be made available to students, staff and other external assessors or examiners.
University regulations	<p>Assessment processes</p> <p>The University requires all programmes to include a programme specification in the student handbook or on the student portal. This includes a definitive teaching, learning and assessment strategy for the programme. Once these are agreed there should be no deviation from the published description unless the change has been documented (the University's Quality Handbook describes the procedure) and clarified with students.</p> <p>The outcome of assessment</p> <p>The University's <i>Academic regulations, notes for guidance and procedures for taught programmes</i> define procedures for recording, documenting and publishing assessment decisions. Students receive copies of their results in a University transcript.</p>
Faculty/School responsibilities	<p>Faculties have internal procedures for approving programme modifications and for documenting and reporting assessment decisions. As a minimum these adhere to the University's <i>Academic regulations, notes for guidance and procedures for taught programmes</i>. Many faculties have additional procedures that are implemented by faculty review groups. These should be made available to all academic staff and appropriate administrators.</p>
Subject responsibilities	<p>Schools (or subject teams) are responsible for assessment strategies. These are used by programme teams in writing the programme specification and may be made available to students in their handbooks.</p>
Programme/module team responsibilities	<p>Module teams should provide an 'assignment brief' for each assignment they set. Students, examiners and placement supervisors should have timely and easy access to these (see Insight 4).</p>
Guidance and support	<p>For students and staff to work effectively and efficiently they need access to appropriate assessment information at the right time. This may sound obvious, but one of the major complaints made by both groups is that they are not adequately informed. An assignment brief (see Insight 4) published on paper and online is the best way of ensuring that students have access to the details they need.</p>
Staff development	<p>Set aside time to devise/discuss a set of assessment procedures for the School; get agreement from colleagues, consult students and publish them widely (perhaps as an agreed code of practice).</p>
Further resources or support	<p>Guidance on writing an assessment strategy is available in 'Good practice in assessing students' from Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT)</p>

Insight into.....**assignment briefs****Insight 4****What are assignment briefs?**

An assignment brief provides students, placement supervisors, other internal examiners/moderators and external examiners with a definitive description of the assessment task(s) that are required to achieve credit in a module.

There is no single way of presenting this information. Each tutor may wish to provide a different type of briefing. However, it has been suggested by students that they find it helpful if a common template is used across a programme. The template should be general enough to be used by any tutor to describe any assignment.

It is useful to provide students with briefings for examinations as well as coursework. External examiners are increasingly asking to see this information for both examinations and coursework.

How might you use assignment briefs?

1. Draw up the assignment brief at the same time as you plan the module.
2. Discuss the brief with other colleagues working on the module to make sure that you have covered the full range of learning outcomes and have avoided 'clumping' of submission dates.
3. Provide students with the briefings
 - in the module documentation at the beginning of the semester, and/or;
 - during a lecture/tutorial at least four weeks before the due date;
 - online in the module folder accessible through the student portal.

Useful guidance on using assignment briefs and a template for a briefing can be found in 'Good practice in assessing students'.

A copy of this reference can be obtained through Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT)

Assessment principle 4

Assessment will be inclusive and equitable

Explaining the principle

Inclusive and equitable assessment will ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual.

Assessment should be free from discrimination and the University has a duty to make sure that all students are appropriately supported. In particular the following groups need to be considered when designing assessment strategies:

- disabled students. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 (SENDA) requires all HE institutions to anticipate the participation of disabled students and to make individual reasonable adjustments (see Insight 5); in addition DDA 2005 requires us to examine policies and procedures to remove discriminatory practice and to eliminate barriers for disabled students. There is an expectation that “assessment activities should be designed from the start with the needs of disabled people in mind” (Understanding the DDA 2007 p.103 Section 3.7.)
- international students faced with new assessment practices
- those studying at a distance from University campuses
- students with diverse educational experiences and learning styles.

University regulations

Regulations for providing support for disabled students and for students with other short term needs are published in the University’s **Academic regulations, notes for guidance and procedures for taught programmes**.

The need for inclusive assessment is recognised in the University’s **Disability Equality Scheme Action Plan 2006 – 08** and our policies, regulations and guidance are designed to comply with the **QAA Code of Practice: Students with disabilities**.

Faculty/School responsibilities

Course approval, module review, annual programme monitoring and periodic review needs to address the assessment of diverse students as identified in the QS handbook.

Faculty scrutiny panels should only approve programmes if they show that the full range of students has been considered in planning the curriculum and that resources are available to support that diversity. This will be particularly important if the programme includes assessed field trips, work placements and/or laboratory work but may also apply to the general range, loading and timetable of assessments.

Subject responsibilities

Subject leaders should take responsibility for staff development activities to ensure that all colleagues are aware of the requirements of the legislation. There are some excellent checklists in ‘SENDA Compliance in HE’.

Programme/module team responsibilities

Responsibility for anticipating the requirements of disabled students and for making ‘reasonable adjustments’ when planning assessment strategies lies with programme teams. Tutors should ensure that the assignments they set do not disadvantage particular groups or individuals (see Insight 5). Alternative assessments should be considered for those students for whom the traditional assessment mode may not be a viable option. The case studies in ‘SENDA compliance in HE’ and the SPACE document provide examples (see examples of current good practice and further resources below).

In addition, it should be made it clear in student handbooks that individuals can discuss their needs with module tutors. It is not appropriate to assume that all students with similar impairments will require similar adjustments.

Guidance and support

Designing inclusive assessment strategies can be a real challenge. How can tutors respond to this challenge bearing in mind that academic requirements and standards cannot be compromised and should be applied to all students whether or not they have a disability?

We already have considerable experience of making reasonable adjustments for students when they are taking formal examinations. In this situation there are well established processes managed through Disability Assist Services. However, the sheer numbers involved are creating considerable pressures on the examination system.

One alternative approach is to review the range of assessment methods currently used to assess learning outcomes and seek new solutions. We can adapt assessment strategies so that disabled students are no longer assessed by methods designed with the non-disabled in mind (see Insight 7). In addressing the needs of this student cohort other students may also be better served.

A slightly different approach is to allow for alternative assessments within a module – this means that we should accept that there is more than one way of testing whether learning outcomes are achieved. Alternative assessments should accommodate the functional differences that arise as a consequence of the student's disability, their methods of communication, learning styles and physical considerations. Using such approaches, disabled students will be better able to demonstrate their ability. Without alternative provision, assessment results will reflect the impact of the disability and prevent students acquiring independence in their learning (Waterfield & West, 2002 p.86).

Examples of current good practice

Useful case studies are included in the Higher Education Academy 'Embedding Success'. This document is available on www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability under the SPACE Project resource link. The SPACE project resource can also be found in DAS' community pages.

Staff development

Use the case studies in 'SENDA Compliance in Higher Education' as the basis for discussing how assessment might reasonably be adjusted in your programme. In one case study the module tutor asks how it might be reasonable to allow a profoundly deaf student following an art course to validate the attainment of academic standards by using means different from those used by other students. Most of the course is practically based and presents few problems. However, students are expected to give an oral presentation of their work. Is it likely to be reasonable to allow this student to present her work using British Sign Language?

Further resources or support

For support in designing assessment tasks contact Disability Assist Services or refer to sections 4 & 10 of the University's publication 'SENDA Compliance in Higher Education'. Available online at www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability. The UWIC/TechDis publication 'Accessible curricula: good practice for all' (Section 8) contains guidance on creating 'barrier free' assessment strategies. Available online at: <http://www.techdis.ac.uk/pdf/curricula.pdf>
Also see the following web sites:
www.nottingham.ac.uk/ssc and
www.drc-gb.org/drc/documents/estates.doc

Insight into assessment and disability Insight 5

Your assessment strategy should reflect the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 to reduce discriminatory barriers, provide equality of opportunity and ensure disabled students experience is full and equal participation in learning.

Since the inception of the DDA Part IV (SENDA) there has been a requirement for students to be assessed in such a way as not to disadvantage them. It is no longer acceptable to simply react to the needs of individual disabled students; We have a duty to examine our practice and anticipate the requirements of disabled students when designing the assessment strategy for a programme.

This requirement is reflected in the QAA Code of Practice on Students with Disabilities which states:

“Assessment and examination policies, practices and procedures should provide disabled students with the same opportunity as their peers to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes”

Important terminology

Disability.

Under the DDA disability encompasses a broad definition which includes people with a wide range of impairments and conditions such as physical or sensory impairments, mental health difficulties including depression, specific learning difficulties and health conditions such as HIV, epilepsy, cancer which have a substantial and adverse effect on academic activities [e.g. learning and assessment]

Inclusive assessment.

A flexible range of assessment modes made available to all, capable of assessing the same learning outcomes in different ways.

MAP.

Modified Assessment Provisions are those contingency arrangements of extra time, own room, large font for questions etc. which currently seek to ameliorate the effects of a disability on performance.

Alternative assessments.

Assessments embedded into course design as present and future possibilities for a minority of students e.g. viva voce with report or short essays instead of an exam.

TLS document (Teaching, learning and support document).

This is generated by Disability Assist Services following a student assessment for required adjustments. It is forwarded to the Faculty for action.

Adjustments.

Currently adjustments may constitute a MAP, or for a minority of disabled students alternative assessments. Reasonable adjustments may be better approached through more inclusive arrangements for all.

Anticipatory approach.

Anticipating disabled students' participation on courses at course planning and approval means that necessary adaptations can be made which accommodate most disabled students' learning.

Guidelines on inclusive assessment design

'where ever possible... assessment activities should be designed from the start with the needs of disabled people in mind'

(Understanding the DDA 2007 p.103 Section 3.7)

*A variety of different assessment types should be included in each programme and at each stage of the programme. The wider the variety of types, the better the chance of meeting the needs of a wide range of students and addressing the DDA requirements for disabled students.

*Coursework assignments should allow students the opportunity to meet the learning outcomes in more than one way. This helps to ensure that staff are responding appropriately to the anticipatory duty of the DDA and that only minor adaptation will need to be made for most disabled people.

*End of year formal examinations and in class tests should be designed with an alternative in mind to accommodate a minority of disabled students. This may mean coursework and examinations need to be able to substitute for each other.

*Be careful not to assume that all coursework is more appropriate for disabled students. In particular be aware that practical assignments, fieldwork, self and peer assessment, group work assessment and some computer based assessment, such as tests that use optical mark readers, can be a problem for some disabled students

*Make sure that assignments are spread out through the year to avoid clustering.

For some useful examples of these principles in action go to www.space.ac.uk and look at case study 3 and 8. Table 21 (p.151) which reports on this research outlines disabled students' top ten preferences for assessment modes

Guidelines on supporting disabled students through assessment

*Inform students early in the programme/module about the assessment you are planning and encourage disabled students to immediately identify any areas in which they may require adjustments to be made.

*Check on the precise requirements of individuals as it is vital to bear in mind that students with the same impairment may require different adjustments.

*Allow flexibility in the conduct of the assessment (e.g. timing and physical location of examinations; facilities available for practical assessment). The precise requirement for this will normally be defined in the student's teaching, learning and support (TLS) document

*Consider presenting the assessment brief in a range of formats and spend time with students on clarifying the assessment criteria described in the brief.

Guidelines on materials and resources used for inclusive assessment

*Assessment documents, examination papers and printed resources need to conform to guidance on how to present learning materials. For example use Arial 12 point font; use plain English and avoid lengthy prose; avoid the use of bullet points.

*Using computer aided assessment can be productive (fast turn round times; short examination length) but there are issues to anticipate for students with poor motor control or visual impairment.

*It may be necessary to accept students' work in different formats (the same work might be written, taped or videoed, for example)

For some useful examples of these principles in action go to www.plymouth.ac.uk/disability

Guidelines on marking and feedback

*At the marking stage all students must be treated equally and the same standards must be applied. All markers and assessors, including external examiners, need to be clear that the same standards are applied but that process by which the standard is assessed can vary.

*The language used for giving feedback needs to be accessible, clear and sensitive to disability.

Disciplinary variations

*Individual disciplines will have different challenges when it comes to assessing students with disabilities. Guidance can be obtained in particular situations from Higher Education Subject Centres accessed from www.hea.ac.uk and/or by contacting Disability Assist Services at the University.

Other Useful Guidance

Gravestock, P. (2006) Disability CPD guide available online at www.glos.ac.uk/shareddata/dms/D3AE9E4CBCD42A039BB7E2C6E4E55418.doc

Disability Rights Commission (2007) Understanding the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 available online at <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/Documents/Disability/Education> and information on examinations available on-line at www.drc-gb.org/education/knowyourduties/examinations.asp [Section 3.15]

The Equality Challenge Unit Promoting Equality available online at www.ecu.ac.uk

McCarthy, D. and Hurst, A. (2001) A briefing on assessing disabled students available online at www.heacademy.ac.uk

QAA (1999) Code of Practice: Students with Disabilities, Gloucester QAA. Available online at www.qaa.ac.uk

Waterfield, J. and West, R. (2002) SENDA Compliance in Higher Education (Section 10)

Waterfield, J. and West, R., (2007) Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation (SPACE) [in particular Sections 3, 5.5, 5.9, 6]

Riddell, S., Tinklin, T. and Wilson, A. (2002) 'Disabled students in Higher Education: the impact of anti-discrimination legislation on teaching, learning and assessment', paper delivered to the ESRC seminar on Reconfiguring Sociology of Education, University of Bristol, November 2002.

Elton, L. and Johnston, B. (2002) Assessment in Universities: a critical review of research. available online at www.heacademy.ac.uk

Accessibility Essential Services. Available on line at http://www.techdis.ac.uk/index.php?p=3_20

Assessment principle 5	Assessment will be relevant to the programme aims and outcomes
Explaining the principle	Assessment tasks will be focused on the aims and objectives of the discipline or subject and, in writing these, programme teams will use the subject benchmark(s) as a guide. They will also ensure that students have assessment opportunities in a range of generic skills and, in writing these, will be guided by the SEEC level descriptors.
University regulations	The University Review and Approval procedures require all programmes to include a programme specification and definitive module records. These include the aims and outcomes (knowledge, understanding and skills) that should be assessed through the programme/module.
Faculty/School responsibilities	Faculty review groups will ensure that programme and module teams align learning outcomes with their aims and that these are appropriately assessed.
Subject responsibilities	Subject groups/Schools will decide on the appropriate benchmark(s) for each programme.
Programme/module team responsibilities	<p>Programme teams should make it clear in their programme specifications how the assessment strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -reflects the subject benchmark and/or other subject specific learning outcomes; -requires students to practise/demonstrate skills (see Insight 6); -relates to work based learning and vocationally specific skills where appropriate. <p>In defining these reference should be made to the SEEC Level Descriptors (Appendix A) and the subject benchmark(s).</p> <p>The overall picture of the knowledge and skills assessed in a programme should be made clear by presenting them in a profile.</p> <p>Assessment briefs and assessment criteria should refer directly to the subject specific and generic skills that are included in the definitive module record.</p>
Guidance and support	Gosling and Moon (2002) provide comprehensive guidance on learning outcomes.
Staff development	Take time as a team to review the subject benchmark(s) –there are still many colleagues who are unfamiliar with the subject knowledge and skills proposed in the benchmarks.
Further resources or support	<p>For more information on writing appropriate learning outcomes and assessment criteria see:</p> <p>Gosling, D. & Moon, J. (2002) How to use learning outcomes and assessment criteria London: SEEC</p>

Insight into..... assessing graduate attributes and skills**Insight 6****What are graduate attributes and skills?**

These are generic or transferable skills that are encountered by individuals in a wide variety of contexts (Murphy 2001). It is assumed that developing and practising such skills will help students to use them initially in familiar, and later in less familiar, situations. Employers show particular interest in ensuring that the graduates they employ have developed these skills. The Dearing report recommended that four key skills should be included in all degree level programmes (learning how to learn, communication skills, numeracy and the use of IT). Over the last few years these have been incorporated into a graduate attributes and skills profile (GASP) adopted by the University of Plymouth for all programmes. For most programmes these are based on the SEEC level descriptors (Appendix A). Additional skills that Plymouth students are expected to demonstrate are defined in the University's revised Skills Plus Strategy (2007).

Many programmes have links to professional and vocational qualifications which define their skills base in a different way. In these cases the assessment of students will reflect the requirements of these qualifications.

How might you assess key graduate attributes and skills?

Murphy (2001) suggests that best approach to assessing key skills is to:

- allow evidence of skill development to be collected from a wide variety of sources/settings
- link assessment of skills to specified sources of evidence
- show development of skills over time rather than relying on a single snapshot

In addition, personal development planning (PDP) leads to the accumulation of evidence over a number of modules/stages.

Mapping the key graduate attributes and skills in a programme

Programme teams should devise a profile or matrix to show where and when students' skills are assessed. Programmes will have core modules that include skills that will be introduced to all students; the mapping process should focus on these even though they are supplemented by skills found in optional modules.

Useful guidance on assessing key graduate attributes and skills is found in:

Murphy, R. (2001) A Briefing on Key Skills in Higher Education. Available online at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/resources.asp?process=full_record§ion=generic&id=5

Designing your Programmes and Modules explains the process of mapping

Copies of these references can be obtained through Educational Development and Learning Technologies (EDaLT)

Assessment principle 6	The amount of assessed work required will be manageable
Explaining the principle	The scheduling of assignments and the amount of assessed work required will provide a reliable and valid profile of achievement without overloading staff or students.
University regulations	<p>The length and number of assessment tasks (and associated student workload) are linked to the credit rating of the module, which is defined in the <i>University academic regulations, notes for guidance and procedures for taught programmes</i>.</p> <p>The University Review and Approval procedures (University Approval panels) ensure that the overall assessment load for students on any programme is manageable.</p> <p>In line with other HEIs the University has adopted the convention that student's should expect to be involved in ten hours of work for every unit of credit. For a twenty credit module it would be expected that a student would have about two hundred hours of work (lectures, tutorials, laboratories, fieldwork reading, coursework assessment, revision and examinations).</p>
Faculty/School responsibilities	Faculty scrutiny panels should take an overview of the assessment workload of a programme to ensure that it is manageable and spread reasonably evenly through the academic year.
Subject responsibilities	Subject leaders should ensure that the assessment burden for any individual member of staff is appropriately distributed and not excessive.
Programme/module team responsibilities	<p>Programme teams should overview their assessment schedules to avoid excessive clustering or bunching of coursework deadlines. In particular, teams should ensure that there is a reasonable spread of assignments throughout the year.</p> <p>When revising or reviewing a programme, teams should consider whether students are over-assessed. There is considerable scope for formative assessment – using this will help to spread out the summative assessment load.</p>
Guidance and support	<p>Tutors and students have seen their assessment workload grow dramatically in recent years for (at least) two reasons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the number and diversity of students has increased; as a result we spend less time on each student's work but more time on assessing overall; • the number of assignments in each module has increased. Interestingly, this is because tutors often believe that the only way to ensure that students will work is to tie them down through more assessment. In fact, more assignments will often lead to 'assessment overload' and students will tend to adopt a surface approach to learning when faced with excessive pressure (Biggs 1999). <p>A systematic review of assessment across a programme is needed to address the problem of overload. Race (2001) suggests several strategies that will help reduce the burden on staff (and may also improve student performance):</p>

- reduce the total number of assignments
- assess students in groups
- use shorter assignments
- do not count all assignments
- avoid assessing the same skills and understanding lots of times

For example, Gibbs (1998) cites a case of an overworked tutor who used to require students to submit 25 reports worth 1% each. He changed the requirements so that each student still submitted 25 reports but only 5 reports (still worth 25%) were selected at random for marking. An immediate outcome of this was that students produced better quality reports, knowing that each one marked would be worth 5%. The marking load was reduced by 4/5ths.

- involve students in self or peer assessment

Race (2001) is a powerful advocate of this type of innovation. He lays out procedures and provides templates for working with students. This can be a particularly effective way (particularly at the early stages) of helping student's understand what they are required to do and improving the quality of student work.

Some of these strategies may involve taking risks. It is nearly always worth the effort. However, there should be a good balance in the types of assignments used -if redesigning the overall assessment strategy avoid using the same time-savers too often.

Staff development

Can't it all go wrong?

There are several things that can go wrong with self-assessment and peer-assessment and to use either process successfully, it's worth knowing the potential dangers. Set up a session where staff can discuss common concerns about introducing self, peer and group assessment. Here are some comments to work with:

'You're paid to assess me - why should I assess myself?'

'But we haven't the expert knowledge to use to assess'

'What about passengers in team work?'

'But won't students be far too kind to themselves when they self-assess?'

(Source: Race,P. online for further details)

Further resources or support

Race, P. (2001) *The Lecturer's Toolkit*. London: Kogan Page

Race, P. online:www.lgu.ac.uk/deliberations/seda-pubs/Race.html)

Biggs, J. (1999) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, London: Kogan Page

Assessment principle 7

Formative and summative assessment will be included in each programme

Explaining the principle

Formative and summative assessment will be incorporated into programmes to ensure that the purposes of assessment (see the University's Assessment Policy) are adequately addressed.

- Formative assessment is designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and inform development.
- Summative assessment provides a measure of achievement (or failure) in respect of a learner's performance in relation to the intended learning outcomes of a programme of study.
- Many programmes will wish to include diagnostic assessment as one element of formative assessment. Diagnostic assessment provides an indicator of a learner's aptitude and preparedness for a programme of study and identifies possible learning problems.

Any one assessment task or module may combine these types of assessment.

University regulations

The University Review and Approval procedures require that each definitive module record specifies the types and proportions of summative assessment proposed (the assessed elements). This is used by the student record system in the calculation of marks and creation of student transcripts and, therefore, cannot be changed without formal approval and the allocation of a new module code.

There are no University regulations relating to the use of formative assessment but formative assessment, particularly early in stage one modules is actively encouraged.

Faculty/School responsibilities

Faculty scrutiny panels will consider summative assessment in programme proposals. It would also be good practice to ascertain whether and where opportunities will be made available for formative assessment.

Subject responsibilities

Heads of subjects may wish to provide staff development opportunities to review the balance of formative and summative assessment currently used.

Programme/module team responsibilities

Programme teams will design their summative assessment to include a balance between controlled (formal examinations, class tests and presentations attended by tutors) and open (all other modes) assessment. The proportion will vary between modules and will be overviewed by the programme team to ensure that an appropriate balance is achieved.

Module tutors have considerable flexibility in the use of formative assessment. In most cases it will be linked to an assignment that will also be summatively assessed.

Guidance and support

Take this opportunity to review existing patterns of summative and formative assessment and to make changes.

Why introduce formative assessment?

- One reason is that students act very strategically when their work is being graded. In formative situations they are more likely to reveal where their

weaknesses lie and, therefore, to learn more effectively. Knight (2001) calls this 'low stakes' assessment.

- A second reason is that many of the skills and attributes we wish our students to develop are notoriously difficult to assess summatively. These include interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, creativity, reflectiveness and autonomy. In assessing these 'soft skills' formative assessment is often incremental and based on learning conversations –for example, the kind of activities that we commonly use when supervising a dissertation or discussing success in a work placement.
- A pragmatic reason for introducing formative assessment relates to the structure of the Academic Year. Year long modules provide opportunities to assess formatively at an early stage. In fact, it may become essential to have early formative assessment to give students a chance to check that they are performing acceptably.

Formative assessment is often resisted because tutors fear that it is resource-intensive and additional to their work load. Examples of formative assessment that can result in deep learning with minimum extra work for tutors include:

- Peer and self assessment exercises in which students compare their answers or consider past answers to questions and make judgements about standards
- Using computer assisted assessment, for example in quizzes, diagnostic tests or automated multiple choice questions that students can return to many times to 'improve the score'
- Using computer assisted assessment to help with marking
- Using formative assessment to review work that will ultimately become summative. Ask the student to point out the changes made between the two versions to save you commenting on the same points twice.

An excellent guide to the issues involved in using summative and formative assessment can be found in Knight (2001).

Staff development

Hold a staff development session on the use of Computer Assisted Assessment (CAA). Discuss whether there are any contexts in which it might replace current assessment approaches in your programme. Introduce Perception -a CAA tool that provides flexible online assessment. It is accessible from the student portal.

Further resources or support

Knight, P. (2001) A briefing on key concepts. Available online at www.heacademy.ac.uk/

For help with using Computer Assisted Assessment/Perception e-mail the Learning Technologies Team at lt@plymouth.ac.uk

Assessment principle 8 Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process

Explaining the principle **Students are entitled to feedback on all (submitted) formative and summative assessment tasks. The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be clear to students in advance.**

University regulations The University requirement is that students should receive written feedback on all coursework. In addition, as a minimum, grades should be available for all controlled assessment (including examinations and in-class tests). This means that students have access to their grades if they ask for them –the onus is on the student.

Faculty/School responsibilities See subject responsibilities

Subject/responsibilities A statement on feedback is an important element of an assessment strategy. In order to ensure a degree of comparability between programmes there should be agreement on extent and timing of feedback at subject (or perhaps even faculty) level. In particular, there should be a commitment to returning work within a maximum of a few weeks. Give a precise figure for the length of time you have agreed on.

Students need to be given this information in their handbooks. Staff need to have discussed the effects of this on their workloads and selected appropriate hand-in dates to allow them to meet their commitments.

Programme/module team responsibilities Programme teams need to clarify

- how and when they intend to give verbal and/or written feedback on coursework and;
- whether they intend to give written/verbal feedback on examination performance.

This information should be published in student handbooks.

The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be clearly published in advance in an assessment brief (see Principle 3/Insight 4).

Guidance and support Opportunities for early feedback are vital and clear strategies need to be developed for students in their first few weeks at University.
‘If assessment is the engine that drives learning, then the ways in which we give feedback are important in gearing and lubricating the engine so that maximum effect is achieved from the effort put in by all concerned’ (Race 1999).

A simple grade is insufficient feedback as it does not help students understand how to improve their work. Verbal and written feedback are both important.

- Written feedback can be reflected on/returned to by students and is essential in order to keep a record for external examiners and audit purposes;
- Verbal feedback is taken very seriously by students and is seen as

particularly valuable when it gives them a chance to question, and even argue with, the tutor (Race and Brown, 2001).

Race argues that the key features of good feedback are:

- it is timely – the sooner the better. Research has shown that returning work and feedback weeks after submission means it is ignored because it bears little relevance to current needs. In fact, late feedback is the most common issue raised by students in their course evaluations in almost all HEIs.
- it is intimate and individual – each student expects feedback to reflect their personal achievements and individual nature (this seems to contradict advice on providing ‘global’ feedback to save time but, in fact, a combination is possible).
- it is empowering –both positive and critical feedback can use language which shows the way forward and does not ‘dampen down’ learning.
- it is manageable – it is important to keep the workload manageable for staff but it is also an issue for students. Too much feedback makes it difficult for student’s to sort out the routine from the important – it is best to keep comments fairly brief and emphasise the important points.

Some ways of giving effective and ‘time-efficient’ feedback include:

- use computer assisted assessment for instant feedback
- use assignment return sheets (tick box if necessary) to give rapid feedback on routine assessment matters;
- use computerised statement banks to cover the issues that arise frequently;
- use class reports to cover frequently occurring mistakes and add a short comment for individuals;
- use model answers and allow students to compare their own work with these;
- give large groups feedback during a lecture;
- use peer marking (occasionally) as an exercise in class time.

Staff development

Discuss how the team can ensure that feedback given for one assignment might inform the next assignment. Given that different tutors may be involved, consider the role of personal tutors and whether this could be an integral part of personal development planning.

Further resources or support

Race, P. (2001) *The Lecturer’s Toolkit*, pp.86-94 London, Kogan Page.

University of Plymouth guidance and support on ‘Good practice in assessing students’.

Assessment principle 9	Each programme will include a variety of assessment types
Explaining the principle	Variety in assessment allows a range of learning outcomes to be appropriately assessed (see Principle 2). In addition, varied assessment tasks support students who have a range of approaches to learning and learning styles. Providing varied assessment tasks ensures that they are inclusive (see Principle 4).
University regulations	The University Review and Approval procedures require programme specification to provide information on the range of assessment methods used. In addition, the definitive module record must specify the modes of assessment that have been selected for that module.
Faculty/School responsibilities	Faculty scrutiny panels should check that programmes specifications include a description of the variety of assessment methods used.
Subject responsibilities	Subjects may wish to provide a staff development session to consider diversifying assessment methods.
Programme/module team responsibilities	<p>Programme teams need to incorporate a variety of assessment approaches into their programmes. It is important to list these in the programme specification.</p> <p>Modules may include a range of different assessment tasks; these will be selected to ensure that learning outcomes are effectively assessed (see principle 2). The responsibility for selecting the range of assessment tasks lies with the module team.</p>
Guidance and support	<p>Race (1999) reminds us that until recently students in Higher Education were assessed almost entirely by coursework essays, dissertations and examinations. However, the variety of methods used today is enormous (see Insight 7). Why is variety so important?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is considerable research that suggests that we all vary in the way we learn and in how we convey our understanding of what we have learnt (Biggs, 1999). For example, some people are less comfortable at writing sustained text while others will struggle with interpreting complex graphical representations. All of us are limited in some ways more than in others. If a range of assessment tasks is included in the programme then students have opportunities to demonstrate ability using their preferred learning styles at least some of the time. There is some evidence that tutors design assignments in the styles in which they themselves have been successful. We need to be aware of this when planning assessment tasks. • Most students adopt a strategic approach to their learning based on the assessment tasks they are required to complete. Biggs (1999) describes this as a 'backwash effect' - assessment, rather than the intended learning outcomes, determines the learning. This is not a problem as long as the assessment method is aligned with the outcomes. Biggs provides a list

that matches tasks to outcomes (see Insight 7).

- Race (2001) makes it clear that each assessment method has practical advantages and disadvantages associated with it. By adopting a range of methods there is an opportunity to even out these disadvantages and maximise the reliability of assessment.

However, students need support if they are asked to take on a new assessment method – they cannot be expected to achieve high marks without some support and training. This is an opportunity to provide some formative assessment and to give class time to discussing the assessment methods and assessment criteria.

Staff development

Use the fifteen common forms of assessment listed below as a checklist to review the variety of assignments offered through your programme:

Unseen, time-constrained written exams	Open book exams
Open-notes exams	Structured exams
Essays	Student projects
Reviews and annotated bibliographies	Reports
Practical work	Portfolios
Presentations	Vivas -oral exams
Poster displays and exhibitions	Work-based learning
Dissertations and theses	

Take note of the ideas Race (2001 pp42-86) offers on each method – these are often simple to implement and make a huge difference.

Further resources or support

Race, P. (2001) *The Lecturer's Toolkit*, London: Kogan Page.
Biggs. J. (1999) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, Buckingham: Open University Press

Insight into..... a range of assessment methods**Insight 7**

The following list outlines the range of assessment methods identified in the QAA Subject Benchmark statements. It provides a potentially rich, cross discipline, resource from which to identify alternative methods for assessing learning outcomes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytical exercises • Briefings • Computer-based assessments and exercises • Continuous assessment • Coursework with discussion elements • Critical diaries, learning logs and journals • Crits • Data interpretation exercises • Design tasks • Dissertation • Documentation • Electronic presentations: CD, web pages, etc • Essay assignments • Examinations (seen) • Examinations (open book) • Examinations (take away) • Examinations (unseen) • Exhibition and poster displays • Extended investigations (e.g., statistical) • Fieldwork reports • Finding primary source material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geological mapping • "In class" and module tests • Internship diaries • Laboratory practical reports • Laboratory examinations and practical tests • Multiple choice testing • On-line assessment • Optical Mark Reader Assessments • Oral examinations • Placement or Exchange reports • Peer and self-evaluation • Personal research projects • Portfolios and sketchbooks • Problem based learning • Projects, independent or group • Practical reports • Sandwich Year reports • Simulation exercises • Slide and picture tests • Student-led seminars, presentations and discussions • Synoptic examinations • Treatment reports • Video formats • Viva voce examinations • Work books • Work experience report
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Source: Waterfield, J. and West, R. (2002)

The kind of learning assessed by a range of frequently used assessment types

Assessment mode	Most likely kind of learning assessed
Extended prose, essay-type Essay exam Open book Assignment, take home	Rote, question spotting, speed structuring As for exam (less memorising), coverage Read widely, interrelate, organize, apply, copy
Objective test Multiple choice	Recognition strategy, comprehension, coverage
Performance assessment Practicum Seminars, presentation Exhibition/Posters Interviewing Critical incidents Project Reflective journal Case study, problems Portfolio	Skills needed in real life Communication skills Concentration on relevance, application Responding interactively Reflection, application, Sense of relevance Application, professional skills Reflection, application, Sense of relevance Application, professional skills Reflection, creativity, unintended outcomes
Rapid assessments (large class) Concepts Venn diagrams Three-minute essay Short answer	Coverage, relationship Relationship Level of understanding, sense of relevance Recall units of information, coverage

Source: Biggs (1999)

References

Biggs, J. (1999) Teaching for quality learning at University. Buckingham: Open University Press.

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Briefings on:

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Assessment of Portfolios

Key Concepts: Formative and summative, criterion and norm-referenced assessment

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Self, Peer and Group Assessment

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Work-based Learning

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Appendix A SEEC Level Descriptors

Notes on the use of the SEEC level descriptors

- Areas of learning differ according to the extent to which the knowledge or skills developed are **generic** or more **subject specific**. The areas of learning are labelled accordingly.
- In general, progression is characterised by two important related factors –
 - the **autonomy** of the learner
 - the increasing **responsibility** that is expected of the learner in the guidance given and the tasks set
- Some or all of the following skills will be identified by subject specialists at any level. It may be useful for subject specialists to develop more detailed descriptors of these skills in association with the other level descriptors in order to determine achievement at each level.
 - a) Investigative skills/methods of enquiry;
 - b) Laboratory skills/fieldcraft;
 - c) Data and information processing/IT;
 - d) Content/textual analysis;
 - e) Performance skills;
 - f) Product development;
 - g) Professional skills;
 - h) Spatial awareness;
 - i) Management of resources.

HE Level 1

Development of Knowledge and Understanding**The Learner:**

- **Knowledge base:** has a given factual and/or conceptual knowledge base with emphasis on the nature of the field of study and appropriate terminology;
- **Ethical issues:** can demonstrate awareness of ethical issues in current areas of study and is able to discuss these in relation to personal beliefs and values.

Cognitive/Intellectual skills**The Learner**

- **Analysis:** can analyse with guidance using given classifications/principles
- **Synthesis:** can collect and categorise ideas and information in a predictable and standard format
- **Evaluation:** can evaluate the reliability of data using defined techniques and/or tutor guidance
- **Application:** can apply given tools/methods accurately and carefully to a well defined problem and begin to appreciate the complexity of the issues

Key/transferable skills**The Learner:**

- **Group working:** can work effectively with others as a member of a group and meet obligations to others (for example, tutors, peers, and colleagues)
- **Learning resources:** can work within an appropriate ethos and can use and access a range of learning resources
- **Self evaluation:** can evaluate own strengths and weakness within criteria largely set by others
- **Management of information:** can manage information, collect appropriate data from a range of sources and undertake simple research tasks with external guidance
- **Autonomy:** can take responsibility for own learning with appropriate support
- **Communications:** can communicate effectively in a format appropriate to the discipline(s) and report practical procedures in a clear and concise manner
- **Problem solving:** can apply given tools/methods accurately and carefully to a well defined problem and begins to appreciate the complexity of the issues in the discipline

Practical skills**The Learner:**

- **Application:** can operate in predictable, defined contexts that require use of a specified range of standard techniques
- **Autonomy in skill use:** is able to act with limited autonomy, under direction or supervision, within defined guidelines

HE Level 2

Development of Knowledge and Understanding**The Learner:**

- **Knowledge base:** has a detailed knowledge of major theories of the discipline(s) and an awareness of a variety of ideas, contexts and frameworks
- **Ethical issues:** is aware of the wider social and environmental implications of area(s) of study and is able to debate issues in relation to more general ethical perspectives

Cognitive/Intellectual skills**The Learner**

- **Analysis:** can analyse a range of information with minimum guidance using given classifications/principles and can compare alternative methods and techniques for obtaining data
- **Synthesis:** can reformat a range of ideas and information towards a given purpose
- **Evaluation:** can select appropriate techniques of evaluation and can evaluate the relevance and significance of the data collected
- **Application:** can identify key elements of problems and choose appropriate methods for their resolution in a considered manner

Key/transferable skills**The Learner:**

- **Group working:** can interact effectively within a team / learning group, giving and receiving information and ideas and modifying responses where appropriate
- **Learning resources:** can manage learning using resources for the discipline. Can develop working relationships of a professional nature within the discipline(s)
- **Self evaluation:** can evaluate own strengths and weakness, challenge received opinion and develop own criteria and judgement
- **Management of information:** can manage information. Can select appropriate data from a range of sources and develop appropriate research strategies
- **Autonomy:** can take responsibility for own learning with minimum direction
- **Communications:** can communicate effectively in a manner appropriate to the discipline(s) and report practical procedures in a clear and concise manner in a variety of formats
- **Problem-solving:** can identify key areas of problems and choose appropriate tools / methods for their resolution in a considered manner

Practical skills**The Learner:**

- **Application of skills:** can operate in situations of varying complexity and predictability requiring application of a wide range of techniques
- **Autonomy in skill use:** able to act with increasing autonomy, with reduced need for supervision and direction, within defined guidelines

HE Level 3

Development of Knowledge and Understanding**The Learner:**

- **Knowledge base:** has a comprehensive/detailed knowledge of a major discipline(s) with areas of specialisation in depth and an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge
- **Ethical issues:** is aware of personal responsibility and professional codes of conduct and can incorporate a critical ethical dimension into a major piece of work

Cognitive/Intellectual skills**The Learner**

- **Analysis:** can analyse new and/or abstract data and situations without guidance, using a range of techniques appropriate to the subject
- **Synthesis:** with minimum guidance can transform abstract data and concepts towards a given purpose and can design novel solutions
- **Evaluation:** can critically evaluate evidence to support conclusions/recommendations, reviewing its reliability, validity and significance. Can investigate contradictory information/identify reasons for contradictions
- **Application:** is confident and flexible in identifying and defining complex problems and can apply appropriate knowledge and skills to their solution

Key/transferable skills**The Learner:**

- **Group working:** can interact effectively within a team / learning / professional group, recognise, support or be proactive in leadership, negotiate in a professional context and manage conflict
- **Learning resources:** with minimum guidance can manage own learning using full range of resources for the discipline(s). Can work professionally within the discipline
- **Self evaluation:** is confident in application of own criteria of judgement and can challenge received opinion and reflect on action. Can seek and make use of feedback
- **Information management:** can select and manage information, competently undertake reasonably straight-forward research tasks with minimum guidance
- **Autonomy:** can take responsibility for own work and can criticise it
- **Communications:** can engage effectively in debate in a professional manner and produce detailed and coherent project reports
- **Problem solving:** is confident and flexible in identifying and defining complex problems and the application of appropriate knowledge, tools / methods to their solution

Practical skills**The Learner:**

- **Application of skills:** can operate in complex and unpredictable contexts, requiring selection and application from a wide range of innovative or standard techniques
- **Autonomy in skill use:** able to act autonomously, with minimal supervision or direction, within agreed guidelines

Masters Level

Development of Knowledge and Understanding**The learner**

- **Knowledge base:** has depth and systematic understanding of knowledge in specialised / applied areas and / across areas and can work with theoretical / research-based knowledge at the forefront of their academic discipline
- **Ethical issues:** has the awareness and ability to manage the implications of ethical dilemmas and work pro-actively with others to formulate solutions
- **Disciplinary methodologies:** has a comprehensive understanding of techniques / methodologies applicable to their own work (theory or research-based).

Cognitive and Intellectual Skills**The learner:**

- **Analysis:** with critical awareness can undertake analysis of complex, incomplete or contradictory areas of knowledge communicating the outcome effectively
- **Synthesis:** with critical awareness, can synthesise information in a manner that may be innovative, utilising knowledge or processes from the forefront of their discipline / practice
- **Evaluation:** has a level of conceptual understanding that will allow her/him critically to evaluate research, advanced scholarship and methodologies and argue alternative approaches
- **Application:** can demonstrate initiative and originality in problem solving. Can act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level, making decisions in complex and unpredictable situations

Key / Transferable Skills**The learner:**

- **Group working:** can work effectively with a group as leader or member. Can clarify task and make appropriate use of the capacities of group members. Is able to negotiate and handle conflict with confidence
- **Learning resources:** is able to use full range of learning resources
- **Self evaluation:** is reflective on own and others' functioning in order to improve practice
- **Management of information:** can competently undertake research tasks with minimum guidance
- **Autonomy:** is independent and self critical learner, guiding the learning of others and managing own requirements for continuing professional development.
- **Communications:** can engage confidently in academic and professional communication with others, reporting on action clearly, autonomously and competently
- **Problem solving:** has independent learning ability required for continuing professional study, making professional use of others where appropriate

Practical Skills**The learner:**

- **Application of skills:** can operate in complex and unpredictable , possibly specialised contexts, and has an overview of the issues governing good practice
- **Autonomy in skill use:** is able to exercise initiative and personal responsibility in professional practice
- **Technical expertise:** has technical expertise, performs smoothly with precision and effectiveness; can adapt skills and design or develop new skills or procedures for new situations.

Taught Doctorate

Development of Knowledge and Understanding**The learner**

- **Knowledge base:** has great depth and systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge. Can work with theoretical / research knowledge at the forefront of the discipline at publication-quality / peer reviewed standards
- **Ethical issues:** can analyse and manage the implications of ethical dilemmas and work pro-actively with others to formulate solutions
- **Disciplinary methodologies:** has a comprehensive understanding of techniques / methodologies applicable to the discipline (theory or research-based).

Cognitive and Intellectual Skills**The learner:**

- **Analysis:** with critical awareness, can undertake analysis, managing complexity, incompleteness of data or contradiction in the areas of knowledge
- **Synthesis:** can undertake synthesis of new approaches, in a manner that can contribute to the development of methodology or understanding in that discipline or practice
- **Evaluation:** has a level of conceptual understanding and critical capacities that will allow independent evaluation of research, advanced scholarship and methodologies. Can argue alternative approaches
- **Application:** can act independently and with originality in problem solving, is able to lead in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level

Key / Transferable Skills**The learner:**

- **Group working:** can lead /work effectively with group. Can clarify task, managing the capacities of group members, negotiating and handling conflict with confidence
- **Learning resources:** Is able to use full range of learning resources
- **Self evaluation:** is reflective on own and others' functioning in order to improve practice
- **Management of information:** competently and independently can undertake innovative research tasks
- **Autonomy** is independent and self-critical as learner; guides and supports the learning of others and can manage own continuing professional development.
- **Communication:** can communicate complex or contentious information clearly and effectively to specialists / non-specialists, understands lack of understanding in others. Can act as a recognised and effective consultant
- **Problem solving:** independently can continue own professional study, professionally can make use of others within / outside the discipline.

Practical Skills**The learner:**

- **Application of skills:** can operate in complex and unpredictable / specialised contexts that may be at the forefront of knowledge. Has overview of the issues governing good practice
- **Autonomy in skill use** can act in a professional capacity for self / others, with responsibility and largely autonomously initiative in complex and unpredictable situations
- **Technical expertise:** has technical mastery, performs smoothly with precision and effectiveness; can adapt skills and design or develop new skills / procedures for new situations

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH ASSESSMENT POLICY Appendix B Code of Practice for Marking

1. Introduction

The University assessment principles are described in the Assessment Policy. It is made clear that reliability is a core principle for assessment¹. This means that the outcomes of assessment for a student should be fair and justifiable. It assumes that if the marking process is repeated, a student can expect to receive a similar result. We know this is difficult to ensure when dealing with large numbers of markers and a very diverse student body and so, the code of practice for marking is designed to ensure that each student's work is considered appropriately and to minimise the possibility of unfair outcomes for students. It also protects and supports staff who are responsible for making judgements about the quality of student work. Finally it is a way of ensuring and maintaining academic standards in the University and its partners.

2. Principles

The minimum standard which all University programmes) regardless of site or form of delivery) must adopt is that all work which contributes to a final award should be subject to an element of **independent internal scrutiny** that seeks to contribute to consistency in marking standards and practices across a subject area/programme and set out in writing how this is to be achieved.

“Marking” is a process indivisible from assessment and embedded within particular disciplines, and thus the marking process for any particular piece of student work needs to be understood within that context. In some cases, marking represents an objective summary of a student's performance as compared to an established answer set. In these cases, it is possible to construct a detailed marking scheme outlining “correct” or “model” answers to set questions. At other times marking involves the exercise of academic and/or professional judgement of student performance against broad marking criteria.

3. Processes

Subject groups/programmes will adopt a combination of the following processes to ensure marking standards are reliable.

Briefings and assessment criteria

¹ This principle is echoed in the University regulations, which state that one of the purposes of assessment is “to provide a reliable and consistent basis for the recommendation of an appropriate award”.

All assignments must be accompanied by a briefing for the students and assessment criteria to indicate the standards required to pass (it may also involve providing grading criteria for different categories of pass marks). All staff involved in marking should have access to these.

Marking Schemes

It is the formal responsibility of the module leader to identify where the creation of a marking scheme for a particular assessment is appropriate, and to ensure that the scheme is accurate, transparent, and available to markers in a timely fashion. Marking schemes should be available to external examiners should they request to see it as part of their consideration of academic standards on the modules for which they have responsibility.

Where detailed marking schemes are available a sample of work (10% or a minimum of 5 pieces) should be reviewed by an independent marker to ensure that the detailed marking scheme has been correctly applied. Where errors or inconsistencies are found the module leader should review all scripts.

Second marking

Where detailed marking schemes are not available and the assessment relies more upon academic/professional judgement, second marking should be considered. Second marking involves sampling and remarking at least 10% (or a minimum of five pieces) of the work. In the special case of final year projects and dissertations all work is second marked. Assignments will normally be second marked unseen (the second marker will have no knowledge of the first marker's results). The outcome of this process will be **either** confirmation of the first marker's judgement without need for a meeting **or** a discussion to resolve the differences between the two markers. This may lead to a wider review (moderation) of the marks of the whole cohort where the markers do not agree. All second marking should be evidenced on the record sheets for the assignment and made available to external examiners and at subject assessment panels.

Moderation

This involves a review of all the marks awarded within a module. Moderation will include

- second marking of a representative sample of scripts (as set out above) from all markers
- a statistical review of the module results (descriptive statistics are used where this is feasible) and
- a moderation meeting to review the results of a cohort of students.

All moderation processes should be clearly recorded and made available to external examiners and at subject assessment panels.