

1495



UNIVERSITY OF
ABERDEEN

CELEBRATING
525 YEARS
1495 – 2020

Mapping Against the UK Quality Code

SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT

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SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Quality Code is split into 12 themes, available online on the QAA website at <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>. Assessment, as one of the key themes, is critically important in ensuring the academic standards and integrity of University degrees. Each student must be assessed fairly and appropriately for the courses in which they partake, and should be recognised accordingly. The code describes this theme as follows:

Assessment is a fundamental aspect of the student learning experience. Engagement in assessment activities and interaction with staff and peers enables learning, both as part of the task and through review of their performance. It is a vehicle for obtaining feedback. Ultimately, it determines whether each student has achieved their course's learning outcomes and allows the awarding body to ensure that appropriate standards are being applied rigorously. Deliberate, systematic quality assurance ensures that assessment processes, standards and any other criteria are applied consistently and equitably, with reliability, validity and fairness.

In practice, this means that assessments should be appropriate for the course and level, and should assess students fairly, consistently and rigorously. This means that approval processes should also be fair, consistent and robust. In handling assessment, the University should also ensure robust policies and procedures to manage the diverse array of courses, programmes and assessments.

In defining key terms that will be used frequently in this section, the Quality Code notes the following:

Formative assessment: Assessment with a developmental purpose, designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and how it can be improved and/or maintained. Reflective practice by students sometimes contributes to formative assessment.

Summative assessment: Used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria to gauge the intended learning outcomes of a module or course. Typically, within summative assessment, the marks awarded count towards the final mark of the course/module/award.

Module: A self-contained, formally structured unit of study, with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Some providers use the word 'course' to refer to individual modules.

SECTION 2: ASSESSMENT

The Quality Code has three different sections: the expectations for standards; the expectations for quality; and the guiding principles. The relevant expectations for standards and quality are detailed below. The Guiding Principles are mapped to the University's own policies, procedures and quality mechanisms. There are two separate sections for the University's practices, detailing what the University does and has in place to support that expectation/principle, as well as the supporting documentation, which includes reference to supporting policy, procedure, website or other document.

EXPECTATIONS FOR STANDARDS & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES	EXPECTATIONS FOR QUALITY & CORE/COMMON PRACTICES
The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.	Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.	From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
The provider ensures that the threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks.	The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.
The provider ensures that students who are awarded qualifications have the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in other UK providers.	The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.
Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them.	The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.
The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.	The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.
The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.	The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES	UNIVERSITY PRACTICES	SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION
GUIDING PRINCIPLES		
<p>1. Assessment methods and criteria are aligned to learning outcomes and teaching activities.</p> <p>There is alignment between intended learning outcomes, teaching strategies, methods of assessment and assessment criteria. Constructive alignment is a model where learning environments and activities are designed to enable all students to achieve the desired learning outcomes, measured through assessment activities using clearly aligned criteria. Learning outcomes, assessment criteria and learning and teaching activities are developed in accordance with the academic level of study, using appropriate descriptors and consistent language. They reflect course and module aims as well as other factors where appropriate, such as professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.</p>	<p>The University operates a robust system of Programme and Course approval and review that ensures that Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) and assessment are aligned, and that appropriate teaching and learning strategies are then deployed to support students in meeting the ILOs to the best of their abilities. This system follows the principles of Biggs’ Constructive Alignment model, setting learning and the assessment of that learning at the heart of the student experience. The system comprises the following stages:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic staff discuss informally a course or programme proposal with their relevant Head of School / Discipline. This might be a new provision or modification to an existing provision. 2. The University’s Curriculum Management System (CMS) requires those submitting course proposals to set out the ILOs and align them with relevant assessments and teaching activities. The system utilises an inbuilt ‘ready reckoner’ to assist academic staff in ensuring that their ILOs are of an appropriate level, based on a 3D version of Blooms’ Taxonomy (see link opposite). In this way, Schools are required to ensure that every assessment has associated intended learning outcomes for students to engage in their learning. At this stage, requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) are taken into account and alignment with these is ensured and highlighted. 3. Course and Programme proposals are submitted to the University’s Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) for scrutiny and advice. QAC members (themselves academic staff) from a different academic discipline are allocated by QAC to oversee and scrutinise proposals and offer advice and support to applicants. This ensures that the focus is on process rather than subject. The designated QAC member is tasked with ensuring that the ILOs are appropriate to the SCQF level of the provision, that the assessment method(s) is /are realistic and appropriate and that the amount of assessment is consistent with other 	<p>Course and Programme Approvals (Webpage) Types of Assessment, Academic Quality Handbook (Document) Setting Assessments, Academic Quality Handbook (Document) Video Guidance: Devising Learning Outcomes Using Blooms’ Taxonomy</p>

	<p>courses or programmes in other Schools / Disciplines elsewhere in the University (i.e. to avoid over- or underassessment for a similar amount of credits elsewhere).</p> <p>4. Once approved by QAC, the Registry is informed and a course or programme code allocated.</p> <p>Alongside the initial development of ILOs, academic and other teaching staff are provided with professional development opportunities by both the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) and their School / Discipline to understand more about how to write effective ILOs and their relationship with student learning and the wider SCQF Framework. These include introducing new staff to the various University Codes of Practice on Assessment (section 2 refers) and the Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment (section 6 refers).</p>	
<p>2. Assessment is reliable, consistent, fair and valid.</p> <p>The assessment process is objective and repeatable over time. All assessment activities have clearly articulated assessment criteria, weightings and level descriptors that are understood by all students and staff involved in the assessment process. To ensure equity, academic standards for each award are rigorously set and maintained at the appropriate level (in accordance with the relevant national qualification frameworks). Awards at the same level are comparable in terms of qualification and level descriptors, assessment criteria, Subject Benchmark Statements, and, where applicable, PSRB requirements. Assessment criteria are sufficiently robust to ensure</p>	<p>The University's Codes of Practice on Assessment (both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Taught) outline the important principles of fairness, consistency and reliability of assessments.</p> <p>In terms of marking assessments, the University operates a moderation policy and 'blind' marking policy to ensure that students are not disadvantaged in the marking of their assessments. This ensures fair and consistent marking and feedback provided to students.</p> <p>A major piece of work undertaken by the University in 2014 was the introduction of a Common Grading Scale (CGS), replacing the former Common Assessment Scale. As well as introducing a simplified grading system that could be used across different disciplines to help students to understand their grade (itself part of feedback), the Scale also includes a series of written descriptors against each grade band. These help students to understand their feedback in general terms (e.g. at what level they are performing) before then going on to read the more detailed comments on their assessments.</p> <p>Alongside this, the subject External Examiners appointed by the School review assessments as part of the process of setting assessment and providing feedback to the School on their appropriateness. External</p>	<p>Undergraduate Code of Practice on Assessment (Document)</p> <p>Postgraduate Taught Code of Practice on Assessment (Document)</p> <p>Types of Assessment, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</p> <p>Setting Assessments, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</p> <p>Double, 'Blind' and Anonymous Marking and Return of Grades, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</p> <p>Moderation Policy (Policy)</p> <p>External Examining (Webpage)</p> <p>Internal Teaching Review (Webpage)</p> <p>Common Grading Scale (CGS) (Webpage)</p>

<p>reasonable parity between the judgements of different assessors. Policies and procedures for marking assessments and moderating marks are clearly articulated, consistently operated and regularly reviewed. Where borderline marks are identified, policies for the consideration of grades to be awarded are consistent, fair and freely available to staff and students. The validity of an assessment - how well a test measures what it claims to measure - is reviewed through annual and periodic review, supported by external subject specialists and external examiners.</p>	<p>Examiners also provide feedback by means of formal Examiners' Meetings as well as their formal annual report. This report is escalated via QAC to ensure institutional oversight of the issues raised in the report and feedback is provided to the External Examiner.</p> <p>These individual elements, whilst robust in themselves, are in turn scrutinised in an holistic manner every five years as part of the University's Internal Teaching Review (ITR). Schools are required to complete and submit an evidence-based Critical Analysis and Curriculum Map as part of their ITR submission. Annual Programme Reviews, External Examiner Reports, and School learning and teaching metrics reviewed as part of the Annual School Planning Process are also considered. The ITR team comprises academic staff from different disciplines with the University, alongside QAC members and an appropriate number of external assessors (based on the number of QAA Subject Benchmark Statements represented).</p>	
<p>3. Assessment design is approached holistically. Assessment is designed 'top down' - beginning with the award, then going down into module level (where appropriate). Assessment design considers all modes of course delivery and environment, including where employers may be involved in assessment for work-based learning programmes such as apprenticeships. Variety in modes of assessment meets a need, based on academic judgement, and is not just for the sake of variety. Variety helps develop a range of skills and competencies and assesses a range of learning styles - the variety itself should</p>	<p>Assessment is planned as part of an overall approach to ensuring that the student learning experience is a holistic one. Timing of assessment is such that it takes place at appropriate points to assess learning, be that at the end of a course, at a mid-point or by continuous assessment. Timing of assessments across Programmes is considered through the process of storyboarding, where Schools seek such support. Hosted jointly by the Centre for Academic Development and the relevant Programme Co-ordinator, storyboarding events involve constituent Course Co-ordinators in taking a strategic overview of the Programme and award, then viewing the individual component courses and their ILOs followed by key activities in each course which help students to meet these (assessment, teaching delivery, feedback). By plotting these constituents of each course as a timeline against each other, a visual representation of the Programme emerges, allowing all concerned to see how all of the courses link to create the Programme and support the award, plus where the potential pinch points are. Staff can then agree amongst themselves how to address these. Within this process, any particular requirements for involvement of employers, placement requirements or other time away</p>	<p>Principles of Blended Learning (Webpage) Academic Integrity (Webpage)</p>

<p>not become a barrier to learning. Assessment design needs to develop across stages as the student develops, as well as levels of study, as part of the overarching award design process and on an ongoing basis.</p>	<p>from the University can be clearly seen by all involved and its implications discussed and changes made as necessary.</p> <p>On the back of these storyboarding sessions, CAD also provides, on request, a range of bespoke sessions for specific Schools to promote robust assessment design (including elements of both academic integrity [section 10 refers] and alternative assessment [section 4 refers] both as part of support for wider curriculum design and specific to individual course assessments.</p>	
<p>4. Assessment is inclusive and equitable.</p> <p>Every student has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement through the assessment process, with no group or individual disadvantaged. In designing assessments, the needs of students are considered, including those studying at different locations, from different cultural/educational backgrounds, with additional learning needs, or with protected characteristics. Assessment procedures and methods are flexible enough to allow adjustments to overcome any substantial disadvantage that individual students could experience.</p>	<p>The Institutional Framework for Inclusivity and Accessibility in Education ensures that all teaching, learning and assessment is fair, inclusive and promotes equality. It presents a series of resources to assist with inclusivity in teaching, learning and assessment.</p> <p>Setting assessments, and associated approvals, Schools must ensure that their assessments are fair, consistent and do not put any students at disadvantage. The approvals route for course proposals via the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) provides balances and checks at a cross-institutional scale to ensure that assessments remain fair and inclusive.</p> <p>External Examiners are consulted as part of the assessment design process to ensure that assessments are appropriate, consistent and fair.</p> <p>There is guidance available for invigilating examinations to ensure that the arrangements in place are fair and inclusive. Face to face training (now replaced with an online equivalent) is offered before each exam diet. Tailored online training has also been provided to staff based at our Doha campus in Qatar and for staff involved in assessment of our jointly-delivered provision at South China Normal University (SCNU). The invigilation manual is maintained by Registry and available to all participants in advance to enable training to focus on the policies via a Q&A format.</p>	<p>Inclusivity and Accessibility Framework for Education (Webpage)</p> <p>Rules for the Conduct of Prescribed Assessments and Written Examinations for Degrees or Diplomas (Document)</p> <p>Guidance for those with Responsibility for Making Examination Arrangements for Disabled Candidates (Document)</p> <p>Types of Assessment, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</p> <p>Setting Assessments, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</p> <p>External Examiners in relation to Marking (Document) Invigilation (Webpage)</p> <p>Exams Manual for Invigilators, AQH (Document)</p> <p>Alternative Assessment Modes (Webpage)</p>

	<p>Our provision of alternative assessments has become a major focus over the past two years, building on work by the Centre for Academic Development and QAC to encourage academic and other teaching staff to think more broadly about how students can be assessed and how to assess their ILOs through more authentic assessment modes that are not constrained by students' individual learning differences or cultural requirements. This led, in 2021, to a University-wide initiative driven by the Dean for Educational Innovation to encourage alternative assessment modes to be adopted more widely.</p>	
<p>5. Assessment is explicit and transparent.</p> <p>Assessment policies, regulations and processes are explicit, transparent and accessible to all staff and students involved in the assessment process. Students are clearly informed of the purpose and requirements of each assessment task and the standards expected. Feedback on assessments explicitly relates to the stated learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and students have the necessary support to understand and interpret assessment criteria and how these are used to enable staff to recognise differential student achievement.</p>	<p>Assessments are approved via our curriculum approvals process as detailed in section 1, with all relevant policies, procedures and codes of practice related to assessment available via links opposite.</p> <p>All assessments are available to view in the University's Course Catalogue for every course, ensuring students have the opportunity to review and consider the assessments for optional and compulsory course choices in advance of starting their studies. The information advises students of the type of assessment, expected parameters in which the assessment will be conducted (e.g. word count) and the weighting of the assessment.</p> <p>Assessments are detailed further in individual Course Handbooks or available on MyAberdeen (the University's Virtual Learning Environment) for every course. These provide ILOs, deadlines by which assessments must be completed, deadlines for feedback to be returned to students and any other relevant information. Together these documents facilitate transparency in assessment information for students.</p> <p>As part of the CMS project the more detailed information on ILOs, feedback and assessment timing is being migrated from course handbooks to also be visible in the Course Catalogue.</p>	<p>Curriculum Management (Webpage) Course and Programme Approvals (Webpage) Course Catalogue (Webpage) Undergraduate Code of Practice on Assessment (Document) Postgraduate Taught Code of Practice on Assessment (Document) Moderation Procedures (Policy) Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment (Document) Markers, Double, Blind and Anonymous Marking (Document) Common Grading Scale (CGS) (Webpage) General Regulations for First Degrees (Webpage) Supplementary Regulations for Higher and Postgraduate Degrees (Webpage)</p>

<p>6. Assessment and feedback is purposeful and supports the learning process.</p> <p>Assessment relates directly to course aims and learning outcomes, reflecting the nature of the discipline or subject and ensuring that students have opportunities to develop a range of knowledge, skills and attributes. Assessment is fit for purpose and methods are valid in measuring achievement against learning outcomes. Assessment enables students to benchmark their current level of knowledge or skills, identify areas for improvement and make judgements about the overall progress made. Feedback (including ‘feed-forward’) reflects attainment relevant to learning outcomes and marking criteria for the assessment task. Feedback on assessment builds on dialogue and opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. The teaching and assessment strategy progressively enhances students’ assessment literacy to enable them to increasingly regulate their own learning and performance.</p>	<p>The Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment sets out our principles of feedback, namely that it is timely, rewards effort, is understandable, relevant, constructive and supportive. The Framework goes on to outline the approach taken with regards to marking and feedback, ensuring a supportive, consistent and fair system. Assessments and associated feedback align with intended learning outcomes, ensuring assessments measure students learning.</p> <p>Feedback on assessment should also identify areas for development (‘feed-forward’) and areas of good practice. Feedback should be constructive, helping students to understand what they have done well and providing them with information that will help them improve future work and assessment. Guidance has been created on feedback on assessment, which is provided to staff to ensure that feedback remains constructive and also feeds forward. Further information on feedback is also available on the University’s webpages.</p> <p>The Centre for Academic Development provides a range of development opportunities and sessions for academic and other teaching staff and PGRs who teach and support learning, which includes assessment and feedback. These include our AdvanceHE-accredited PG Certificate in H.E. Learning & Teaching and the popular Principles of Learning & Teaching in H.E. short programme for PGRs and others new to teaching. The Centre also hosts a range of open, drop-in discussion sessions addressing topics such as ‘Providing Effective Feedback’.</p>	<p>Institutional Framework for the Provision of Feedback on Assessment (Document) Feedback (Webpage) Feedback on Assessment (Webpage) Assessment and Feedback, Toolkit (Video)</p>
<p>7. Assessment is timely.</p> <p>Assessment tasks and feedback are timed appropriately to promote student learning and facilitate improvement. Students are given sufficient time and</p>	<p>Assessment is planned as part of an overall approach to ensuring that the student learning experience is an holistic one. Timing of assessment is such that it takes place at appropriate points to assess learning, be that at the end of a course, at a mid-point or by continuous assessment. Timing of assessments across Programmes is considered through the process of storyboarding, where Schools seek such support. Hosted jointly by the</p>	<p>Course and Programme Approval (Webpage) Academic Calendar (Webpage) Exam Diet Dates (Webpage)</p>

<p>opportunity to engage in learning and teaching activities that build their capacity for assessment. A holistic view of assessment deadlines can help to ensure that they are timed appropriately, to avoid overburdening students. Expectations in relation to feedback and feedback turnaround time for each assessment are consistent and clearly articulated. Feedback comments are provided in sufficient time to enable students to enhance their performance in subsequent assessment tasks.</p>	<p>Centre for Academic Development and the relevant Programme Co-ordinator, storyboarding events involve constituent Course Co-ordinators in taking a strategic overview of ILOs and then key activities in each course which help students to meet these (assessment, teaching, feedback). By plotting these constituents of each course as a timeline against each other, a visual representation of the Programme emerges, allowing all concerned to see where the potential pinch points are and then agree amongst themselves how to address them.</p> <p>Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, at a University level, the term dates identified a formal exam period at the end of each half-session alongside additional continuous assessment during the course. During Covid-19, the formal exam diets have been replaced by use of other forms of assessments (e.g. essays, open book exams, online assessments) which has provided more flexibility in assessment. We ensure that modes of assessment delivery adhere to any PSRB requirements in relevant courses and programmes.</p>	
<p>8. Assessment is sufficient and manageable.</p> <p>The scheduling of assignments and the amount of assessed work required provides a reliable and valid profile of achievement without overloading students or staff involved in the assessment process. Assessment requirements take into account the notional learning hours for any given unit of study. The spread, number and methods of assessment are considered with other, concurrent modules in mind to ensure that the burden of assessment is not excessive. For example, an overview of assessment deadlines across the course of study is taken to avoid</p>	<p>Through the curriculum management processes and approval via the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), assessments are scrutinised and reviewed to ensure that they are sufficient and manageable for students, as well as staff. Course coordinators and programme directors are encouraged to look holistically at programmes and constituent courses to ensure that assessment is sufficient, appropriate and that the scheduling is manageable and not ‘bunched’.</p> <p>The guidance documents in the form of Types of Assessment and Setting Assessments also provide relevant course coordinators information with regard to sufficient and manageable assessments.</p>	<p>Course and Programme Approval (Webpage) Quality Assurance Committee (Webpage) Types of Assessment, Academic Quality Handbook (Document) Setting Assessments, Academic Quality Handbook (Document)</p>

<p>'bunching' where possible, given students' choice around modules.</p>		
<p>9. Students are supported and prepared for assessment.</p> <p>Students are given opportunities to develop assessment literacy, practise subject-related skills and knowledge, engage with content and develop the competencies required to meet learning outcomes. This often involves formative assessment opportunities. Students are provided with appropriately timed feedback that is understandable, constructive and helps them meet their developmental needs.</p>	<p>The University operates a variety of support mechanisms for students to ensure that they are well-supported for study and prepared for assessment. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal Tutoring: Each student is assigned a personal tutor as a contact for pastoral and academic support. ▪ Student Learning Service: Part of the Centre for Academic Development, the Student Learning Service (SLS) offers workshops and online resources. SLS works with students on a one-to-one basis to improve understanding and help implement feedback from marked assessments. ▪ Academic Writing Skills Course: Some Schools make use of the Academic Writing Skills courses which are available to assess students' level of academic writing when they begin study in first year. This is supported by the Centre for Academic Development. ▪ Induction: All Schools provide induction to their programmes during Welcome Week, during which students are informed of the support mechanisms available to them in terms of their teaching, learning and assessment. ▪ Course Coordinators: Course Coordinators support students by offering office hours to discuss any issues that may arise over the course of completing an assessment. ▪ Formative Assessment: Schools make use of formative assessments, which do not count towards the final course grade, to allow students the opportunity to develop their skills and prepare them for the summative assessment. <p>Support also takes the form of previous feedback and feed-forward. These provide students with constructive ways to improve and enhance their work, while supporting them to enhance their academic skills. This information can be found on our feedback webpages ('Your Academic Feedback').</p>	<p>Assessment (Webpage) Types of Assessments, Academic Quality Handbook (Document) Personal Tutoring (Webpage) Student Learning Service (Webpage) Feedback (Webpage) Academic Writing Skills, Toolkit (Webpage)</p>
<p>10. Assessment encourages academic integrity.</p>	<p>A University-wide approach across Schools aims to encourage academic integrity. We actively promote academic integrity as an issue via a series</p>	<p>Code of Practice on Student Discipline (Academic) (Document)</p>

<p>Assessment is designed to minimise opportunities for students to commit academic misconduct, including plagiarism, self-plagiarism and contract cheating. Wherever possible, a suitable variety of assessment methods should be used, to minimise the availability of opportunities for students to incorporate plagiarised work by another author, or previous work by the student, either within the level of study or across levels. Policies and procedures relevant to academic integrity are clear, accessible and actively promoted rather than simply made available.</p>	<p>of ongoing awareness raising workshops for teaching staff, exploring issues of assessment design to minimise opportunities for academic misconduct and developing students' academic literacies. Guidance for students and staff helps ensure that assessment encourages and improves academic integrity.</p> <p>In terms of the assessments themselves, regulation takes the form of assessment design (including advice and feedback through discussion with External Examiners at this stage of the process), followed by marking and moderation, during which process the issues of academic integrity are foregrounded and open for discussion amongst the markers. Following this, both the internal pre-Examiners' meetings and the formal Examiners' Meeting involving the External Examiners provides further opportunity for discussion around the academic integrity of assessments.</p>	<p>Academic Integrity: Guide for Students (Document) Academic Integrity (Webpage) Moderation Procedures (Policy) Markers, Double, Blind and Anonymous Marking (Document) External Examiners in relation to Marking (Document)</p>
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