



Assessment for Learning and Achievement Policy

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Introduction

- This policy directly relates to the Office for Students (OfS)¹ Conditions of Registration, in particular B: Quality, reliable standards and positive outcomes for all students and the advice and guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)².
- The paper brings together a number of previously presented assessment and feedback documents, consolidating them into one policy, which will enable the University to deliver assessment and feedback in accordance with the approved set of principles listed below.
- The adoption of eSAF across the University will facilitate the implementation and monitoring of a number of elements in this assessment policy.

Northumbria University Assessment and Feedback Principles

NB: These were presented to Education Committee (formerly Student Learning and Experience Committee) in July 2013, in the Assessment Policy and Practice. Minor amendments have been made to wording.

- These principles will:
 - clarify good performance (goals, criteria, standards)
 - encourage 'time and effort' on challenging and authentic learning tasks
 - provide high quality feedback and opportunities that enable learners to close the gap between current and desired performance
 - ensure summative assessment impacts positively on learning
 - ensure formative assessment opportunities
 - encourage interaction and dialogue around learning and assessment (peer and lecturer-student)
 - facilitate the development of self-assessment, reflection in learning and autonomy
 - ensure an inclusive approach to assessment and feedback
- Additionally, these principles:
 - support the development of learning groups and learning communities
 - encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
 - provide opportunities, where appropriate, for student choice in the topic, method, criteria, weighting or timing of assessments
 - involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice
 - provide information to lecturers to help shape their teaching
- The following policy elements are included in this document:

¹ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/initial-and-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/>

² <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance>



- Assessment and feedback design requirements
- Grade descriptors, marking schemes and assessment criteria
- Assessment briefs
- Feedback standards
- Approval of assessment tasks

1. Assessment and feedback design requirements

NB. These were presented to Education Committee (formerly Student Learning and Experience Committee) in July 2013 in the Northumbria University Assessment Policy and Practice. Minor amendments have been made to wording.

- Clearly defined module outcomes will be mapped to programme outcomes
- Clear alignment will be demonstrated between the learning outcomes, content that is taught and the knowledge and skills being assessed, thus ensuring validity
- Assessment criteria, grade descriptors and marking schemes will have been developed that distinguish between different knowledge and skills, and between grades, and that are aligned across modules and programmes. See point 2
- Module assessment is integrated into an overall plan/timeline for programme assessment which is shared with students
- Learning outcomes and assessment criteria are written in a way that is understandable to students demonstrating development of their graduate attributes
- A variety and complexity of assessment methods appropriate to the learning outcomes will be utilised that encourages a deep approach to learning (e.g. essays, problem-based, portfolios)
- A progression in the complexity and demands of module assessments in later years of programmes
- Students will be given the opportunity across the level and programme (for example final major projects, dissertations), to make a formative submission where feedback is provided
- Plagiarism is minimised through careful task design, explicit education and appropriate monitoring of academic integrity
- Assessment and feedback is fair, reliable, flexible and inclusive with provision for individual reasonable adjustments wherever required, so every student has an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement
- Student feedback will provide explanations of how they have performed in relation to assessment criteria and grades, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, helping to improve individual performance in future assessments

2. Grade descriptors, marking schemes and assessment criteria

NB. These were presented to Education Committee (formerly Student Learning and Experience Committee) in June 2014 in Northumbria University Assessment Criteria Guidelines. Minor amendments have been made to wording

2.1. Grade Descriptors

Generic grade descriptors are statements of standards to be reached across a range of generic criteria in order to achieve different grades. Grade descriptors should be constructed with reference to the QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)³.

- Programme grade descriptors are required which reflect expectations for each level of a programme
- Grade descriptors will incorporate descriptions that demonstrate what is qualitatively different between the different grades
- Generic grade descriptors approved by the Faculty Executive Group (FEG) (formerly Faculty Education Committee (FEC)), should be used but FEG may approve variations by programme
- Grade descriptors must be included in programme handbooks and/or in module assessment briefs
- Grades will be clearly delineated making use of the full marking range, with marking blocks for each 10% above 30%. Subcategories may be developed (e.g. 0-9%, 10-19%, 20-29%, 40-44%, 44-49%, 50-54%, 54-59% etc.)
- The University's format for grade descriptors is as follows:

Grade bands	Generic criteria (approved by FEG (formerly Faculty Education committee (FEC)))			
90-100%				
80-89%				
70-79%				
60-69%				
50-59%				
40-49%				
30-39%				
0-29%				

2.2. Marking schemes

- A marking scheme for an assignment or examination combines the assessment criteria for the task with the appropriate standards (for example, from a set of grade descriptors) and provides the detail about how performance in each of the criteria will be graded
- Marking schemes should combine the assessment criteria (e.g. relevance to question, structure and organisation, grounding in literature, use of evidence, application of theory, quality of argument, presentation, referencing etc.) and marking blocks, utilising and being consistent with the relevant grade descriptors (see above)
- Marking schemes are required for each assessment and should be agreed with relevant external examiner/s along with the assessment brief
- Marking schemes must be made available to students in module assessment briefs
- The University's format for marking schemes is as follows:

³ [QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications \(FHEQ\)](#)

Grade bands	Assessment criteria (to be defined for each assessment on a module/ programme, and approved by the External Examiner)			
90-100%				
80-89%				
70-79%				
60-69%				
50-59%				
40-49%				
30-39%				
0-29%				

- Sub categories may be developed (e.g. 0-9%, 10-19%, 20-29%, 40-44%, 44-49%, 50-54%, 54-59% etc.)

3. Assessment briefs

NB. These were presented to Education Committee (formerly Student Learning and Experience Committee) in June 2014 in Northumbria University Assessment Criteria Guidelines. Minor amendments have been made to wording.

- All assessment tasks (coursework, examinations for example) should be agreed with relevant external examiners at levels 5 and above, noting external examiners will not normally approve level 3/ 4 assessment tasks. They should be made available to students in module information where feasible.

3.1. Coursework

- Assessment briefs will include:
 - Title/overview of assessment task
 - Learning outcomes addressed by the assessment
 - Assessment tasks and instructions that are clear and unambiguous
 - Assessment brief (what students are expected to do/task criteria), ensuring this is available on the eLP
 - Assessment criteria (aspects that will be taken into account when making a judgement), and/or qualities expected in a good assignment
 - Marking scheme (see above)
 - Information on word limits and penalties
 - Submission date and date for assignment return where relevant
 - Alternative assessment arrangements for disabled students or students with unforeseen medical circumstances are followed as set out in the Alternative Forms of Assessment for Disability or Unforeseen Medical Circumstance Policy⁴ as indicted in the Academic Regulations for Taught Awards (ARTA 1.12.2)⁵
- Alternative assessment arrangements for disabled students or students with unforeseen medical circumstances will be followed as set out in Northumbria

⁴ [Alternative Forms of Assessment for Disability or Unforeseen Medical Circumstance Policy](#)

⁵ [Assessment Regulations for Taught Awards \(ARTA\)](#)

University regulations in the Policy on Alteration of Assessments for Disability and as required

3.2. Examinations

- Unless specific exceptions have been approved with the Faculty, students must have access to past exam papers from the past two years where available, normally via the electronic Learning Portal (eLP)
- The Module Leader should provide a class briefing on the forthcoming exam (e.g. in the last class session of the semester)

4. **Feedback standards**

4.1. Generic Feedback on Assessments

- Generic feedback should be provided for the cohort as a whole, highlighting key strengths, and areas for improvement, made available (e.g. via the eLP or class email) in advance of individualised return of work
- There should be a formally scheduled time/class to discuss feedback on each assessment, where feasible which could take form of generic feedback to the cohort as a whole, peer feedback and/or self-assessment
- Feedback should be legible
- The quality of student feedback will be monitored through the process of internal and assessment moderation

4.2. Individual feedback on assessments:

- Assessment feedback sheets will:
 - Prompt feedback against each of the assessment criteria, and the quality of performance in relation to the marking scheme
 - Identify assessment criteria aligned with the learning outcomes for the module
 - Provide space for general qualitative comments, under specific headings e.g. strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement

4.3. Feedback on Examinations

- Feedback should be given on all examinations; feedback can take many different forms and the most appropriate format should be decided upon locally:
 - All exam scripts should be returned to students in line with the existing procedures for other types of assessed coursework
 - Feedback on examinations should have the same turnaround timescales and conditions as for other assessed work
 - Where feedback is given using annotations on the scripts, it should be student focused

4.4. Feedback timelines

- Individual feedback on assignments will be given within 20 working days (working days exclude weekends, bank holidays and official institutional closure days)

5. Approval of assessment tasks

- External Examiners must be fully consulted on assignments, exam papers and marking schemes. All summative assessment tasks (including referral activities) normally only at level 5 and above must be approved by External Examiners before issued to students. For clarity: this does not preclude agreement of a particular assessment in principle (if it is not possible to provide the detail of the assessment when approval is being sought) or sign-off of assessment for a fixed period of time. Details of this process are included in the Examiners handbook