

POLICY STATEMENT



Somerset College

Policy Title	Higher Education Assessment Policy	Date	July 2014
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Scope - This Policy Statement sets out the primary purpose of Higher Education (HE) assessment at Somerset College. The Policy is aligned to the University of Plymouth's Assessment Policy 2014-20 and revised in accordance with the Open University requirements.

Effective assessment enables students to develop and demonstrate their full potential. More specifically, Somerset College and its partner HE institutions expect assessment to:

- Measure a student's achievements objectively against the learning outcomes of modules;
- Enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the intended aims and learning outcomes of the programme of study;
- Assist student learning by providing appropriate feedback on performance;
- Provide a reliable and consistent basis for the recommendation of an appropriate award;
- Assist staff in evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching;
- Be informed by reflection, consideration of professional practice and subject-specific and educational scholarship;
- Promote equality of opportunity.

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

Reference should also be made to the College's Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy which covers all forms of Accreditation of Prior Learning.

Policy Statement

PART A – GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ASSESSMENT

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.

2. Assessment will be valid

Validity ensures that assessment tasks and associated criteria will effectively measure student attainment of the intended learning outcomes. All staff engaged in assessment will be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

3. Information about assessment will be explicit, transparent 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. The assessor(s) will return marked assessed work to students within a four working week period, unless otherwise agreed with them.

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4. Assessment will be inclusive and equitable

Through inclusive assessment design and individual reasonable adjustments (where appropriate) assessment will provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement.

5. Assessment will address all of the programme/stage and module aims and learning 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.

6. The volume, timing and nature of assessment should enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes

The scheduling, amount and weighting of assessment types must be appropriate to the level of the award, the programme of study and the delivery mode.

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.

The scheduling of assessment must be such that students have adequate time to reflect on learning before being assessed, and that they can benefit from feedback.

7. Formative and summative assessment will be included in each programme, stage and module

Formative and summative assessment will be incorporated into programme stages to ensure that the purposes of assessment are adequately addressed. Assessment will fall into one or more of the following categories:

- **Diagnostic assessment**, which provides an indicator of a learner's aptitude and readiness for a programme of study and identifies possible learning problems or study needs.
- **Formative assessment**, which is designed to provide learners with feedback on progress and informs development.
- **Summative assessment**, which 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.

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

Programme teams are expected to include formative as well as summative assessment so that students are able to benefit from such developmental activities and feedback.

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8. Feedback will be timely, constructive and developmental

Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process and students are entitled to feedback on all (submitted) formative and summative assessment tasks to assist in improving their assessment practices. The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be clear to students in advance.

Programme teams must ensure that constructive and timely feedback is provided to students on assessed work (normally within four working weeks) in order to promote effective learning and facilitate improvement. Feedback should be based on clear assessment criteria and it should be sufficient to provide students with an understanding of the way the mark was derived, and the extent to which the learning outcomes have been met. In addition it should enable students to see clearly how to develop their work further.

9. Each programme/stage will include a variety of assessment types

A variety of assessment methods or instruments should be used. These methods and types of assessment should encourage and support effective student learning and relate closely to the learning outcomes and subject matter of the programme of study.

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.

10. Work based learning

Work based learning should be regarded as learning that is integral to a higher education programme and demonstrated through engagement with a workplace environment and the assessment of reflective practice. Learning and work are closely interlinked within Foundation Degree programmes. Learning in the workplace can take many forms and serves a variety of purposes (paragraph 20: QAA Foundation Degree qualification benchmark 2010).

Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design. It enables learners to take on appropriate role(s) within the workplace, giving them the opportunity to learn and apply the skills and knowledge they have acquired as an integrated element of the programme. It involves the development of higher level learning within both the institution and the workplace. It should be a two way process, where the learning in one environment is applied to the other. Work-based learning can be achieved through many forms, including full-time and part-time work, integrated work placements, and real work environments. Work based learning requires the identification and achievement of defined and related learning outcomes (paragraph 23: QAA Foundation Degree qualification benchmark 2010).

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The work based learning activity may be met by different means dependent on the opportunities available to the programme(s) and students at a period in time. For example, the activities might be met by a placement within the workplace, simulated projects, or realistic working environments. The activities selected will provide learners with opportunities to meet the relevant programme learning outcomes and benchmark requirements.

Each Foundation Degree incorporates work related learning either through a specific module or through integration into other modules as appropriate. Other programmes incorporate work related learning to assist in the delivery, assessment and enhancement of the curriculum.

The College's policy is defined in relation to three phases of activity associated with the preparation for the work based learning activity, undertaking the activity, and evaluation of it at its completion.

Preparation – the key stakeholders involved will be prepared for the work related activities by receiving verbal and / or written briefings to set out the expectations of the activity, the relationship to the programme's curriculum, health and safety and legislative requirements relevant to the sector e.g. safeguarding, and evaluation of the activity and its relationship to assessment.

Undertaking the activity – the student will be expected to keep a record of the work related activity and reflective thoughts and actions taken. He / she will liaise with an appropriate work related activity coordinator to establish working practices and monitor progress.

On completion of the activity – the student will be debriefed and complete the reflective record, which may be in the form of a personal / professional development plan, with an evaluation of the activities undertaken. This evaluation may involve key stakeholders, where appropriate, such as other students, placement provider representative, the work related activity coordinator, members of the public, or others receiving a service. The evaluation will inform assessment of the relevant module(s).

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PART B – CODE OF PRACTICE FOR MARKING

1. Introduction

The College's assessment principles are described in part A of this Policy Statement. 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 College.

2. Principles

The minimum standard which all College 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. "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

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

Programme teams are expected to use clear assessment criteria and marking schemes (in line with Plymouth University's Assessment Policy 2014-20) as these are key factors in assuring that marking is carried out fairly and consistently and that marks are awarded appropriately.

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Marking Schemes

It is the formal responsibility of the Programme and Module leader(s) to ensure that the scheme is accurate, transparent, and available to markers in a timely fashion. Marking schemes should be available to external examiners as part of their consideration of academic standards on the modules for which they have responsibility.

First marking

All assignments will be first marked. Wherever possible, assignments will be marked anonymously. In some circumstances this may not be practical because the assessment method involves direct contact between the student and the examiner.

Anonymous marking

“Anonymous marking is an important element of the University’s Teaching, Learning and Student Experience strategy that supports a quality assessment process.

Anonymous marking is defined as where an assessment is marked without the student’s name or identity being made known to the marker. Anonymous marking provides reassurance for students and staff against the perception of discrimination and bias entering the assessment process and ensures students are treated equally.

In a number of areas anonymous marking is not possible, for example in programmes where assessment methods include performance, practical work, presentations, fieldwork, placements, clinical skills and team or group assessments.

Anonymous marking will be adopted for all formal written examinations scripts, in class tests and multiple choice questions.

Anonymous marking will be adopted for all summative assessed coursework and other forms of assessment at all levels except where it is recognised that this is not practical because the nature of the assessment involves direct contact between student and examiner” (University of Plymouth Assessment Policy 2014-20).

Internal Moderation

In accordance with University of Plymouth’s Assessment Policy 2014-20, moderation involves a review of assignments within a module by an independent College examiner. Normally the internal moderation process will sample up to 20% of a module’s assignments in order to satisfy the moderator that there is consistency and fairness. Selection should ensure there is a representative sample of:

- assignments from all elements of the module (ie coursework element and exam element)
- borderlines and fails

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Moderators should pay particular attention to, and may need to sample more than 20% where for example there are:

- new modules
- assignments are taught or assessed by staff new to Plymouth University and partner institutions

Where a module leader has collated marks from a number of assessors and moderated these to a common standard he/she may ask the moderator to review the process.

When a moderator has concerns they will have a conversation with the module leader and may suggest a review and revision of marks.

All moderation activities should be recorded with the moderator and module leader's comments, and be available to external examiners, and at subject assessment panels.

If, following discussions with the module leader a moderator has serious concerns that marking is substantially out of line, the moderator will report this to the programme leader who may appoint an independent academic to undertake second marking.

Second marking

Second marking involves sampling and remarking the work.

In the special case of level 6 final year projects and dissertations all work must be 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/Award Assessment Boards.

Where two markers cannot agree a final mark, a panel of three, including the Curriculum Area Manager or their nominee and the External Examiner will determine the final mark and will inform the Award Assessment Board of their decision.

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Second marking of dissertations and final year projects at level 6

All level 6 final year dissertations and projects will be independently second marked by a College examiner. Marking will normally be 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 between markers to resolve the differences between the two markers.

Where first and second markers cannot agree, a third marker will be assigned. Marking will normally be unseen (the third marker will have no knowledge of the first and second marker's results).

All marking should be evidenced on the record sheets for dissertations and final year projects and made available to external examiners and at subject assessment panels.

External moderation of marks

Following internal moderation, all assessment that contributes towards an award must be moderated by an external examiner. The sample selected for external moderation should normally include all summative work for an agreed selection of students from a given cohort, based on the marks agreed by the internal examiners.

In order to ensure consistency and fairness to students, any amendment to the marks of the sample as a result of external moderation must be applied to the rest of the cohort.

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Formulation – This Policy Statement was reviewed by the Director of Curriculum for HE in consultation with the HE Quality and Development Manager. During the review process reference was made to the following publications:

QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching (September 2012)
QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning (October 2013)
Plymouth University Assessment Policy 2014-20 (May 2014)

Review – This Policy Statement will be reviewed within three (3) years of the approval date or as required in response to changes in College organisation or legislation.

Authorised by

Approved by

.....
Vice Principal Curriculum & Quality

.....
HE Quality and Development Manager

Date

Date

This policy has been Equality Impact Assessed by the Human Resources Manager, the Interim HE Director and the Quality Improvement Co-ordinator.

¹ This principle is echoed in the University of Plymouth Assessment Policy 2014 - 20, which states that one of the purposes of assessment is “to provide a fair and reliable measure of students’ performance, knowledge and skills against the learning outcomes and discipline pedagogy”.

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Appendix 1

Good Practice Guidelines - General principles of assessment

The following guidelines pose questions for individuals and teams, against each assessment principle, to reflect on and comply with.

1. Assessment will be reliable

Do the results reflect the student's performance?

Would a repeat of assessment produce a similar result / performance?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

Assignment Briefs

Assessment Panel Papers

External Examiner's reports

Grading Criteria

2. Assessment will be valid

Do the assessment tasks actually test what you want the students to know?

Are all the module learning outcomes assessed in one way or another?

Are staff appropriately qualified / experienced?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

Programme Specification

Employer Feedback

Staff CVs

Assessment Panel Papers

External Examiner's Reports

Assignment Briefs

3. Information about assessment will be explicit and accessible

Do all involved (students, examiners, employers) understand the assessment purposes and processes?

Do students receive clear, detailed briefs?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

Assignment Briefs

Student Feedback

External Examiner's Reports

Student Handbooks

4. Assessment will be inclusive and equitable

Are assessment methods, materials and examination processes fair regardless of gender, race, disability, age, class, wealth and sexuality?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

Student Feedback

Assignment Briefs

Assessment Panel Reports

External Examiner's Reports

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5. Assessment will address all of the programme / stage / module aims and outcomes

Have assignments been designed to reflect the broader aims of the programme (these in turn will reflect the subject benchmark and the SEEC generic skills)?

Are assessment criteria appropriate to the level of study?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

External Examiner's Reports

Programme Specification

Assignment Briefs

Examples of Personal Development Planning (this means reflection not just a file containing a CV)

6. The volume and timing of assessed work will be manageable

Can the work be done in the time available and within existing constraints (facilities, numbers etc?)

Are students over-assessed?

Is the workload for staff achievable while maintaining standards?

Sources of Evidence include:

Assessment Schedule

Assessment Panel Reports

Student Feedback

External Examiner's Reports

Assignment briefs

7. Formative and summative assessment will be included in each programme / stage / module

Are both types of assessment included in the module?

Is formative assessment designed and timed so that it helps students to improve their summative assessments?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

Assessment Panel Reports

Student Feedback

External Examiner's Reports

Scheme of Work

8. Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process

Is feedback precise and detailed enough to guide future learning?

Is the language used positive and constructive?

Is feedback given as soon after the submission as possible?

Sources of Evidence include:

Module Boxes

Assessment Panel Papers

Student Feedback

External Examiner's Reports

Assignment Feedback Sheets

Audit of assessment turn-around

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9. Each programme / stage will include a variety of assessment types

Are a variety of methods used to assess?

Does the variety selected give all students the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities?

Sources of evidence include:

Module Boxes

Programme Specification

Scheme of Work

Student Feedback

Assessment Panel Papers

External Examiner's Reports

Assignment Briefs

Module Record

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