

**ACADEMIC AWARD REGULATIONS
Assessment Principles and Policy**

Name of regulation :	Assessment Principles and Policy
Purpose of regulation :	To ensure the fairness and appropriateness of the assessment of students at Staffordshire University via assessment principles and policy
Approval for this regulation given by :	Academic Board
Responsibility for its update :	Dean of Students and Academic Registrar
Regulation applies to :	To all Students registered on Staffordshire University awards.
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QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in Higher Education - Section 6: Assessment of Students - 2006

Assessment Principles and Policy

The University Assessment Principles and Policy defines a series of general principles and policies to which award and module designers are expected to subscribe and conform. They are published for the guidance of undergraduate and taught postgraduate award and modular designers to secure a common framework for the student experience of assessment.

1. Introduction: the purpose of assessment

Assessment describes any processes that evaluate the outcomes of student learning in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and abilities. In line with the QAA Code of Practice for Assessment of Students (2006) in higher education, assessment is taken to be an integral component of teaching and learning and will serve multiple purposes:

1. Provides a means by which to judge and certify student achievements and form the basis of decisions on whether a student is ready to proceed, to qualify for an award or to demonstrate competence to practice – also referred to as **Assessment of Learning**;
2. Provides a means to enhance student learning by guiding and encouraging effective approaches to learning and by providing timely and appropriate feedback which will help to improve performance- also referred to as **Assessment for Learning**;
3. Provide information which, in conjunction with other feedback, will enable staff to evaluate the effectiveness of module and programme design and of the teaching and learning strategy employed.

In addition, as bodies responsible for the academic standards of awards made in their name, institutions are required to have effective procedures for:

1. designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards;
2. implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this;
3. evaluating how academic standards are maintained through assessment practice that also encourages effective learning. (QAA, 2006)

2. General Principles of Assessment

These principles draw on published guidance on best practice in assessment in higher education and reflect the code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education Section 6: Assessment of students (QAA, 2006).

2.1 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.

2.2 Assessment will be valid

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

2.3 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.

2.4 Inclusive and equitable assessment

The University is committed to the provision of an environment which encourages and properly supports a diverse learning community.

The University will continue to work towards ensuring that assessment tasks and procedures are designed to be inclusive and do not disadvantage any group or individual (for example students with disabilities, students with varied cultural backgrounds). Programme teams should show that they are aware of the University's regulations on the assessment of disabled students. The equality impact assessment carried out early in the process of planning a programme should explicitly cover assessment as well as other aspects of the learning and teaching strategy for the programme.

2.5 Assessment will address all of the programme/level 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.

2.6 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.

2.7 Formative and summative assessment will be included in each programme/ level

Formative and summative assessment will be incorporated into programmes/level to ensure that the purposes of assessment are adequately addressed. Many programmes will also wish to include diagnostic assessment.

2.8 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.

2.9 Each programme/level will include a variety of assessment types

Variety in assessment (including computer aided, and self and peer 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.

2.10 Assessment tasks will be designed so as to minimise opportunities for plagiarism

Plagiarism is minimised through careful task design, explicit education and appropriate monitoring of academic misconduct

Further guidance can be found in Appendix B: Principles of good assessment and feedback practice. These have been taken from the work of David Nicol and the *Re-engineering Assessment Practices* (REAP) project <http://www.reap.ac.uk/index.html>

3. Regulatory Requirements

Statements 1 to 3 are direct quotations from the University's Academic Award Regulations.

3.1 Fulfilment of programme's Outcomes

The purpose of summative assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have fulfilled the outcomes of the programme of study and that they have achieved the standard required for the award(s) they seek. All programmes of study should be subject to regulations, which relate the assessment requirements of the programme to its outcomes, and it is within those assessment regulations that the examiners make their judgements on the students' performance.

3.2 Confirmation of standard

Assessment should reflect the achievement of the individual student in fulfilling the award outcomes. At the same time, assessment should relate that achievement to a consistent national standard of awards. It should, therefore, be carried out by competent and impartial examiners, using methods which enable them to assess students fairly. To that end, external examiners should be involved in the assessments which may count towards a particular award; their particular role is to ensure that the standard of the institution's awards is maintained.

3.3 Examiners' judgement

Students' work will be marked in accordance with the published assessment referencing criteria. The calculation of degree and other classifications is normally undertaken automatically (within in the appropriate award regulations) using the University's Student Information System which gives an indicative classification for ratification by the Award Board. Through this process, and where regulations allow, students are identified as eligible for consideration of discretion. In such cases, the regulations identify how discretion may be applied.

In operating discretion, Award Boards will take account of the guidelines which have been developed.

3.4 Award Assessment Strategy

All awards shall develop an assessment strategy, which will be defined in the Programme Specification, to ensure that the defined outcomes of the award are explicitly and appropriately tested through a variety of methods in the context of the programme of summative modular assessments. Where appropriate to the subject area, the assessment strategy will include a proportion of assessment under controlled conditions.

3.5 Modular Assessment Design

The choice of format of module assessment shall be appropriate to test the achievement of all the specified module learning outcomes and designed as an integral feature of the process of learning. When appropriate, assessment shall be also designed to meet the requirements of external accrediting bodies.

In order to secure comparability of task and parity of treatment Faculties shall create

appropriate procedures for the internal scrutiny and review of all summative assessment tasks prior to any required submission to External Examiners.

3.6 Volume of Modular Assessment

Module assessments shall occupy a specified proportion of the notional learning time allocation of the module/unit of study. The specified learning outcomes should be assessed through the minimum of discrete tasks. For a 15 credit module, assessment should, normally, be limited to a maximum of two pieces of summative assessment. Multiple modules should not necessarily simply multiply the number of assessments (eg a 30 credit module should not automatically have four pieces, 45 credits six pieces etc). The overall award assessment strategy should set the context for the range and number of assessments. The same range of tasks will be used for the same module regardless of mode or location of delivery, although implementation may reflect experiential learning opportunities or cultural contexts where appropriate.

Subject Areas will be expected to develop consistent guidelines on issues such as length, complexity, intellectual challenge and the volume of assessment.

3.7 Summative Assessment and Formative Feedback on Modules

The study of all modules will include both summative assessment and formative feedback. Explicit criteria against which performance is to be assessed will be published in advance of all summative assessments. A summative assessment may also provide the necessary formative function if the student receives detailed written feedback normally no later than 20 working days (excluding days on which the University is officially closed) after submission and at least 2 weeks prior to the deadline for any end of year/teaching block summative assessment. Such feedback must be given against the published performance criteria for the assessment.

As appropriate, students will receive purposeful and systematic feedback on their learning and progress through participation in other activities that fulfil a formative function (for example, seminar presentations). Such feedback will be made available normally no later than 20 working days (excluding days on which the University is officially closed) after the activity has taken place and at least 2 weeks prior to any end of year/teaching block summative assessments. It may be provided in a variety of oral, written and electronic formats to individuals or to groups of students.

3.8 Anonymous Marking

All formal, University managed, written examinations will be marked anonymously by Faculties/Schools.

With the exception of assessed activities for which anonymity of the candidate is impractical, impossible or undesirable, all summative coursework assessments shall be marked with the name of the student not being identified. Categories of work which will be classed as exceptions to this practice will be approved on a regular basis in advance by Quality Sub-Committee.

3.9 Second Marking

All Faculties/Schools will implement the University's Second Marking or Moderation Policy (see **Appendix A**).

3.10 Assessment Process

3.10.1 Coursework

All assessed coursework will be published in good time with a clear statement as to what is required, in what format and by when. All arrangements for the submission of

coursework shall be detailed in the award handbook and Faculties/Schools will take reasonable steps to ensure that all students are aware of the procedures and process with regard to claims for extenuating circumstances

3.10.2 Examinations

The University and Faculties/Schools will ensure that information on the date, time and location of all examinations is published in good time. Students are responsible for making themselves aware of the date, time and venue for all examinations that they are required to take and for presenting themselves at the examination room in good time before the examination is due to begin.

3.10.3 Assessment Results

All assessment results will be published in compliance with the University Policy on the Publication of Assessment Results.

ACADEMIC AWARD REGULATIONS

Appendix A - Second Marking or Moderation Policy

1. Introduction

Second marking is an aspect of teaching and assessment which has not before been considered from a University-wide perspective. Academic staff have proceeded on the basis of shared assumptions about what is done elsewhere in the University and in other comparable institutions and have followed procedures which are generally accepted for their disciplines. Second marking is an aspect of examining and assessment which is important for a number of reasons. It is one of the means by which we seek to ensure that students are assessed accurately, fairly and with only those aspects of subjectivity which are academically justifiable. Hence, it is one of the means by which we produce defensible results. Other parts of the assessment process which assist directly in this are external examiners and anonymous marking.

The University has a policy of refusal to hear appeals against marks from students which question the academic judgement of examiners, but will hear appeals against failures in process. This is an essential protection of an important part of academic freedom but does depend for both its moral basis and legal substance on the integrity and efficiency of the examinations processes which are used. It is essential that our assessment judgements are defensible since there is a growing likelihood that they may be challenged in increasingly litigious times by students who see themselves as customers.

A range of interpretation and practice regarding second marking exists. This variety is observable in several ways: between Faculties, between individual Subject Areas within Faculties, between first, second and third years, and between examinations and course work.

It was clear that this variety was to a significant extent the result of three main influences: differences between disciplines, differences between material being assessed, and resource constraints such as adverse student-staff ratios, highly specialised material, and absolute volumes of marking. In these circumstances, it is not only impossible to aim for detailed standardisation of second marking practice, but is not academically justifiable. In addition, it must be acknowledged that second marking is expensive even in a financially benevolent environment.

Choices regarding second marking practice have been closely tied to other aspects of the assessment process, for example the role of the external examiner, the type of material being examined and the form of examinations. If accuracy, fairness and objectivity are the aims of second marking, the other ways in which these characteristics might be achieved need to be considered. Anonymous marking should protect from personal bias affecting the marks of individual students other than on relatively small courses, but will not guard against inaccuracy or the application of inappropriate standards. Highly structured examinations such as those using multiple choice questions marked by machines will produce objective and accurate results but such methods will be of limited use in many subjects and will not test certain important attributes.

2. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

The University should accept variety in second marking practice by recognising the varying demands of different Subject Areas and the different requirements of various types of assessed material.

Variety should exist within a range of practice defined by models of second marking which are accepted within the University and within Subject Areas.

Subject Areas and Faculties should be required to choose the most appropriate practices for their programmes from these models using agreed criteria. Such choice should be published, formal, recorded and reaffirmed or changed as part of regular award reviews.

Proposals to the University for the establishing of new awards should indicate as part of their statements on assessment arrangements for the second marking of examinations and coursework.

The above should apply to all appropriate aspects of student assessment including conventional examinations, formally assessed coursework such as projects or dissertations, and laboratory or other practical work.

3. Alternative Models of Second marking

The main alternative forms of second marking which should be available are as follows (Note: the following is expressed in terms of written work but may be adapted to other forms of assessment such as practicals, orals, presentations etc.):

3.1 Universal 'double blind marking'

The first marker makes no annotations of any kind on the work being marked and the second marker examines all pieces of work as they left the student. Both examiners record their marks and comments separately and then compare marks and resolve differences to produce an agreed mark. Agreed marks and comments may then be entered on the work.

3.2 Universal 'non-blind double marking'

The first marker makes some annotations on the work and the second marker marks all pieces of work with this information known. This may involve varying degrees of information available to the second marker e.g. annotations to draw attention to noteworthy points in text, or calculations but with no actual marks disclosed; or marks written on answers or in agreed places in the work, (the back cover of an examination book for instance). Second markers may be required or advised not to take into account the first marks in determining their own marks or may be required to resolve differences in marks for all cases or within ranges as part of their second marking responsibilities. Where non-mark annotations are allowed or required, their purpose may be to make second marking easier by guiding the second marker or to indicate where a first mark has come from to allow the second marker to evaluate its suitability.

3.3 Universal second marking as check or audit

The first marker marks and annotates the work fully including the writing of marks awarded. The role of the second marker is to check that first marking has been done correctly, that mark schemes made available on the examination paper and on worked solutions have been properly applied, and that the total mark is arithmetically correct. The first marker should leave a clear trail to be audited. The purpose of second marking is to check on standards for all work and may be extended to reviews or through second marking of selected work e.g., fails, marks just below the lower boundary of a class, or firsts.

3.4 Second marking as sampling or moderation

The second marker samples work already first marked and with annotations and/or marks attached in order to check overall standards. This will normally be used as a verification procedure. In addition, this may be employed in situations where first markers are less experienced, where there are several first markers and consistency may be a problem or where unusual patterns of performance are expected or observed. It may lead to more extensive marking if problems are detected. The second marker may be the arbiter in such cases or may be responsible for alerting the examiner(s) with overall responsibility for the module being assessed.

3.5 Partial second marking

Any of the above may be applied to particular types of marks e.g., fails, firsts, or borderlines.

3.6 Marking teams

This is not strictly second marking, but multiple marking where a number of markers work together under a leader to produce agreed marks for a group of pieces of work.

3.7 Second marking as a check on basic attributes of first marking

This involves someone additional to the first marker checking certain basic attributes of marking e.g., addition and transcription. This is not strictly marking but a clerical check.

The underlying practical issue in second marking is that of checks and balances. Subject Areas should consider the need for checks and balances in the marking of material for their modules and/or awards and should choose the method or methods which provide the most effective and suitable checks in the circumstances.

Any of the above models of second marking could apply equally to conventional examinations or formally assessed work. Certain of their equivalents could apply to practicals, presentations and similar aspects of assessment. For example, two or more observers attaching independent marks to a practical is equivalent to (a).

4. The Resolution of Differences Between Markers

4.1 General Issues

Whatever method is used for second marking there must be a method or methods of resolving differences between markers. These are:

- discussion and negotiation between the two markers on all differences;
- discussion and negotiation between the markers on specified differences e.g., for relatively large differences, fails, firsts, borderlines or differences across degree classes. If a size criterion is used its value or range of values should be agreed and specified;
- taking the mean of differences: this may be done for all differences, for relatively small differences or differences within a degree class, or where both marks are clearly above or below the pass-fail line or above or below limits for compensation. It is recommended that where differences straggle critical boundaries the differences should be settled by discussion and negotiation;
- resort to a third marker. This should be an additional internal examiner or where none is available or where it is accepted practice for the field, the external examiner.
- Faculties and Subject Areas should devise a method for recording if a piece of work has been second marked and what the outcome was.

Differences between markers cannot be left unresolved.

4.2 Sample, Moderation and Verification Marking

In the case of sample second marking the following additional guidelines should be noted.

In the case of sample second marking or moderation, it would be expected that module second markers should receive all first class honours work, all fails and a representative sample of student work across the module. Normally, it will be the case that such a process will confirm the appropriateness of the standard of marking for the assessment(s). It would be anticipated that any variation between the first and second marker would not exhibit any systematic differences and that the mark of the first marker would be recorded. However, if the marks of the first and second marker exhibit a systematic difference (for example, two grade points or equivalent percentage) for a significant proportion of sampled work and this cannot be resolved by discussion, further action should be taken. In the first instance this should be referred to the field leader. Possible courses of action include:

- Require the first marker to review all assessment marks for the module in the light of the second markers comments
- Ask a third marker to mark the same sample of work as the second marker
- Require that all work in a particular class be second marked
- Require that all work for the module be second marked
- Refer to external examiner

5. Issues To Be Considered By Subject Areas In Determining Their Second Marking Schemes

- 5.1 Consideration should be given to whether all formally assessed work at particular levels of a programme should be treated to the same second marking practices. Where material of different kinds is assessed at a given level in an award, it may be appropriate to adopt different second marking practice
- 5.2 Where students follow modules in another Subject Area, the second marking methods chosen for assessment on such modules should be field-determined, not student-determined. Students attending the same Subject Areas should be subject to the same second marking practices.
- 5.3 Consideration must be given to the role of the external examiner in determining second marking practices. It is generally accepted that external examiners should not act as second or third markers in the normal examinations process but this may be complicated in minority subjects and other special circumstances.
- 5.4 Suitable marking criteria must be provided by internal examiners with responsibility for assessment on modules where second marking occurs. It is expected that external examiners see not only draft examination papers and other types of assessments which they normally have responsibility for advising on, but also marking criteria for such assessments. Where students' work is double marked, both first and second markers should have common information and guidance for their marking based on suggested marking criteria.
- 5.5 Subject Areas should bear in mind the types of information needed to provide assurance that quality standards are maintained under the schemes of second marking which they

use. Relevant Faculty/School/School Quality Committees should ensure that suitable monitoring of second marking takes place.

- 5.6 Subject Areas should ensure that the selection of markers for all marking duties meets acceptable teaching quality standards. In this context the suitability of staff to serve as markers in schemes of second marking should be carefully considered.
- 5.7 It is expected that where full-time members of the academic staff (or their equivalent) are supplemented by others (e.g., postgraduates, research assistants or outside lecturers) in second marking schemes, full-time academic staff (or their equivalent) will assume primary marking or moderating responsibilities. Where markers are not full-time academic staff (or their equivalent), they should be assigned duties compatible with their experience and capacities.
- 5.8 Second marking practice should be determined by the Subject Area. The relevant Faculty/School/School Quality Committee should approve all second marking schemes proposed by Subject Areas. A regular and simple reporting procedure should be adopted to ensure that an effective approval mechanism exists.

6. Criteria For Choice of Second Marking Schemes

The following are criteria which should be taken into account in determining appropriate schemes of second marking:

- 6.1 **the nature of the material being assessed:** whether material is qualitative or quantitative; whether marking requires the judgement of the examiner or merely the checking of objective fact; whether material is presented in essays or numerical answers; whether questions and answers are structured or unstructured; whether questions are multiple choice or open; whether assessment involves short, discrete questions or questions which have a wide coverage;
- 6.2 **the level of study of the course unit:** the importance of objective second opinions increases with closeness to the determination of the final degree classification;
- 6.3 **the significance of the decisions following from the marks being assigned:** pass or fail at a first attempt with resits available; resit examinations; ability to compensate fails;
- 6.4 **resource considerations:** availability of suitable staff to act as markers; student numbers; deadlines;
- 6.5 **the importance of the individual piece of work being marked;**
- 6.6 **the form of assessment:** conventional examination; other assessed work such as essays, projects, case studies, practicals, orals, presentations, individual or group work;
- 6.7 **the norms for the discipline.**

7. Prescription Of Minimum Acceptable Standards

Quality Development Committee does not consider it appropriate for the University to lay down narrowly defined standards for second marking practice. However, some general minimum acceptable standards should be considered, namely:

- 7.1 second marking should apply to levels 2, 3 and M

7.2 in the case of M level it is recommended that the models outlined in 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4 would normally be the most appropriate

7.3 decisions on the selection of second marking practices taken by or approved by Faculty/School/School Quality Committees should be formal and recorded and should relate to the criteria and other matters set out in this report

7.3 the second marking practices adopted within the University should be based upon the following general principles :

- they should seek to ensure accuracy and fairness in marking;
- they should be suitable and acceptable to the discipline being taught;
- they should be suitable to the material being assessed;
- they should be suitable to the means of assessment being used.

Appendix B:

Principles of good assessment and feedback practice.

- 1. Help clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, standards).**
To what extent do students in your course have opportunities to engage actively with goals, criteria and standards, before, during and after an assessment task?
- 2. Encourage 'time and effort' on challenging learning tasks.**
To what extent do your assessment tasks encourage regular study in and out of class and deep rather than surface learning?
- 3. Deliver high quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct.**
What kind of teacher feedback do you provide – in what ways does it help students self-assess and self-correct?
- 4. Provide opportunities to close any gap between current and desired performance**
To what extent is feedback attended to and acted upon by students in your course, and if so, in what ways?
- 5. Ensure that summative assessment has a positive impact on formative learning**
To what extent are your summative and formative assessments aligned and supportive of the development of valued qualities, skills and understanding?
- 6. Encourage interaction and dialogue around learning (peer and teacher-student).**
What opportunities are there for feedback dialogue (peer and/or tutor-student) around learning and assessment tasks in your course?
- 7. Facilitate the development of self-assessment and reflection in learning.**
To what extent are there formal opportunities for reflection, self-assessment or peer assessment in your course?
- 8. Provide opportunities for choice in the topic, method, criteria, weighting or timing of assessments.**
To what extent do students have choice in the topics, methods, criteria, weighting and/or timing of learning and assessment tasks in your course?
- 9. Involve students in decision-making about assessment policy and practice.**
To what extent are students in your course engaged in consultations regarding assessment decisions?
- 10. Support the development of learning groups and learning communities**
To what extent do your assessment and feedback processes help encourage social bonding and the development of learning communities?
- 11. Encourage positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.**
To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes enhance your students' motivation to learn and be successful?

12. Provide information to teachers that can be used to help shape their teaching

To what extent do your assessments and feedback processes inform and shape your teaching?

Under each principle there is a question intended to stimulate thinking about assessment practices in courses and programmes. Assessment in this context is broadly defined to include teacher, peer and self-assessment and feedback processes both formal and informal. Looking down this list from 1-10, there is intuitively some ordering with the application of the principles calling for increasing levels of learner autonomy, and an increased sharing of responsibility for learning with students. Principle 11 and 12 are somewhat different. Principle 11 is about the affective and motivational aspects of assessment whereas Principle 12 is about the teacher's role in using assessment information to inform and shape teaching. These principles are separate from but inform all the others during implementation.

Staffordshire University's commitment to equality and diversity means that this policy has been screened in relation to the use of gender-neutral language, jargon-free plain English, recognition of the needs of disabled people, promotion of the positive duty in relation to race and disability and avoidance of stereotypes. This document is available in alternative formats on request. If you think we can improve the fairness of this policy, please contact the individual who has responsibility for its update.