University of Staffordshire Assessment and Feedback Framework

1. Purpose and Scope

This framework sets out the University's approach to assessment and feedback across all undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. It applies to all modules, courses and programmes, including those delivered with collaborative partners and apprenticeship, and should be read alongside the University's academic policies and regulations.

The assessment and feedback strategy at the University is underpinned by our Curriculum Framework and core values. Assessments will be valid, reliable, fair and inclusive as well as constructively aligned to learning outcomes to enable students to demonstrate their learning. Across our courses, assessment will reflect professional and disciplinary practice to make use of authentic assessment practice and simulation-based approaches which support the development of academic, digital and research skills. Where appropriate, assessments will also encourage engagement with issues related to sustainability and wider societal issues. Feedback approaches will be clear, timely and developmental to support students to understand their progress within their course as well how their learning will be applied into the world of work.

When we take a holistic approach to assessment design, we ensure that our core values to be ambitious and inspirational; fair and inclusive; curious and daring; and innovative and enterprising are embedded throughout. Where programmes are subject to the requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs), assessment design and delivery will also meet the specific standards and competencies required for professional recognition, accreditation or practice.

This framework was designed to support compliance with Office for Students (OfS) ongoing conditions of registration B2, B3 and B5 by ensuring assessment information is reliable and accessible (B2), securing positive student outcomes (B3) and reliably maintaining our academic standards (B5).

2. Principles of Assessment and Feedback

The following principles will guide assessment and feedback approaches at the University.

1. **Curriculum alignment and coherence**
    - When designing or re-designing a course, the assessment strategy should be considered for the entirety of the programme rather than focusing on assessment as a single instance to reduce assessment burden for students.
    - All summative assessments will be clearly aligned to one or more module learning outcome(s). Formative assessments will be used to prepare students to achieve the module learning outcome(s) to which it is aligned.
    - Assessments reflect and complement the previously delivered course content.
    - Formative assessment will be intentionally designed to support student learning and staff teaching, building confidence, clarifying academic expectations and enhancing overall course outcomes.
    - Feedback will be transparent, constructive and actionable to form part of an ongoing developmental dialogue. Where possible, it will be offered in multiple formats and provided in time to inform students' next assessment, ensuring a strong feedforward focus.

2. **Accessibility and Inclusivity**

- All assessments and related support documents will be clear, specific and transparent. All documents will contain the relevant information that students need to be undertake the assessment in one easy to access location. This will be on Blackboard or in the case of partners, their defined virtual learning environment (VLE).
- All assessment at the University will be intentionally designed to be accessible and inclusive, utilising identified best practice and where possible, embedding student choice. This includes ensuring that assessment is designed with diverse learners in mind and varied assessment formats and content, as well as optionality of equivalence (e.g., presentations, written work, group projects, different case studies) are offered where appropriate.

3. Simulation Based Education

- Assessments will be authentic to the subject area, focusing on knowledge and skills valued by stakeholders (e.g. employers, industry, PSRBs). For apprenticeship provision, this will include behaviours as well, as defined by the apprenticeship standard. Where appropriate and possible, physical and digital simulation will be utilised with input from external partners.

4. Employability, Enterprise and Professional Practice

- Assessments will be designed to develop students' employability, enterprise skills, and professional practice by embedding industry-relevant and work-based or work-integrated learning opportunities where appropriate. They will enable students to experience authentic professional tasks and connect their learning to future careers, enterprise opportunities and professional behaviours.
- Where possible assessments will be co-created with employers and stakeholders to ensure relevance, authenticity and alignment with professional practice. This is a requirement for apprenticeship provision.

5. Sustainability

- Where appropriate, assessment should intentionally incorporate aspects of global and local citizenship such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) and responses to local challenges.

6. Academic, Digital and Research Skills

- Assessments will be designed with a focus on developing students' academic, digital and research skills, as well as their subject specific knowledge, assessment literacy and self-efficacy. This should include addressing new and emerging technologies both within the subject as well as in society.

3. Departmental Assessment and Feedback agreement

The Departmental agreements have been introduced to ensure that assessment design is discipline-specific whilst enabling a consistent experience across assessment. Departments are responsible for developing their assessment and feedback agreement. The departmental agreement will contain information in the department's agreed approaches to feedback, including feedback forms, using specific feedback formats, and the amount of feedback. The Departmental agreement will include information on the department's approach to cases where students have exceeded a prescribed limitation on assignments (e.g. word count limit).

The agreement may also contain:

- detail around subject specific assessment types, for example performances, artefact creation and Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs).

- additional assessment limitations (such as word count limits) and equivalencies guidance where alternative options are provided.
- subject specific expectations, competence standards and PSRB and/or Subject Benchmark Statements (if applicable).
- requirements to involve different stakeholders in assessment design (employers, PSRBs, students).
- Apprenticeships consideration

Information contained in the Institutional framework takes precedence over the Departmental agreement. The departmental agreement should be student friendly and available to students on Blackboard. Each department will determine where their individual agreement will be held as well as the specific format of their agreement.

Where modules are shared across different departments, course teams will be expected to define which of the two departmental approaches will be utilised on the shared module(s) and clearly communicate this with students through the VLE and associated module content.

All Departmental Agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean (Students) before being implemented.

4. Assessment

This section will provide further detail on:

- Summative assessment
- Formative assessment
- Assessment briefs
- Marking

4.1 Summative assessment

This framework defines summative assessment as all assessment that contributes to the final mark of a learning unit (e.g. module).
The University has set out maximum summative assessment elements for different credit values. This approach is intended to reduce unnecessary assessment load for students. The expectations below set out the approach to the number of assessments and associated learning outcomes for each module dependent.

Credit value	Number of learning outcomes	Maximum summative assessment elements
30 credit module	2-4	Up to 3
60 credit module	4-6*	Up to 5

Departments may set out further information on the number of summative assessments per module in the relevant Departmental Agreement.

Type of assessment When deciding the type of assessment within a module, a backwards learning design approach should be utilised, to ensure assessment alignment with the intended learning outcomes. This means that the type and format of the assessment should be guided by the knowledge and skills being assessed. Assessment will reflect wherever possible real-life authentic situations that students may encounter post-graduation. Students should be offered multiple types of assessments across the course, with the expectation that bringing new assessment types at level 6 be avoided where possible. Assessments will be designed to evaluate the knowledge and skills learnt in the module, rather than simply testing a student's ability to perform well in a specific assessment format.

For apprenticeships, summative assessments should equip students to excel in their End Point Assessment (EPA) by providing opportunity for them to experience the format of the EPA in a previous assessment.

Length of assessment Restrictions on the length of an assessment (for example word count, exam length, or presentation length) should be considered using the same ethos as when determining the type of assessment. Students' ability to respond within the set limitations should be considered as one of the skills being assessed. Further guidance on word count and equivalencies may be included in the relevant Departmental agreement.
Alternative assessments and reasonable adjustments Universities are required by law to prevent discrimination and provide equal opportunities, including making reasonable adjustments. Adjustments ensure all students can access education fairly, removing barriers to learning. By being clear on the core learning outcomes (competence standards), flexibility can be introduced on the exact type of assessment.

A whole course approach Where possible, course teams should strategically map their summative assessments across all modules within the programme to minimise assessment clustering and promote a balanced workload for students.

**To ensure that all Programme Learning Outcomes are achieved by students undertaking a Postgraduate Top-up course, the 60-credit dissertation/project may, exceptionally, include more than six Module Learning Outcomes and must be mapped to all Programme Learning Outcomes. These requirements will also apply when the module is shared with other courses within the School.*

4.2 Formative Assessment

Formative assessment is an important teaching method and is designed to provide feedback during learning. Formative assessment tends not contribute to the final mark of a learning unit but it supports the lecturer and student to understand learning on the module.

Cohesion All formative assessments should meaningfully contribute to the student's preparation for the summative assessment and deployed with intention. Together, formative and summative assessment must form a cohesive overall course assessment approach.

Feedback To enable students to effectively utilise the feedback they receive as part of the formative assessment, feedback must be provided to students in good time before the related summative assessment,

Format of assessment Formative assessment may incorporate a range of approaches, including peer- and self-assessment.

4.3 Assessment brief

Consistent assessment briefs enhance student understanding and satisfaction, uphold quality and fairness in assessment, and promote inclusivity in assessment practices. Expectations on assessment brief content can be found in Appendix 1.
Assessment briefs should use clear, accessible language and avoid jargon, idioms, or culturally specific references.
The assessment brief must include information on use of AI in assessments, which is covered in Appendix 1.

4.4 Marking

All marking should be conducted in alignment with the current Academic Policies and Regulations. These include second marking, moderation and verification, which are outlined in the University's Verification and Moderation Guidance.
Having a consistent approach to marking is essential, as consistent marking underpins fairness, credibility, and the quality of higher education, ensuring that assessment outcomes are valid, reliable, and credible to both the student and the general public.

4.5 Hidden Assessment

- Hidden assessment is when an assessment comprises distinct non-disclosed components that could be split up into multiple assessments.
- Hidden assessment can also refer to expectations that the marker has of a student that aren't explicitly communicated.
- University of Staffordshire modules do not use participation marks, as this type of assessment is not linked to learning outcomes. Participation cannot be assessed as a pass/fail either, for the same reason.

5. Feedback

Feedback should be given to students both formally and informally, at key points in the student journey, forming part of an ongoing developmental dialogue. Providing consistent feedback ensures that students clearly understand expectations, can trust the fairness of assessment, and know how to improve their work. This reliability builds confidence, supports continuous learning, and helps students progress successfully through their academic journey.

Transparency Feedback should be clear, actionable, relevant and consistent, and where possible, aligned to the same marking rubric that was used to mark the assessment. By using the same rubric to mark and give feedback, student can receive focused feedforward that can positively impact their performance.

Feedback and feedforward To facilitate a feedforward focus, post-assessment feedback should include recognition of strength as well as areas for development. Where relevant students should be signposted to additional support services such as the Academic Skills team. Where possible, it will be offered in multiple formats and provided in time to inform students' next assessment.

For rules and regulations on the expected feedback turnaround, please see the Academic Policies and Regulations.

Feedback format Where possible, feedback should be provided to students in multiple formats, to facilitate student ability to interact with it in a more meaningful way. Inclusive and accessible language will be utilised, regardless of the feedback format.

Localised feedback approach Feedback templates and practices will be defined at the department level in the Departmental Agreement.

Appendix 1

As a baseline expectation, all assessment briefs should include:

- Submission Deadline
- Grade Weighting of Assessment
- Assessment instructions, including format and presentation requirements (for example, word count, font size, slide limit etc) and submission method. If applicable, information on alternative formats for these assessments should be included
- Assessment Question(s)
- Marking Criteria/Rubric
- How the assessment ties in with the module's intended learning outcomes
- Tips and Essential Things to include when completing each assessment question, including assessment preparation signposting which indicates when students should begin preparing for assessments
- Referencing Instructions
- AI Declaration (information below)
- What is Academic Misconduct
- Non/late submissions information, including information on extenuating circumstances
- Link to University glossary and any locally created subject specific glossaries
- Link to the where students can access academic skills or English language support

The Assessment brief template also includes an AI declaration. The AI declaration was developed to offer transparency to students on the use of AI within assessments and to enable staff to clearly set out expectations whilst reducing the barriers to engagement.
The following options will be available:

Declaration	**Definition**
Limited	AI tools may be used in a narrow or specific way which does not replace your own work or constitute plagiarism as defined by the Institution's academic misconduct procedure.
Integrated	The use of AI tools form an intentional element of assessment. You will be expected to use AI and will be assessed for effectiveness and criticality. Module leaders will specify this within the assessment brief.

Where AI use is declared as limited, we recommend the module leader consider the following possible acceptable uses:

- **Idea development (not assessed work)** AI may be used to support the development of initial ideas. However, it must never replace critical thinking, analysis and academic writing. Students should always be able to explain the reasoning behind their work.
- **Learning support** AI may be used in the early stages of preparation, helping to explore complex concepts, reinforce understanding, and strengthen learning before tackling assessments.
- **Clarification and explanation** You can use AI to check your understanding of challenging terms, phrases, or concepts. It should be a tool to aid comprehension, not a substitute for the deeper engagement and analysis required in assessed tasks.
- **Exploring further resources** AI may be used to suggest additional readings or references to broaden your research and deepen your engagement with the subject.

Library and Academic Skills (LAS) developed prompts to support students understand acceptable uses of generative AI as part of assessment.
Staff guidance on the use of Generative AI can be found here.
Where AI use is declared as integrated, we would expect this to include elements of applied AI literacy. Students will use AI as part of the task and will be assessed on how effectively and critically it is applied. Students will reflect on the strengths, weaknesses and limitations of the use of AI. This is an emerging area of

practice so staff may consider integrating critiques of AI outputs, analysing bias and using AI in simulations or reflective tasks.