

School of Life Sciences Assessment and Feedback Policy (version 3)

There are two related guides, one for students and one for staff, plus a moderation guide, that will be put on the School webpages as well as available as downloadable PDFs. These can be linked to from this overall policy guide.

Purpose and Principles of Assessment and Feedback

High quality assessment and feedback on student work are key priorities for the School of Life Sciences. This is currently an area of the NSS where our scores are low, despite high teaching scores. Good assessment and feedback practices are integral to student learning and enable students to:

- Gain a clear understanding of the quality of their work and how it relates to degree classifications
- Identify their strengths and areas for future improvement

The School's Key Principles of Assessment and Feedback are:

- **Transparency:** Clear communication of practices to staff and students
- **Consistency:** Practices are applied consistently and fairly across the School
- **Relevance:** Students can use assessment and feedback for effective learning

1. Transparency

- Clear assessment criteria and expectations of assessment and feedback should be communicated effectively to students and staff: one of the key issues raised by students is that they are often unclear on how an assessment will be marked. Additionally, the amount and quality of feedback given by staff currently varies widely.
- Module Learning Outcomes should map onto Course Outcomes, with a coherent progression through modules and the course.
- Each module should have a section on Canvas on how students are assessed and receive feedback for a module. This could include information on how to navigate Canvas.
- Each module should also have a full mock examination paper, with model answers/guidance provided, as a minimum for revision.

See Staff Guide to Assessment and Feedback for detailed instructions on what to include on Canvas, and links to TEL advice

2. Consistency

- All staff involved in assessment and feedback should follow the School Guidance on marking and feedback and receive appropriate training.
- It is the responsibility of the person organising the assessment and/or the Module Convenor to ensure that Associate Tutors are clear on how to mark and what feedback to provide: this is particularly important when there is more than one marker for an assessment.
- Assessment criteria should be aligned to module learning outcomes: clear criteria form a structure for feedback. Outline requirements at each grade boundary so that students are aware of how to improve marks.
- Equality considerations must be applied to the development of all assessments: this should include e.g. the standardisation of dyslexic-friendly fonts, appropriate colour schemes, and compatibility with screen readers. Additionally, ensure required reading materials are accessible to students who may not physically be able to access the Library.
- Quality should be maintained through internal and external moderation of summative assessments contributing towards progression.
- Examinations should be approved by the relevant Exam Scrutiny Committee.

3. Relevance

A range of assessment types should aim to develop a range of core knowledge and skills, including key transferrable and employability skills.

A mixture of formative and summative assessments should be used where possible.

Good quality assessment should aim to be:

- Useful for the student, and enable them to understand why they received the mark they did
- Future-facing to help the student identify areas to improve for subsequent assessments
- Consistent with the School marking criteria with regard to qualitative adjectives, i.e.
 - “Inadequate” = 30-39% (Fail)
 - “Basic” = 40-49%
 - “Fair – Good” = 50-59%
 - “Good – Very good” = 60-69%
 - “Excellent” = 70-79%
 - “Outstanding” = 80-100%

Setting up Assessments and Submissions

- E-submission/e-feedback (ESEF) will be used for all coursework submissions, unless there are valid reasons why this is not possible.
- Knowledge of online systems, such as applying grading rubrics, can help standardise feedback and save staff substantial time.
- Staff are strongly encouraged to attend training by TEL (Technology Enhanced Learning) and seek advice on an ad hoc basis as needed.

Step-by step guidance on how to set up, mark and moderate assessments is available here:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/tel/submission/staff>

Training workshops are listed on the “Teaching Online, Learning Anywhere” Canvas site here:

<https://canvas.sussex.ac.uk/courses/14993/pages/training-opportunities>

See Staff Guide to Assessment and Feedback for detailed instructions and links to TEL advice

Marking

Further information is available on the guide to marking, moderation and feedback produced by ADQE:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/examsandassessment>

- Marking usually involves one or more markers (including Associate Tutors) in marking assessments, marks checking and writing feedback, during which time marks adjustments may be made, including by the Module Convenor.
- We recommend that the assessment lead/Module Convenor review the first few scripts marked by Tutors and provide comments, to ensure consistency.
- All staff involved in the marking process should be familiar with the Marking Criteria and the School Marking Procedure
- To ensure consistency, Module Convenors should ensure any new module assessments are covered within the currently published School marking criteria; it is worth providing an example of how the assessment fits to the criteria.
- The generic School marking criteria available should be adapted for individual assessments where appropriate. Where new assessments are not covered and/or where assessments are very individual in nature, students and markers should be provided with specific marking criteria in the module materials on Canvas.
- Marking criteria may be found here:
<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lifesci/internal/students/exams-and-assessments>
- Markers should make use of the full range of marks specified in the relevant marking criteria, including failing marks and marks over 80% for outstanding or exceptional work. Note that in some circumstances the University examination and assessment regulations provide that students can be automatically compensated and awarded credits for a “marginal” fail on a module: 35-39% or 45-49% for PGT students.
- In the case of coursework, marks should normally be released as within the 15 working day turnaround time, as per University policy. In the case of examinations and formal assessment undergoing external moderation, marks will be released after the relevant MAB committee meeting has taken place.

Word Limits

Students should not go over the word limit. For each assessment involving written work, the maximum word limit is publicised to students. The limits as stated do not include the bibliography, footnotes/endnotes, appendices, abstracts, figure legends, tables, acknowledgements.

Students are requested to state the word count on submission and remaining within the word limit will be recognized by the Marker when evaluating the organization of the assessment. Where a student has exceeded the word limit by >10% the Marker need only consider work up to the designated word count and discount any excessive word length beyond that to ensure equity across the cohort.

It may be appropriate for some assessments to provide a “minimal” word limit, below which it is not considered possible to include sufficient material to address the task.

Dyslexia and “flagged” work

Markers may disregard errors of spelling and grammar in assessed work submitted by students with a specific learning difference; essentially, do not penalise errors that a good copy editor could correct. However, to safeguard academic standards, the writing should not be so poor that intelligibility and coherence are comprised. There is further guidance available in the ADQE guide.

Misconduct on assessments

- Markers should be vigilant for potential cases of academic misconduct, particularly plagiarism and collusion.
- Be aware that Turnitin’s matching facility can be misleading: for example, it often gives high similarity scores because instructions/question details are included on submitted files. Conversely, it may be “gamed” by word substitutions.

Suspected misconduct should be referred to the Module Convenor in the first instance. The University’s misconduct procedure should be followed:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/adqe/standards/academicmisconduct>

Feedback

It is important that students know how to access their feedback and interpret it. The Assessment and Feedback page on each Canvas module site should be added to the Units view, as this is what students ordinarily access from their phones (which give a view different view from the computer screens faculty usually use).

Student guidance on accessing their feedback (with screenshots) is here. This should be linked to on the Assessment and Feedback page on each Canvas module site:

<https://canvas.sussex.ac.uk/courses/14493/pages/how-to-access-your-feedback-and-marks>

Additionally, the Skills Hub has useful guidance here, which Module Convenors should highlight:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/skillshub/?id=261>

See Staff Guide to Assessment and Feedback for detailed instructions and links to TEL advice

Feedback for coursework is required within 3 weeks under current University regulations (but may be released earlier). If the marks are released early or late, Module Convenors should contact students to let them know why and when to expect their feedback. They should also alert their Course Co-ordinator.

If assessments do not include feedback in addition to the grade, they will be rejected by moderation.

Feedback on coursework

Individual marks and feedback are entered on Canvas Online or Turnitin by the markers, and imported into Sussex Direct by the module convenor.

General cohort feedback

The Module Convenor should produce a generic feedback statement (usually on Sussex Direct), which includes the mean for the cohort to enable students to gauge their relative performance. The statement should also cover elements that students did well, as well as common mistakes, errors and omissions. It should reference the assessment criteria and signpost to relevant teaching materials such as examples in classes, key readings on reading list etc. to allow students to review the areas they need to improve upon.

Individual feedback

Feedback should explicitly refer to the assessment criteria. This helps students to understand how marks are awarded and to identify areas for improvement.

Module convenors should ensure details of how students receive feedback is included in the Assessment and Feedback section. This should include explicitly signposting for all types of feedback, including e.g. verbal feedback in class or in person." Students should be encouraged to develop opportunities for "reflective feedback" in their learning.

Written feedback should be of a reasonable length, ordinarily around 100-200 words depending on the assessment type, and written in full sentences. Note that Canvas online does allow for e.g. voice recordings of feedback as an alternative. Using a grading rubric can simplify and standardise feedback.

Both formative and summative feedback should:

- Be constructive, regardless of the grade students achieve, and use respectful, non-judgemental language.
- Be as clear and as specific as possible (refer to the marking guide). Generic comments such as "great work!" are useless unless followed up by more specific guidance relating to that particular piece of work. Where appropriate, give a breakdown of marks gained and lost.
- Start with something positive, even for a very poor piece of work. Students often don't read beyond the first sentence if the initial feedback is negative (which is what is all that is visible on the Sussex Direct preview).
- Include "feed forward" which identifies areas for improvement.
- There is a feedback template based on these principles available in the Staff guide, which Staff can copy and use in their assessment
- Online MCQ tests via Canvas allow a range of feedback options, including general feedback for the test with reference to the grade, and individual feedback per question. It is recommended that the correct answers are provided via this latter option.

Feedback on examinations

There is space for generic feedback on Sussex Direct for exams, so this should be provided, following the guidelines as for coursework (around 100-200 words).

This can be used as feed forward feedback for subsequent cohorts, e.g. as examples of "common mistakes" and "effective strategies" in revision sessions.

Individual feedback should be provided on exam papers (particularly where they are online), as per the coursework guidelines.

Moderation

See Guide to Moderation if you will be involved in the Moderation process

Moderation is an essential quality assurance process. For coursework, the Module Convenor should review assessments before moderation/marks release and may amend marks (see Marking).

All module assessments (including retakes) which contribute to progression and/or award must be moderated, except those assessment components weighted at 30% or below of the module assessment. Late submissions do not need to be moderated provided they are marked by the same marker.

Internal moderation

Internal moderation is conducted by a member of academic staff within the School who is not involved with the marking process, but who is familiar with the content of the module. They determine if the marking and feedback are appropriate based on the assessment outcomes in the sample and the statistical data provided.

A representative sample of assessments is selected, which should be 10% of the assessments in each classification band (minimum 7 papers, maximum of 25 in total, plus all fails, as per University guidelines). For e-submissions, the sample is automatically selected by the system. For other assessments, the sample is selected by the School Office and forwarded to the Moderator.

If the Moderator approves the marks and feedback for the sample, they should return all the scripts, including the sample, and the marksheet to the School Office. In the case of e-submissions the Moderator should add comments on Sussex Direct and accept/reject the sample, then email the relevant Course Co-ordinator to confirm that the marking process is complete.

Where there are queries/issues, the Moderator should raise this issue with the Curriculum and Assessment Officers in the first instance, before any marks rejection.

See Moderation Guide for detailed guidance on what to review in moderation and reasons for rejecting a sample.

External moderation

External moderation is conducted by the External Examiner who will have access to the same sample of assessments that has been reviewed as part of the internal moderation process. They will also have access to the Internal Moderator's decision and any comment made. They will also determine if the marking and feedback are appropriate based on the assessment outcomes in the sample and the statistical data provided.

This is carried out by the External Examiner who will review the sample of assessments used in the moderation phase. For most electronic assessments, the sample will be generated automatically via Sussex Direct, as per internal moderation. For paper assessments, double-marked dissertations, and MCQs, the School Office will send out samples and marksheets along with additional module documentation. Access to Canvas sites should be enabled in good time.