

Principles of assessment design.

NOTE: These are set out following the format for QAA codes - i.e. the policy is given in bold and the accompanying text should be taken as amplification/explanation of the policy. This statement will be updated annually or as required by changes to the QAA Quality Code.

1. An effective assessment scheme should be designed in a way that is economical in terms of load on faculty and efficient and of high quality in terms of assessing outcomes.

2. The assessment burden across a programme should be strategically designed to satisfy the learning and assessment needs while at the same time balancing the workload of students.

3. The purpose of assessment should be clearly understood by staff and students. Therefore the assessment should be explicitly linked to the learning outcomes.

There are a variety of purposes of assessment e.g. to monitor learning, to assess competence, to develop skills, to provide a context for learning, and to provide feedback to staff and students. In deciding on the methods and timing of assessment for a module/course, it is necessary to clarify the purpose(s) for which the assessment is required, and consider the extent to which the method of assessment is fit for such purpose(s) within the overall constraints of managing the assessment burden for both staff and students.

Assessment should correspond to the Module and course learning outcomes. Over a course students should experience a diversity of assessment linked to the diversity of outcomes.

In order to promote students' understanding of assessment strategies, it is good practice to involve students in discussion of them. Although academic judgement of the appropriateness of assessment is paramount, developing assessment strategies closely with students encourages their active participation and engagement with the activities, particularly when new methods are being introduced. This can be done using the normal processes of student participation in curriculum development and quality assurance. In addition, where novel methods are being trialled as part of non-contributory, formative assessment the course team should be encouraged to enter into an active dialogue with the students taking the course.

4. Feedback (which may comprise marks, comments on errors, specimen answers) should be seen as an integral part of the learning process.

During a course, assessment should balance formative and summative elements so as to provide meaningful feedback on courses and on the stage (level) of a module prior to completion.

Assessment tasks used for formative purposes should provide meaningful feedback to students which helps students know how they are doing and how they can improve. It follows that feedback on formative assessment is part of the learning process and needs to be as specific as possible.

At the most basic level feedback on summative tasks comes in the form of the mark for the assessment, which may be as a collated mark for some tasks. Effective and efficient feedback can be generic in nature, including, for example, the later publication of specimen answers, lists of common errors etc. Where appropriate and feasible, feedback should be specific to the student and published on Sussex Direct.

Feedback on summative assessment should be tailored to student progression needs. For example, this would mean ensuring, at the course level, that students receive appropriate feedback on the different modes of assessment which they encounter at more than one level.

The nature, extent and timing of feedback for each assessment task should be clear to students in advance.

5. Assessment should be incremental and appropriately demanding.

Assessment tasks should be designed to challenge students as appropriate for the level/stage of study. Where appropriate assessment tasks should build on what has already been achieved in terms of methodology and/or content. Robust and challenging assessment in modules or the programme overall will encourage students to reach the highest level of achievement within their capability.

6. Assessment should be reliable.

In summative assessment consistent standards of marking and fairness in the marking process essential.. Both are more likely to be achieved if clear task guidance, explicit assessment criteria and marking schemes are provided to staff and students alike.

The monitoring of assessment reliability is achieved through the examination system for summative work, but attention also needs to be paid to the consistency of marking for non-contributory formative work. Mentoring within course teams will help to achieve reliability and consistency in assessment and feedback.

7. Criteria for assessment should be transparent.

Criteria for assessment should be as clear as possible to tutors, examiners and students to ensure equity, validity and reliability. Assessment criteria should be published to students and the location of this information included in course handbooks. Assessment criteria must be provided to all markers and examiners.

8. Assessment should be designed so as to deter and minimize plagiarism.

In most cases, assessment tasks should be rewritten or modified each year to ensure currency. Where appropriate, they should require evaluation, argument and contextualization of information as well as its collation. Assessments with checkable stages can also reduce plagiarism by promoting appropriate pacing of work and by deterring collusion. In general, plagiarism can be reduced by designing assessment tasks that promote deep learning and are interesting and relevant to students. Asking students to comment on their learning and understanding e.g. by using learning journals can also be a guard against plagiarism.

9. Students should be notified in good time of assessment requirements.

Students must be notified of the assessment mode(s) in advance including the relative weight and contribution to the level of the course..

Academic Office

Updated 2012-13