Assessment and Learning Policy

Date approved:	24/11/2023	Date policy will take effect:	24/11/2023	Date of Next Review:	24/11/2026
Approving Authority:	Academic Council				
Responsibility:	Head of Learning and Teaching				
Consultation undertaken:	Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee				
Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:	Assessed Group-work Guidelines Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures Assessment and Standards CA Procedures Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy				
Reference(s):					
Audience:	Public – accessible to anyone				
Category:	Learning and Teaching				

1 Version Control and Change History

Version Control	Date Effective	Approved By	Amendment(s)
1	10/12/2010	(Academic Council (AC:DOC:115:07:01)	• Adopted.
2	12/05/2027	Academic Council (Meeting No. 152)	• Adopted.
3	24/11/2023	(Academic Council (AC:DOC:190:10:01)	• The literature has been updated. • The supporting policies and procedures have been updated. • Implementation guidelines have been revised to include reference to feedback as a process, specific reference to inclusive assessment and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), academic integrity and learning orientated assessment. • Reference to student wellbeing in the context of assessment. • Principle 4 has been amended to reflect the current focus on inclusive assessment. It has been amended from 'Assessment will be fair ethical and learner centred' to 'Assessment will be fair, ethical and inclusive'. • Figure 1 has been updated.

Introduction

Assessment plays a key role in learning and the student experience and the DkIT Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy commits to using assessment and feedback to promote student success.

Assessment can serve a number of functions, however traditionally, the summative function, i.e. use of assessment to measure or certify learning predominated. It is widely recognised that assessment and feedback are integral to the learning. This is captured in the contemporary distinctions between assessment *of, for* and *as* Assessment *of* learning refers to the summative function of evidencing learning. Assessment *for* learning emphasises the formative function, particularly the role of feedback in promoting learning while assessment as learning captures the potential of assessment to actively engage students in their own learning. It is important to have a balance of assessment functions which are flexible and adaptable in relation to the level of the module and in response to the diversity of the student population. While these functions are different, all should be learning oriented (Zeng et al., 2018). Learning-oriented assessment is defined as assessment where a primary focus is on the potential to develop productive student learning processes (Carless, 2014, pp 964). It's also important to recognise that a single piece of assessment may serve more than one function, for example, a project might be assessment *of, for* and *as* learning.

The structure of the policy is outlined below in *Figure 1.*

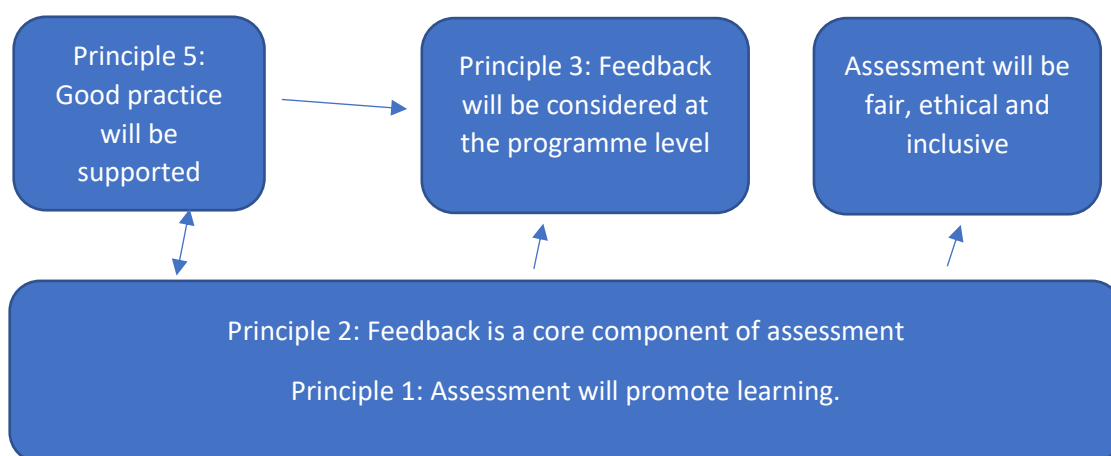*Figure 1. Assessment and Learning Policy: principles and structure.*

1.0   Assessment and learning

Well-designed assessment contributes to student success. Good practice in assessment and feedback can also support student wellbeing, reducing stress and anxiety. All assessment opportunities offered to our students, whether assessment *of, for*, or *as* learning, should promote or facilitate learning whether are formally graded or not.

Policy Principle 1:

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Assessment will promote learning

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Implementation guidelines

1.   Assessments should be constructively aligned to learning outcomes and learning and teaching activities, i.e. assessment activities should appropriately assess specific learning outcomes and reflect the learning and teaching activities used in the module.

2. It should be clear to students how the assessments will support their learning and why they have been selected.

3. Expectations should be clear to students and students should have opportunities to ask questions about their assessment.

4. Where group work is being used, the DkIT Guidelines for assessed group work should be followed assessed-group-work-a-framework-and-guidelines.pdf (dkit.ie)

5. Informal, ungraded assessment activities can be used to promote learning in or outside class (e.g. quizzes, one--minute papers *etc.*).

2.0   Feedback

It is widely recognised that feedback can have a powerful impact on learning and student achievement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; (Y1 Feedback, 2016), although evidence suggests that '...*students highly benefit from feedback when it helps them not only to understand the mistakes they made, but also why they made these mistakes and what they can do to avoid them next time*' (Wisniewski, Zierer & Hattie, 2020, p.12).

Academic staff are a very important source of feedback, however useful feedback can also be generated by students themselves and could be integrated into the assessment methods used (*e.g.* peer feedback and self-assessment).

The quality of feedback is important but so too is what students do with it. Feedback is a '...*process in which learners make sense of comments about the quality of their work in order to inform the development of future performance or learning strategies.*' (Carless, 2018, p.706). It is important to encourage students to engagement with feedback and provide opportunities for them to apply it.

Policy Principle 2:

Feedback is a core component of assessment

Implementation guidelines

1. Assessment activities should provide opportunities for feedback. While this may include individual written or verbal feedback from lecturers it might also take the form of generic feedback to a group (e.g. on an exam or test), automated feedback on a quiz, peer feedback, post- exam consultation and so on.

2. Identify opportunities for informal feedback, for example using Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs) such as one-minute papers or in-class quizzes Explicitly naming these as feedback opportunities encourages students to recognise them as such.

3. Feedback should be constructive, supportive, timely and include specific advice on how to improve. It should be informed by best practice, particularly the principles of effective feedback (Nicol 2007). These principles may be complemented by strategies and approaches identified in more recent studies (e.g. Mahoney et al. 2018; Boud and Dawson 2023).

4. Discuss feedback with students, including ways they can use it to enhance their learning and achievement. Resources are available on the SLDC Moodle Hub, under the 'Using Feedback' tile to support students to engage with feedback.

5. Provide opportunities for students to use their feedback and highlight these. Feedback is often widely applicable to other tasks and assignments (e.g. use of evidence, structure, critical analysis etc.). Feedback (individual or generic) on drafts or staged assessment can be very useful where practical.

3.0 Assessment at the Programme Level

There is an increasing focus on programmatic approaches to assessment and increasing interest in programme level approaches to feedback (Y1 Feedback, 2016). Considering assessment at the programme level ensures that programme learning outcomes are assessed, promotes integration of knowledge, and reduces some of the negative effects of modularisation (Carless, 2015). A further advantage is the reduction of over-assessment.

Policy Principle 3:

> **Assessment will be considered at the programme level**

Implementation Guidelines:

Programme teams should:

1. Consider the role of programme assessment in supporting the development of the programme graduate attributes.
2. Use the constructive alignment model to align learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities and assessment at the level of the programme, as well as individual modules, ensuring all learning outcomes are assessed.
3. Use a range and balance of assessment modes, choosing the most appropriate methods to assess specific learning outcomes. The workload should be appropriate and reasonable to facilitate deep learning. In all aspects, the emphasis should be on quality rather than quantity.
4. Consider the use of integrated or synoptic assessment (a single assessment assesses the outcomes for one or more co-requisite, related or parallel modules).
5. Recognise the role of assessment and, particularly, feedback in supporting the transition to higher education.
6. Ensure that first-years have opportunities to obtain formative feedback early on in their studies. This should feed-forward to subsequent learning and assessment.
7. Provide students with opportunities to develop their academic writing and study skills. The Student Learning and Development Centre can provide support with this.
8. Ensure that students have ongoing opportunities to develop their understanding of the principles and practices of academic integrity as they progress through the programme.
9. Review the assessment methods used as part of the annual Programme Board review.

4.0 Fair, ethical and inclusive assessment

A fair and ethical assessment is one in which students are given equitable opportunities to demonstrate what they know. An inclusive approach should be taken to assessment design to meet the needs of a diverse student body (Tai et al. 2023; JISC, 2015). It is also important to consider the impact of assessment on wellbeing and the overall student experience. This is supported by providing a variety of assessment modes within a programme and offering choice, as appropriate (Ajjawi et al. 2023). It is important that assessment processes are both transparent and fair and *seen to be* fair.

Policy Principle 4:

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Assessment will be fair, ethical and inclusive

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Implementation Guidelines:

Every student should be provided with:

1. A collectively agreed programme-based assessment schedule indicating assessment methods being used, and outlining when all assessments are due (submission dates to be achievable and 'bunching' of assessments to be avoided).
2. The relevant assessment brief and assessment criteria at the beginning of their studies; information on where and how the assessment is to be submitted, to whom, by what time and information on the date by which marks and comments will be given.
3. Unambiguous guidance on deadlines and penalties; guidelines on what constitutes 'extenuating circumstances', in accordance with the CA procedures continuous assessment procedures document v4.pdf (dkit.ie).
4. Information on how marks are awarded, weightings applied, final marks calculated and how results affect progression, in accordance with Marks and Standards Assessment and Standards (dkit.ie).
5. Guidance and training on academic integrity and opportunities to develop their understanding of this across the programme.

Programme teams should:

*   Consider the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to ensure accessibility and inclusivity of the assessment process.
*   Offer a range of assessment methods across a programmes and offer choice where appropriate.
*   Discuss academic integrity in the context of the programme and model good academic practice.

5.0   Supporting good practice in assessment:

Both staff and students should be supported to ensure assessment promotes learning (Carless and Winstone 2023). For staff, continuing professional development (CPD) builds capacity and is an important driver of good practice (Boud and Dawson 2021). This is an area of strength for DkIT and the policy is designed to build on the excellent, innovative work in assessment and feedback that is ongoing.

To benefit from assessment, it is important that students engage actively with it. Programme teams should support the development of assessment and feedback literacy in students, *i.e.* students' understanding of, and engagement with, assessment and feedback (Carless and Boud 2018).

Policy Principle 5:

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Good practice in assessment in feedback will be supported

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Implementation Guidelines:

1. Opportunities for CPD will continue to be offered through the MA in Learning and Teaching, training events, guest presentations and other events.
2. There will be an emphasis, within guidance and CPD provision, on assessment and feedback.
3. Staff development and scholarship in relation to learning and feedback will continue to be encouraged and supported, within resource constraints.

4. Activities such as discussing assessment criteria, discussing feedback, offering opportunities for students to submit drafts for formative feedback and offering opportunities for peer feedback all support the development of assessment literacy.
5. Programme teams and lecturers should discuss assessment and expectations with learners and raise awareness of the alignment between assessment and learning.
6. Programme teams and lecturers should encourage learners to engage more deeply with assessment and feedback, for example by contributing to or agreeing assessment criteria, offering opportunities for peer feedback and self-assessment *etc*.

References

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