Assessment and Learning Policy

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<th><strong>Date approved:</strong></th>
<th>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 2017</th>
<th><strong>Date policy will take effect:</strong></th>
<th>12&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; May 2017</th>
<th><strong>Date of Next Review:</strong></th>
<th>May 2022</th>
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<td><strong>Approving Authority:</strong></td>
<td>Academic Council</td>
<td><strong>Responsibility:</strong></td>
<td>Head of Learning and Teaching</td>
<td><strong>Consultation undertaken:</strong></td>
<td>Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee</td>
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| **Supporting documents, procedures & forms of this policy:** | Marks and Standards  
CA Procedures  
Assessed Group-work Guidelines | **Reference(s):** | | **Audience:** | Public – accessible to anyone |
| **Category:** | Learning and Teaching |
Introduction

Assessment ‘...shapes the experience of students and influences their behaviour more than the teaching they receive’ (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007, p. 3). Students’ own perceptions of the assessment demands strongly influence their motivation and will determine the allocation of time and effort. It is widely accepted that focusing on assessment is an effective and efficient way to promote learning.

Assessment can serve a number of functions, however traditionally, the summative function, i.e. use of assessment to measure or certify learning has predominated. However, increasingly it is recognised that assessment is an integral part of the learning process and not simply a measurement of it (Ball et al., 2012, p.20). This is captured in the contemporary distinctions between assessment of, for and as learning. Assessment of learning refers to the summative function of evidencing learning. Assessment for learning emphasizes 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 now widely accepted that it is important to have a balance of assessment functions which are flexible and adaptable in relation to the teaching level of the module and also in response to the diversity of the student population. It is 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 can promote deep learning and support the development of transferrable skills (Ball et al., 2012). All assessment opportunities offered to our students should promote or facilitate learning whether or not it is formally graded.

Policy Principle 1:

Assessment will promote learning

Implementation guidelines

1. Assessments should be constructively aligned to learning outcomes, i.e. assessment activities should appropriately assess specific learning outcomes.
2. The rationale for selecting the methods of assessment should be clear to students and staff and expectations made clear to students.
4. Informal, ungraded assessment activities can be used to promote learning in or outside class (e.g. quizzes, one minute papers etc., see for example [https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/) can provide valuable learning opportunities).

2.0 Feedback

It is widely recognised that feedback is one of the most important enablers of learning (Y1 Feedback, 2016), however an overemphasis on assessment of learning (or summative assessment) means that this potential is often not realised. Good quality feedback identifies gaps between the student’s current performance and desired performance and offers constructive and concrete advice for closing the gap (Sadler, 1989), as well as acknowledging strengths. Good quality feedback has powerful, positive effects on student achievement and supports the development of metacognitive skills. 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).
Policy Principle 2:

**Feedback is a core component of assessment**

**Implementation guidelines**

1. Assessment should provide an opportunity 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 (see for example [https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/cats/)). Explicitly naming these as feedback opportunities encourages students to recognise them as such.

3. Feedback should be timely, constructive and include specific advice on how to improve. Feedback should be informed by best practice, particularly the principles of effective feedback (summarised here [http://www.reap.ac.uk/reap/public/Resources/fb_principles.pdf](http://www.reap.ac.uk/reap/public/Resources/fb_principles.pdf))

**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 reduces some of the negative effects of modularisation (Carless, 2015). A further advantage is the reduction of over-assessment. Programme teams must consider that reducing ‘...the quantity of assessment...so that we … have time to do it well, and learners have time for their learning not to be completely driven by assessment’ (Race, 2005, p.82).

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. A range and balance of assessment modes should be used, 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. Review the assessment methods used as part of the annual Programme Board review.

4.0 Fair, ethical and learner centred 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 (JISC, 2015). This is supported by providing a variety of assessment modes within a programme and offering choice, as appropriate. It is important that assessment processes are transparent and both fair and seen to be fair.

Policy Principle 4:

**Assessment will be fair, ethical and learner-centred**

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 streamlined 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.

4. Information on how marks are awarded, weightings applied, final marks calculated and how results affect progression, in accordance with Marks and Standards https://www.dkit.ie/system/files/marks_and_standards_v6_0.pdf.

Programme teams should:

1. Offer a range of assessment methods across a programmes and offer choice where appropriate.

5.0 Supporting good practice in assessment:

Both staff and students should be supported to ensure assessment promotes learning. For staff, continuing professional development (CPD) builds capacity and is an important driver of good practice. 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 literacy in students, i.e. students’ understanding of, and engagement with, assessment.

Policy Principle 5:

**Good practice in assessment in feedback will be supported**

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


