

QMUL Assessment & Feedback Strategy 2024/25

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Introduction

Assessment and feedback play integral and key roles in supporting learning. They serve as motivators both for learners and educators and provide opportunities to synthesise within and across modules, as well as allowing for contextual testing of knowledge / understanding, skills and capabilities / behaviours relevant to professional contexts for further study and employability.

While acknowledging that some students may favour large numbers of low stakes assessment items that allow them to frequently test their progress, the prevalent view across the sector is that, with respect to summative assessment (i.e. items of assessment that count towards degree classifications) “less is more”. Assessment and feedback are considered to be more effective in the support of learning, and assessment is more inclusive, when there are a smaller number of meaningful elements of summative assessment that draw on a broader range of assessment methods (as referenced in the [Principles of Programme Design](#)). Adopting this approach as an assessment and feedback strategy lowers the assessment burden on students and on colleagues without compromising quality and standards. (Indeed, there is evidence that large numbers of low stakes assessments contribute to ‘grade inflation’ and non-compliance with OfS Condition B4, whereas smaller numbers of higher stakes assessment items provide a more robust assessment of academic performance.) Hence, the QMUL assessment and feedback strategy advocates a small number of well-defined assessment items for each module, where each item is strongly and clearly aligned both to the programme and / or module-level learning outcomes, and students are exposed to a broad range of assessment methods across the modules that comprise their degree programme.

Recognising that students benefit from constructive feedback on *all* elements of assessment (whether designed as purely formative or as summative assessments, where marks from the latter summate towards the calculation of module, year and degree classification marks), this strategy also emphasises the need to ensure timely feedback that can be used to feedforward and to support student development (in accordance with OfS Condition of Registration B2). Formative feedback does not always need to be generated by academic staff / tutors or teaching fellows / assistants; guided peer feedback can also be effective in supporting future learning and in preparing students for summative assessments.

In designing and conducting assessment, **consideration should be given to the whole programme** of study for a given student, rather than focussing unduly on individual modules. Wherever practically possible, the burden on students and staff should be lowered by adopting **programme-level assessment**: integrating the assessment of intended learning outcomes across two or modules with common elements of assessment. Where this is impractical, programme teams must ensure **programme-level planning of assessment**, taking a holistic view of the total load and the pattern of assessment across each semester when confirming the number and distribution of assessment items for each constituent module.

Assessment Criteria

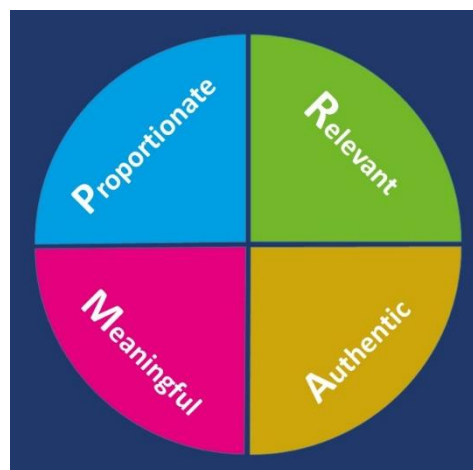
In accordance with the preceding paragraph, the following criteria apply across each degree programme (rather than to each and every element of assessment in each constituent module). While it is intended that all four of these top level criteria should be taken into account for each element of assessment, it is recognised that some are more or less achievable at different levels of study (e.g. it may be challenging to create assessment that is 'authentic' at FHEQ Levels 3 or 4, when learning outcomes may be oriented towards knowledge acquisition, but more practical at FHEQ Levels 6 or 7).

When designing, setting and marking assessments, the Programme and / or Module Team(s) should ensure that, as far as practically possible, all assessments are:

1. **Relevant**
2. **Authentic**
3. **Meaningful**
4. **Proportionate**

Each of these four criteria are elaborated in the Appendix 1 to this assessment strategy.

Before defining and elaborating these criteria (which should be read alongside the latest guidance from the Queen Mary Academy on [Assessment Design](#)), it is important to emphasise QMUL's core values of being **inclusive**, proud, ambitious, collegiate, and ethical (IPACE).



Given the University's commitment to "opening the doors of opportunity", with **inclusivity** foremost, these core values of QMUL also need to be reflected in the design and conduct of assessments, as well as in marking and the provision of feedback, supporting *all* students in achieving the outcomes of the module and of the programme to which a module contributes.

To ensure that the design and / or conduct of assessments does not contribute to attainment gaps between students of different genders or ethnicities (**strategic KPI 4**), as required under the Principles of Programme Design (specifically Principle 4 – Programme Assessment Mapping), in addition to being relevant, authentic, meaningful and proportionate, assessments must be **varied**: a **range of different assessment methods** must be used to ensure that *all* students can evidence the full range of knowledge, skills and capabilities / behaviours that they have developed through their degree programme. Within an individual module, the number of different assessment methods that can be used appropriately may be understandably limited, so the requirement for variety underscores the importance of ensuring that assessments are planned at **programme-level**, providing students with an appropriate balance between different formats of assessment across their degree.

Feedback

In order to support students in not only achieving but demonstrating that they have met all of the intended learning outcomes, it is imperative that they are provided with **constructive feedback**. In order to support students in developing their learning skills and improving their academic performance in subsequent elements of assessment (as per questions posed in the NSS and PTES), any feedback needs to be both **timely** and **scheduled** so as to inform

future assessment items. It is expected that marks and feedback will be returned to students in accordance with the expectations defined in the [QMUL Marking Policy](#). In addition, feedback should be **structured** with an appropriate level of **detail** such that the recipient can both (i) understand the mark awarded for a particular element of assessment (with reference to the published marking criteria) and (ii) be clear what they would need to do differently in future assessment exercises to gain a higher grade / mark, where possible.

Before any mode of assessment is used summatively, students must have an opportunity to **practice** that specific mode of assessment purely formatively (i.e. not contributing summatively to their final classifying mark). More importantly, students should receive timely, structured, constructive feedback on those formative assessment exercises that helps them to understand the expectations of subsequent summative elements of assessment. This does not mean that every module is required to contain purely formative elements of assessment, but rather that, across the degree programme, students should get an opportunity to receive feedback on purely formative assessments and to engage with and appreciate the marking criteria *prior to* undertaking summative assessments¹.

Feedback may be provided in a **range of formats** (e.g. automated feedback for online quizzes, annotations on a script / dissertation, and / or personalised audio or video recording). Feedback must be **inclusive** (i.e. accessible to *all* students) and **constructive**, indicating areas where a submission is good as well as potential areas for improvement and should provide clear, concise guidance as to what a student would need to do differently in future to obtain a higher grade (i.e. **feedforward**).

Supporting Design of Assessment and Feedback

This high level strategy should be read in conjunction with the latest guidance on [Assessment Design](#) and the accompanying [Principles of Programme Design](#), both curated and maintained by colleagues in the Queen Mary Academy, and approved by the University's Education Quality and Standards Board (EQSB).

Additional support for the design (or redesign) of assessment in accordance with the above criteria is available from the [Queen Mary Academy](#) (see Appendix 2 for further details).

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¹ In practice, this may mean that each of the modules in Year 1 of a Bachelor's degree and Semester 1 of a Master's degree are required to contain at least one formative assessment exercise on which students receive formative feedback to support development of their learning skills and improve their subsequent academic performance in summative assessments.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

(1) Relevant

In order to pass a module, students must demonstrate that they have met all of the defined module-level learning outcomes. Hence, each element of assessment should allow students to demonstrate that they have **met one or more of the module-level learning outcomes** (whether the acquisition of knowledge or the development of skills or capabilities / behaviours). In so doing, each element of assessment should also allow students to evidence that they have **met, either in whole or in part, at least one of the programme-level learning outcomes** to which that module and its associated assessments contribute.

There should be no module-level or programme-level learning outcomes that are not subject to at least one assessment. It is recognised that two or more items of assessment may address the same intended learning outcome, but every element of assessment should be aligned to at least one or more of those learning outcomes.

The programme team/s must ensure that all learning outcomes, whether at module- or programme-level, are reviewed annually as part of continuous programme monitoring and enhancement / programme review in order to ensure ongoing alignment between those learning outcomes and each element of assessment. This review may either identify elements of assessment that are no longer relevant, or where changes need to be made to the module- and / or programme-level learning outcomes for the subsequent academic year.

(2) Authentic

Wherever possible, assessments should be authentic in that they should draw on ‘**real world**’ scenarios and require students to **evidence learning in meaningful contexts**. Typically, students will be required **to practice and evidence the knowledge, skills and capabilities / behaviours that are relevant to the professional practice of the discipline** and be **assessed through activities that try to mirror those that graduates might undertake in the workplace or in postgraduate study**. (“Assessment needs to prepare students for *their* future, not *our* past” Philip Dawson, Centre for Research in Assessment and Digital Learning [CRADLE] at Deakin University 2023). This may necessitate a rebalancing of assessment between coursework (CWK) elements as opposed to more traditional, timed and / or invigilated examinations (EXM), and might also require an increased emphasis on group or project work, as compared to assignments undertaken by individual students without reference to their peers.

To replicate expectations of the workplace and / or postgraduate study, the criteria against which the performance of students will be evaluated must be made available to students in advance, in the form of published assessment criteria / marking rubrics. Like the assessment items themselves, those assessment criteria / rubrics should be closely aligned to the intended learning outcomes published for the module and / or programme to which that module contributes. It is recommended that students are encouraged to engage with, and develop a personal understanding of, these criteria through dialogue, formative assessments, and, where appropriate, co-created activities.

(3) Meaningful

All elements of assessment must be meaningful, both in terms of:

- a) their **alignment to the module and programme level learning outcomes**, and
- b) the **contribution (weighting)** of a given element of assessment both to the final module mark and to the final classifying mark (taking account of the weighting for the relevant developmental year).

Assessment items which contribute a low percentage to the overall module mark can render that element of assessment meaningless, even where it is strongly aligned to the intended learning outcomes of a module and / or programme. For example, given that a student has to complete 120 credits in each year of a three year Bachelor's degree, and the classifying mark for that degree is weighted 1:3:6 across Years 1, 2 and 3, respectively, a single item of assessment allocated 10% of the marks for a 15 credit, Year 1 module, only equates to a maximum contribution of 0.125% to the overall classifying mark for that degree. Similarly, in a Master's degree programme, for which a student has to study and be assessed in 180 credits over the course of a single year, an assessment item contributing 10% to a given 15 credit module only accounts for up to 0.833% of the classifying mark at the end of that degree.

All elements of assessment should make a meaningful contribution to evaluating whether a student has met the intended learning outcomes, and the marks awarded should justify the effort on the part of the student and of the member of staff providing marks and feedback.

(4) Proportionate

The **marks** allocated to a given element of assessment should be **proportionate to the time required by the student to complete the relevant study as well as the specific assessment activity** (whether coursework or exam). For example, if a student is studying a 15 credit module (on which they are expected to spend 150 notional study hours), an item to which 10% of the module marks have been allocated should require approximately 15 notional study hours (including the underpinning study and revision, as well as completing and submitting the element of assessment), whereas an item contributing 60% of the mark for a 30 credit module should require 180 hours of effort (incorporating the associated study, revision, preparation and submission of the assessment item).

While it is intended that all four of the above criteria should inform the design of all elements of assessment, these top level criteria are intended to operate across a programme of study, rather than within each and every element of assessment, recognising that some criteria are more achievable at different levels of study.

These four criteria are expected to be considered alongside the latest guidance on Assessment Design and accompanying Principles of Programme Design.

QUEEN MARY ACADEMY RESOURCES

In the first instance, colleagues may find the resources and toolkits for [Assessment and Feedback](#) helpful. These already include:

- The Queen Mary [Assessment Toolkit](#)
- The Queen Mary [Feedback Toolkit](#)
- Additional [Resources and Good Practice](#) which include:
 - Examples of assessment practice
 - Examples of feedback practice
 - Generative AI and Chat GPT – guide for staff
 - Constructive alignment
 - Intended learning outcomes
 - Information for students
 - Links to guidance provided by the following external bodies:
 - AdvanceHE
 - Office for Students [OFS]
 - Quality Assurance Agency [QAA]