

025. Assessment & Feedback Policy

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Assessment & Feedback Policy

1. Introduction

This policy provides guidelines for the assessment process within higher education programmes. It aims to ensure fair, transparent, and consistent assessment of student work, contributing to the integrity of academic qualifications awarded by the institution. It incorporates procedures for second marking, moderation, and the involvement of external examiners to maintain academic standards. The policy is aligned with the Office for Students (OfS) regulatory framework, particularly in relation to conditions B1 to B5, which focus on assessment and academic standards.

This policy ensures that assessments are fair, transparent, and rigorous. The involvement of second marking, internal moderation, and external examiners guarantees that the institution's academic standards are maintained and that students are assessed in a consistent and equitable manner. Regular reviews of the policy will be conducted to ensure that it remains in line with best practices and evolving standards in higher education.

This policy is designed in compliance with the Office for Students (OfS) conditions B1 to B5, ensuring that assessment practices maintain the integrity of academic qualifications and the quality of education provided by the institution.

2. Principles of Assessment

- **Fairness:** All students should be assessed based on clearly defined criteria that reflect the learning outcomes of the course.
- **Transparency:** Assessment methods and criteria should be clearly communicated to students at the start of the course.
- **Consistency:** Assessments should be consistent and applied equitably across all students.

- **Validity and Reliability:** Assessment methods should accurately measure students' knowledge, skills, and abilities, ensuring reliability across different assessors and contexts.

These principles align with the OfS's B1 condition, which requires providers to ensure that students are assessed using clear and transparent criteria.

3. Assessment Methods

- **Formative Assessments:** These are used to provide feedback during the learning process and may or may not necessarily be graded. Where marks are awarded, these are only to guide future performance and do not contribute to the student's grade for the module or course.
 - *In highly exceptional circumstances as a reasonable adjustment, a mark awarded for a formative assessment may form part of a student's contributing overall grade where for valid reasons the student is unable to complete part of the intended assessment, provided that:*
 - *The formative assessment in question contributes to the relevant learning outcomes;*
 - *The formative work is double marked and moderated against the student's other work;*
 - *The agreement of the External Examiner is sought and in place before the student's formative mark is submitted to the Examination Board as contributing to the student's grade for the module/course.*
- **Summative Assessments:** These are assessments where the mark awarded contributes to the student's grade for the module or course.

Examples of assessment methods include:

- Written exams
- Coursework (essays, reports, projects)
- Practical assessments (lab work, presentations, portfolios)
- Group work and collaborative tasks

These methods are in place to meet the requirements set out in OfS condition B2, ensuring that assessment methods are reliable, transparent, and consistent across different cohorts of students.

4. Second Marking and Internal Moderation

4.1 Second Marking

Second marking is an essential procedure to ensure fairness, reliability, and accuracy in the assessment process. All summative assessments should undergo second marking, except where otherwise agreed upon by the institution's academic board.

- **Purpose:** Second marking serves to verify the accuracy of the first marker's judgment, confirm that assessment criteria have been applied consistently, and prevent bias.
- **Implementation:**
 - The first marker is responsible for grading the student's work and providing feedback.
 - A second internal marker must review the assessment, ensuring agreement with the first marker's grade and comments, reaching a collective agreement on any adjustment.
 - The second marker is encouraged to review a representative sample of the students' work to ensure consistency and in cases where possible academic misconduct is suspected. For larger cohorts, this may focus on a random sample.
 - If a disagreement arises between the first and second markers, the matter will be escalated to the module leader or assessment board for resolution.

4.2 Internal Moderation

Internal moderation involves the review of assessments to ensure that the assessment process, marking standards, and grading align with the applicable academic regulations.

- **Purpose:** To maintain consistency, validity, and fairness in marking and grading across different assessors and assessment tasks.
- **Implementation:**
 - All assessments should undergo moderation prior to marks being finalised by the Examination Board.
 - The moderation process will assess whether the assessment criteria have been correctly applied, whether there is consistency in marking, and if students have been treated fairly.
 - The moderation of assessments is typically carried out by a subject expert or senior academic staff member not involved in the direct assessment.

4.3 Moderation of Coursework and Examinations

- Moderation must occur prior to the final decision on grades to ensure that students' grades are awarded in accordance with institutional standards.
- For large assessments, the institution may use a sampling process, where a representative sample of marked assessments is moderated.
- Any identified inconsistencies or irregularities in marking should lead to re-moderation or adjustments to grades where necessary.

- These procedures align with OfS B3 condition, which ensures that assessment processes are fair, equitable, and applied consistently across the student body.

5. Assessment feedback

1. Feedback on assignments is:
 - a. concrete and related to the learning objectives of the task;
 - b. specific in that it is related to the particular features of the submitted work;
 - c. relatable to the applicable Grade and Level Descriptors, so that students can transparently benchmark themselves against these, and
 - d. usable by students to improve in future assessments.
2. Feed forward. Before students submit their assessments, they are given the opportunity to send first drafts of their work to receive interim feedback.
3. For some modules such as Study Skills and Themes in Social Science, final marks are broken down in line with assessment criteria. Two samples are provided.
4. For other modules, more general and less structured feedback is provided. One sample is provided.
5. All marks/grades are moderated by the Academic Board.
6. Marks are recorded on a spreadsheet and on individual student transcripts.

6. External Examiners

External examiners are independent academic professionals from outside the institution, appointed to ensure that assessment practices are fair, rigorous, and consistent with academic standards.

6.1 External Examiner Principles

All IFG appointed External Examiners are required to adhere to the following [UKSCQA principles](#):

1. Protect standards and ensure comparability and consistency
2. Act as an expert in providing independent critical review, performing the role with integrity and supporting enhancement
3. Ensure fairness and transparency in assessment
4. Maintain the currency of their knowledge
5. Support inclusivity and equity in teaching, learning and assessment

Please see the IFG External Examiner Code of Practice for further details on IFG's External Examiners expectations and arrangements.

6.2 Role of External Examiners

- **Purpose:** External examiners are responsible for providing an external perspective on IFG's assessment process, reviewing the fairness and quality of assessment methods, and ensuring our academic standards align with national or international benchmarks.

- **Broad Responsibilities relating to assessment and feedback:**
 - Reviewing and approving the assessment methods and examination papers prior to the assessment.
 - Sampling a range of student work to ensure that marking and grading are consistent with institutional standards.
 - Attending examination boards and providing recommendations for improvement where necessary.
 - Ensuring that the institution's academic standards meet the expectations for awarding degrees, diplomas, and certificates.
 - Providing written reports on the assessment process and recommendations for improvement.

Please see the IFG External Examiner Code of Practice for full details on the External Examiner role and responsibilities.

6.3 Appointment of External Examiners

- External examiners are appointed based on their academic qualifications, experience, and expertise in the subject area.
- Appointment will be for a fixed term of 4 years, with the possibility of an exceptional extension of 1 year
- IFG ensures that external examiners have no conflicts of interest and are independent of the department or course.

6.4 Responsibilities of Module leads

- Departments are required to provide external examiners with appropriate access to assessment materials, student work, and marking schemes.
- External examiners will be provided with a clear understanding of the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and course content.
- Departments should respond to external examiner feedback, ensuring that recommendations for improvements are addressed.

This ensures compliance with the OfS condition B4, which mandates that institutions appoint external examiners to ensure academic standards are met and maintained.

7. Academic Appeals and Complaints

In the first instance, if a student believes there has been a procedural or administrative error in the assessment process prior to marks being confirmed by the Examination Board, they can raise this informally with their Course Leader or the Director of Studies; this gives IFG the opportunity to ensure that clerical errors can be swiftly rectified without necessitating any formal process.

Students have the right to formally appeal their assessment results if they believe there has been a procedural error or unfairness in the assessment process, or if they believe that exceptional circumstances affected the resulting assessment outcome. Please see the academic appeals procedure for further details. This process adheres to OfS condition B5, ensuring that students have a clear and transparent process for challenging decisions that affect their academic progression.

8. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed by the Academic Board and updated regularly to maintain alignment with national and international standards in assessment practices to ensure that our academic standards remain comparable with the sector and in accordance with any changes to OfS regulatory conditions.

9. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

As part of IFG's commitment to embedding inclusive practices and removing barriers for all students, not only those from underrepresented groups, IFG carries out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) where appropriate including when making changes to this policy.

EIAs enable the College to identify potential or existing barriers and to proactively consider and implement reasonable adjustments. This supports the College in meeting its anticipatory duty under the Equality Act 2010.

EIAs may be conducted in relation to both student and staff matters for key policies and student experience matters.

See Appendix A within IFG's Equality Impact Assessment Template and Guidance.