

Requirements for Assessment and Feedback on Summative Assignments



Introduction

In the light of discussions within the Learning and Teaching Committee, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, their working parties, and the E. Learning Committee, we are replacing the University's 'Coursework Report Form' with a set of requirements for assessment and feedback on students' summative assignments. These requirements were approved following discussion of Paper L253, 'Enhancing Assessment and Feedback Practices', at the Learning and Teaching Committee in May 2012. The requirements are for all of our taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Throughout the sector, there are many ways in which students are provided with marks/grades and feedback on their summative assignments. Even so, there are now well-established common principles of good practice. We need to ensure that we apply these principles and our University's requirements (e.g., regarding speed of return of marked assignments) in ways that meet the needs of students and teaching staff throughout the University. This paper provides information about:

Part 1: University Requirements

Guidance on the University's requirements for assessment and feedback on summative assignments, and how requirements may be met, online or on paper.

Part 2: Improving Assessment and Feedback Practices

General advice on the role and importance of assessment and feedback.

PART 1: University Requirements

1.1 Requirements for Assessment and Feedback

The University requirements are:

1. All students receive some written feedback on their learning achievements against the assessment criteria for their summative assignments;
2. Students are provided with the assessment criteria before undertaking their assignments;
3. Students, whatever their level of achievement, receive feedback that enables them to see how they may improve or develop particular aspects of their work;

4. Students are informed about the ways that marks/grades and feedback are provided by the marking tutor(s) for a particular assignment;
5. Students are normally provided with marks and feedback on their summative assignments within three weeks of the submission date;
6. Summary accounts (Assessment Report Forms or equivalent) of students' assessed work (and feedback given) are provided for students, and kept by marking tutors (on paper or online) for QA purposes, and to facilitate good practices in the sharing of ARFs among and between teaching teams, programme leaders and personal tutors.

1.2 Using an Assessment Report Form (ARF)

The ARF will replace the current 'Coursework Assessment Form', from September 2012. The new Form provides a model or template that can be customised by teaching teams, departments and schools, and used in a variety of formats (on paper or online).

We recognise that good feedback on the progress of students' learning and their summative assignments can be provided in many ways; face-to-face (e.g., through individual tutorials and class discussions), on paper (e.g., through comments within scripts), and online (e.g., through screencasts and the use of facilities such as Skype and Grademark). The ARF is not designed to replace any of these activities, but it can be used to help students appreciate the range of ways in which tutors provide and offer feedback on assignments.

The requirements for use and customization of the Form are:

1. It is clearly identifiable as an official Assessment Report, whether it appears as a Form or is adapted for use on an online system.
2. It is used, in paper copy or an electronic format, by tutors as a record for all summative assignments. *In cases where an assignment is not created or presented in a digital form, the marking tutor should ensure that the elements of Part 1 of the ARF are completed by students at the time of submission (the 'due date'); this may be on paper or online.*
3. The tutor should ensure that students are informed about the assessment criteria for the assignment (paper or online, e.g., through Minerva/module handbooks) before students undertake the assignment.
4. The four sections of Part 2 ('Assessment Criteria for this Assignment'; 'Assessment of Achievement/Performance'; 'Advice on How to Improve'; and 'Other Feedback') are completed by the marking tutor(s).
5. The completed Assessment Report (or equivalent online) is made available to students, normally within three weeks of the submission of the assignment.
6. The marking tutor(s) keeps a paper or online copy of the Assessment Report as a summary record of the work assessed and feedback given.

NOTE. In cases where Deans of School and Programme Leaders are confident that all assessment and feedback requirements are being met (and may well be exceeded)

through the use of online processes in place of an ARF, the Programme Leader must contact the Heads of Quality Assurance (Demelza Curnow) and Learning and Teaching (Paul Hyland) for confirmation.

1.3 Customization

There are many ways that an ARF can be customized to reflect good practices and innovations in the assessment of students, and to meet the needs of particular assignments, courses and groups of students. For example,

- You may wish to send or print copies of an ARF (with the assessment criteria) for a particular assignment, tell students to return the form when their assignment is due, and complete the form. If you do all of this on paper, you will then need to take and keep a photocopy of the form, or scan it, before its return to students.
- You may wish to use Minerva, placing an ARF for each assignment online, and using Minerva tools to facilitate various assessment and feedback processes. Minerva may be used to provide better online documentation of assignment tasks, assessment criteria, deadlines, and return times; automated student data (names/student numbers, courses, assignments, dates of submission, etc.); anonymisation of assignments; ease of student submission (and record of work submitted); speed and legibility of feedback to students; increased opportunities for oral, written and visual forms of feedback; enhanced use of generic feedback, and discussions about feedback; facilities to assist tutors (e.g., use of Grademark, or enlarging of fonts); improved record keeping; reduced use of paper resources.
- You may wish to use an ARF online or on paper with other e-learning tools (such as individualised screencasts for students on their work).
- You may wish to enlarge the spaces for comment under any of the sections in Part 2 of an ARF, or add further sections (e.g., on where feedback to students will 'feed forward', or checklist boxes to indicate students' level of attainment of particular skills). So an ARF does not need to be limited to one side of paper.

It is important to note that an ARF provides a 'summary account' for students and tutors. Though a vital record, in most cases an ARF is unlikely to provide a comprehensive account of all the assessment advice and feedback given to all students, individually and collectively, on their assignments. The final section of the ARF ('Other feedback') is designed to point students to the key sources of further information and advice that they may be offered on assignments; e.g., particular comments in the marginalia on scripts, personal tutorials (required or offered), class discussions on work, wikis for students to address their learning needs in the light of generic feedback on their assignments, Google documents, and personalised screencasts on assignments.

1.4 Model of an Assessment Report Form

A model/template ARF that can be adapted for electronic/paper use is provided here.



Model of an Assessment Report Form
School of Studies / Department

Part 1: To be completed by the student and submitted with each piece of assessed work.

Student Number..... Module Code.....

Short Title of Assignment.....

Course/Marking Tutor..... Date of Submission.....

In submitting this assignment, I am confirming that I have read and understood the regulations for assessment, and I am aware of the seriousness with which the University regards unfair practice.

Part 2: To be completed by the marking tutor(s).

Assessment Criteria for this Assignment

Assessment of Achievement/Performance

Advice on How to Improve

Other Feedback Provided

Tutor's Signature

Date.....

Mark awarded.....%

PART 2: Improving Assessment and Feedback Practices

2.1 Importance of Assessment to Student Learning

We know from our own experiences as teachers, from research and development work that we have been undertaking within the University, and from a vast body of research within and across the disciplines, that assessment is a major driving force of student learning in higher education. It exercises a powerful influence on

- what students learn:
both in terms of (a) the knowledge, skills, and professional attributes that students acquire from their course of studies; and (b) what students learn about themselves --- their personal development --- including their individual abilities, values, needs and achievements, which critically affect students' self-worth, confidence and aspirations.
- how much they learn:
most students spend most of their time on assessed tasks, so the number and demands of assessment tasks affect students' total study time and 'time and task'.
- how they learn:
the nature of the assessment tasks (e.g., whether solitary, collaborative, authentic, creative) directly affects the nature of a student's learning experience. This critically affects students' perceptions of their learning environment and their approach to learning (e.g., deep or surface). A student's approach to learning then exercises a powerful influence on the quality (and enduring value) of her/his learning outcomes.
- how effectively they learn:
the number and timing of assignments directly affects the distribution of student effort in the course of a year. An uneven distribution of effort may lead students to adopt a surface approach to learning at busy times (e.g., when there is submission 'bunching'), and consequently to low-quality learning outcomes.

2.2 Common Problems

Tutors often say

- Many students will only do the assessed/graded assignments (not the courses).
Students are often strategic: they do the work that counts, and assume that we too are rational, in assessing the things that are most important.
- Many students aren't interested in feedback (only grades and marks).
In general, this is only true where the feedback is of little or no developmental use or comes too late for future assignments, and does not 'feed forward' into future work.
- Many students don't like new or unfamiliar forms of assessment.
This may be true where new tasks are introduced without careful explanation, and students do not have opportunities to practise the tasks before summative assessments.

Students often say

- We are unclear about goals and standards.
This may be addressed through many kind of discussions and practical exercise, in and out of class.
- We are often baffled by the meaning of some terms (such as plagiarism) and the use of 'assessment criteria'. *Criteria should be discussed with students, and assignments marked clearly against explicit criteria.*
- We don't get enough practical advice about how to improve our work.
Tutor feedback is often largely or entirely focussed upon providing students with a measure of their performance/achievement. In order to support student learning, feedback also needs to be developmental; showing students how they can improve in future work.
- We are very sensitive to any signs/evidence of marker variation.
Where goals, standards and assessment criteria are unclear or unobserved by all members of a teaching team, students will seek alternative explanations for the marks they see awarded.
- We don't get feedback promptly.
Having submitted their work, students are often very anxious about when they'll hear about their performance. This can be reduced greatly if you set a 'first return of marks and feedback' date alongside the due-date for submissions.
- We can't read the tutor's handwriting.
This is a serious and widespread problem, easily rectified by typing or marking online. We must also ensure that students with visual impairments are treated fairly.

2.3 Key Principles

- All assessments should be valid, reliable and fair.
Some assessment tasks are of limited validity, not actually testing what they claim to be.
- Assessments should be linked directly to the Intended Learning Outcomes for the module, and teaching and learning activities should provide students with opportunities to develop their knowledge and abilities in order to undertake the assessed work.
This is called 'constructive alignment' (John Biggs).
- Assessments in higher education should develop students' ability to manage their own learning.
This means that students will need to develop understanding of how to measure and address their own learning needs and achievements (meta-cognition). Enabling students to become autonomous should not be confused with solitary learning.
- Summative assessments should engage students in, and reward them for, high-quality learning activities and outputs.
Tutor feedback should measure/grade performance (against explicit criteria) and provide practical advice on how to improve.
- Formative assignments (pre-assessment exercises and tasks) may be small scale and embedded into normal learning and teaching activities.

- Tutors and peers can provide developmental feedback throughout a course. Formative exercises do not need to be 'marked' or 'graded', and where they are marked, the marks don't count.*
- The processes of assessment may involve elements of self-and peer-assessment, teacher criticism, assignment revision, external observation, etc.
This should not be confused with marking or grading. Normally, marking is the responsibility of the teacher, but all students can often be involved in the processes of 'assessment'. Ensuring that assessment processes are transparent will help students to understand goals and standards, and to develop their abilities to manage their own learning. Where the marking/grading of students' work involves other students/parties, additional attention should be paid to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the marking processes and outcomes.
 - The volume, variety and timing of summative assignments across a student's programme need to be managed to help students plan their studies and use feedback to develop their abilities.
Too many assignments may encourage a surface approach to learning; too few may lead to inadequate effort/time on task. Too much variety in assessed tasks may reduce students' ability to realise improvements; lack of variety may fail to engage and capture the range of students' abilities and achievements. How tasks are related (when and in what order they are undertaken) will affect the utility of feedback.
 - Each kind of assessed task should have its own assessment criteria.
Thus, for example, we would expect the assessment criteria for essays, group fieldwork projects, seminar managements/presentations, knowledge tests, and portfolio work to be distinctive, reflecting the particular nature of the learning outcomes to be tested.
 - Tutors should keep an appropriate summary account (online or on paper) of the assessment feedback (as well as the marks) provided on all summative work.
This is good professional practice. It can help teachers and teaching teams to reflect upon and monitor the impact and effectiveness of their teaching, and adapt their teaching plans in light of student learning.

2.4 The Importance of Developmental Feedback

It is now widely recognised that feedback exercises a powerful influence on the quality of students' learning experiences and achievements. Providing high-quality developmental feedback is therefore a hallmark of excellence in teaching. Notwithstanding rises in staff-student ratios and other factors, there are many ways by which the quality of feedback practices can be improved.

Feedback on the progress of students' learning may be regularly embedded in teaching and learning activities. Only by knowing what, how, and how much progress students are making in their learning can we as teachers understand the impact of our various teaching activities and adjust these to optimize student learning.

Feedback on students' work

- can be through summative assignments (marks/grades that count) or formative exercises/tasks (marks don't count);
- needs to provide students with practical advice on how to improve, as well as an accurate measurement of their performance/achievement on the task;

- should be regular, criteria-related, legible, understandable, practical, timely, useable;
- can be provided in or out of class; for whole cohorts, groups or individuals; oral or written; by self, peers, teachers, others; face-to face or online, using a wide range of technologies, such as Google; and
- may be diagnostic (students identify needs and abilities); ipsative (charting progress from previous feedback); student-steered (students identify what developmental feedback they want); feed-forward (directly aimed at the next assignment).

The importance of feedback is neatly captured in Graham Gibbs' seminal paper on 'Conditions under which assessment supports student learning'. Of the 10 key conditions, 7 are about feedback:

<http://resources.glos.ac.uk/shareddata/dms/2B70988BBCD42A03949CB4F3CB78A516.pdf>

2.5 Learning from the National Student Survey (NSS)

It is well known that since its introduction in 2005, the NSS has focussed attention on assessment and feedback practices in universities, as students are least satisfied with their experiences in this domain. The NSS asks students to rate their responses to 5 statements about their assessment experiences:

- The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
- Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.
- Feedback on my work has been prompt.
- I have received detailed comments on my work.
- Feedback on my work has helped me to clarify things I did not understand.

In almost every discipline and kind of university each year, students' responses to these 5 statements (and responses to 3 statements about 'teaching quality') provide the strongest correlation with students' "overall satisfaction" with their course. NSS scores are a vital element in the construction of university (and subject) league tables, and the University has now set NSS scores as a Key Performance Indicator. You can use NSS data (quantitative and qualitative) about your students' experiences to address many of the challenges of improving assessment and feedback practices.

2.6 Invitation to Join our Research and Development Projects

The University is a leader in two major projects designed to improve assessment and feedback practices, here and nationally:

- TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment)
<http://www.testa.ac.uk>

- FASTECH (Feedback and Assessment for Students with Technology)
<http://www.fastech.ac.uk>

The project websites provide tools and advice to help you review and improve practices. Already, over 7 of our programme teams at Bath Spa are researching and improving practices as part of these projects. Please join us by contacting our project team:

Paul Hyland p.hyland@bathspa.ac.uk
Joelle Adams j.adams@bathspa.ac.uk
Graham Morgan g.morgan@bathspa.ac.uk

2.7 Help and Advice

There are many colleagues who will be happy to provide help and advice.

For help with using Minerva, please contact Mark Annand m.annand@bathspa.ac.uk. His 'Help Pages' (e.g., for anonymous submission using Turnitin) can be found at: <http://it-help.bathspa.ac.uk/minerva/grade-mark.html>

The University has recently appointed five new Learning Technologists (one in each School) who will be able to help you to make the most of readily-available technologies to improve assessment and feedback practices:

Jeff Boehm (MPA) j.boehm@bathspa.ac.uk
Neil Glen (BSAD) n.glen@bathspa.ac.uk
Susanna Romans-Roca (SSM) s.romans-roca@bathspa.ac.uk
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John Sumpter (HCI) j.sumpter@bathspa.ac.uk

For general advice about assessment requirements and practices, please contact:

Paul Hyland (Head of Learning and Teaching) p.hyland@bathspa.ac.uk
Demelza Curnow (Head of Quality Assurance) d.curnow@bathspa.ac.uk