

## Assessment and Feedback Policy 2021-2026

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## CONTENTS

<b>CONTEXT AND SCOPE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1 <i>Context .....</i>	5
2 <i>Purpose .....</i>	5
3 <i>Limitations .....</i>	5
<b>PRINCIPLES .....</b>	<b>6</b>
4 <i>Underlying principle.....</i>	6
5 <i>Inclusive assessment.....</i>	6
6 <i>Student-focussed assessment.....</i>	6
<b>ASSESSMENT DESIGN.....</b>	<b>6</b>
7 <i>Authentic assessment.....</i>	6
8 <i>Consideration of assessment at course-level.....</i>	7
9 <i>Relationship of assessment to learning outcomes .....</i>	7
10 <i>Design of assessment tasks .....</i>	7
11 <i>Academic integrity.....</i>	7
<b>ASSESSMENT PRACTICE .....</b>	<b>8</b>
12 <i>Communicating assessment requirements.....</i>	8
13 <i>Assessment criteria, rubrics and grade descriptors .....</i>	8
14 <i>Assessment planning .....</i>	8
15 <i>Assessment load .....</i>	8
16 <i>Electronic submission .....</i>	9
17 <i>Anonymous assessment .....</i>	9
18 <i>Group assessment .....</i>	10
<b>FEEDBACK.....</b>	<b>10</b>
19 <i>Course feedback strategy .....</i>	10
20 <i>Formative assessment and feedback.....</i>	10
21 <i>Summative assessment and feedback.....</i>	11
22 <i>Feedback arrangements and time limits .....</i>	11
23 <i>Feedback format.....</i>	12
<b>STAFF DEVELOPMENT .....</b>	<b>12</b>
24 <i>Staff development in assessment and feedback.....</i>	12
<b>APPENDIX: Indicative exemptions .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Electronic submission exemptions.....</i>	13
<i>Anonymous assessment exemptions.....</i>	13



## CONTEXT AND SCOPE

### 1 Context

This Assessment and Feedback Policy has been prepared to contribute to the achievement of the education aims of the University's Being Westminster Strategy 2018-2023, and to promote the core principles and strategic aims of the Education Strategy 2020-2023.

### 2 Purpose

The policy sets out the core principles for the design, communication and implementation of effective assessment and feedback practices at the University of Westminster. It applies to all credit-bearing taught courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The policy has been prepared specifically for the following purposes:

- To provide a framework for course teams in establishing assessment and feedback strategies for courses and modules, designing assessment tasks and supporting students in meeting the requirements of assessment.
- To identify what students can reasonably expect in the conduct of assessment and feedback on their course.
- To set out the responsibilities of academic staff with regard to the design, setting and conduct of assessment, and the provision of feedback to students.
- To support the development and implementation of procedures for the management and administration of assessment and feedback.
- To complement the University's quality assurance processes that relate to assessment and feedback, including curriculum development, validation and revalidation, modification, and annual monitoring.
- To complement discussions with employers, professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, and other external stakeholders in relation to assessment and feedback practices.
- To provide a basis for discussions with collaborative partners on assessment and feedback practices.
- To guide professional development activity.

### 3 Limitations

The policy is not intended to provide precise instruction on assessment and feedback practices. Separate resources will offer more detailed advice and practical guidance on the implementation of the policy.

The policy does not replace other formal guidance or regulations that apply to the University's courses. It is therefore important that the policy is read in conjunction with:

- Academic Regulations
- Quality Assurance and Enhancement Handbook

In addition, it is important that the policy is implemented within the broader framework of expectations arising from external regulatory requirements, including:

- Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) requirements (Quality Code; Subject Benchmark Statements).
- Office for Students (OfS) expectations.
- Requirements of Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)

## PRINCIPLES

### 4 Underlying principle

The University welcomes students from every background and is committed to actively engaging students to help them to learn. Assessment and feedback are fundamental to student learning. Assessment provides opportunities for students to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been achieved, and thereby enables evidence to be produced that learning has taken place and that standards are being maintained. As such, assessment is a powerful driver of students' learning.

Students learn through purposeful engagement with assessment tasks that are varied, authentic and inclusive. Staff facilitate students' learning by supporting them in this engagement and providing feedback on their performance. Feedback enables students to reflect on their learning and helps them to understand what they need to do to further develop their knowledge, understanding and skills to meet their aspirations.

### 5 Inclusive assessment

The design of assessment will acknowledge the diversity of our students and the need to eliminate barriers to success. Assessment tasks will provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. Facilitating a degree of individual choice within an assessment task helps to ensure that no student is disadvantaged whilst maintaining parity of assessment standards.

### 6 Student-focussed assessment

Assessment will always be designed to meet the learning needs of students, as expressed in the validated learning outcomes. Opportunities should be provided to enable students to take ownership of assessment tasks. This could be achieved by designing the assessment in partnership with students or offering some choice within assessment tasks. Students will be supported in developing their assessment literacy to help them understand the purpose of assessment and the standard of work expected.

## ASSESSMENT DESIGN

### 7 Authentic assessment

All courses will incorporate authentic assessment approaches. Authentic assessment may be understood as assessment that requires students to demonstrate the ability to apply knowledge and skills in a 'real world' situation. Thus, authentic assessment should be relevant to the aspirations of

students in the context of their discipline or professional area. Traditional forms of assessment such as time-constrained, unseen examinations will only be used where the learning outcomes explicitly require such approaches, or where such approaches are necessary to align with the requirements of professional, statutory or regulatory bodies.

## 8 Consideration of assessment at course-level

A coherent approach to assessment is essential at course-level. Such an approach will ensure that module-level assessments clearly contribute to course-level learning outcomes and should consider the relative complexity of assessment tasks at different levels (as appropriate). The course-level approach will provide a framework for assessment practices across the whole course and will ensure that assessment is considered holistically. Across the course as a whole there will be variety in types and modes of assessment, to promote the development of the full range of knowledge, understanding and skills required to meet the course learning outcomes. Course-level planning of assessment can also help to avoid assessment 'bunching' (See Item 14 below).

Courses that draw on modules from multiple host courses (including joint courses and courses with numerous option modules) require particularly careful oversight to review the implications of any modifications made to modules hosted elsewhere.

## 9 Relationship of assessment to learning outcomes

Within each module it is essential that every learning outcome is assessed. Furthermore, each assessment task that is set will genuinely assess one or more learning outcomes and not something else. Design of assessment will accord with the principles of constructive alignment, such that the alignment between the learning outcomes and the assessment and feedback regime can provide the basis for supportive learning activities. The alignment between assessment tasks and learning outcomes will be made explicit through the provision of assessment criteria (see Item 13 below).

## 10 Design of assessment tasks

Careful consideration will be given to the design of individual assessment tasks within modules. Course teams are positively encouraged to adopt innovative approaches to assessment in order to stimulate student interest, provide variety and engage students purposefully. As far as possible, and subject to the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, the excessive use of traditional forms of assessment should be avoided. Where such approaches are adopted, it is the responsibility of course teams to justify their use by reference to learning outcomes. In all cases, the relevance of assessment tasks must be made clear to students. The tasks should promote higher level learning rather than just the reproduction of information.

## 11 Academic integrity

Careful consideration should be given to the nature of the assessment tasks to minimise opportunities for students to engage in academic misconduct. Assessment tasks will therefore be designed to promote academic integrity and to reduce the likelihood of plagiarism, collusion or contract cheating.

## ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

### 12 Communicating assessment requirements

Students will be advised of assessment requirements for their course in full at the start of each semester or period of study. This will include the form and weighting of each assessment together with an indication of submission deadlines and/or time-constrained assessment periods. Students will be provided with sufficient information to enable them to plan workloads in relation to assessment requirements. Within each individual module, detailed requirements for assessment will be published in module handbooks and on the module site on the University's virtual learning environment. Explicit instructions for each assessment task must be set out.

### 13 Assessment criteria, rubrics and grade descriptors

Clear assessment criteria will be published to students for each assessment task. Assessment criteria will identify what students are expected to do to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been achieved, and the factors that staff will take into account when making judgements about students' work.

Wherever possible, assessment criteria should be supported by the use of assessment rubrics. These are typically constructed as grids that contain the assessment criteria and define the expected standard for different levels of judgement. Assessment rubrics help students to identify the standards of work that will result in the award of different grades. Used effectively, rubrics promote greater transparency and consistency in the assessment process.

The adoption of assessment criteria and the use of rubrics will be underpinned by reference to the University's grade descriptors. The grade descriptors are a key point of reference that provide a benchmark in relation to the standard of students' work across grade bands. The grade descriptors will promote consistency across modules and courses.

### 14 Assessment planning

Students' assessment workloads should be spread across modules and courses. At course-level, there should be consideration of the distribution of overall assessment workload across the course for both students and staff. An assessment schedule will be produced for each level of each course and the 'bunching' of assessment deadlines should be avoided except where it is absolutely necessary due to the nature of assessments. Assessment deadlines will be set in accordance with the requirements of Part 3 of the Academic Regulations. Students should be encouraged to develop effective time management strategies and supported in the planning of assessment workloads. At module-level, consideration should be given to ways in which students can engage with assessment tasks across the whole module rather than concentrating their efforts within a short period of time.

### 15 Assessment load

To ensure parity of awards, and to balance student and staff workloads, the assessment load associated with modules of the same credit value will be broadly consistent. This will be achieved by reference to assessment tariffs that provide guidance on word counts, or the duration of time-constrained assessments. Where assessment is based on media other than the written word,



alternative approaches to specifying assessment loads will be required. In all cases, the approach to determining assessment loads will be fair and transparent and will be clearly communicated to students.

## 16 Electronic submission

The standard mode for submission of coursework is electronic, via the University's approved platforms. The facilities for electronic submission will be established specifically within each module site on the University's virtual learning environment, and the arrangements will be clearly communicated to students.

It is acknowledged that there are forms of assessment where electronic submission is not possible or practicable. A list of instances that are exempt from the requirement for electronic submission has been provided in the Appendix to this policy. It is acknowledged that there may be further instances beyond those listed in the Appendix where electronic submission is not possible or practicable. In such cases, approval for an exemption from the requirement for electronic submission must be obtained from the Associate Head of College (Education & Students) and must be reported to University Teaching Committee.

Where there is an exemption from the requirement for electronic submission, this must be communicated to students in the module handbook and on the module site on the University's virtual learning environment.

## 17 Anonymous assessment

Summative assessments will be marked anonymously. This means that the identity of the student will not be known to markers at the point of initial marking and second marking. The objective of this is to reduce the potential for bias and to reassure students that assessment practices are fair and impartial.

It is acknowledged that there are forms of assessment where anonymity is not possible or practicable. There are also situations where anonymity may be compromised due to the individual nature of the assessment task, or where provisions have been made for an individual student's circumstances. Furthermore, where a marker suspects a case of academic misconduct, anonymity is to be lifted for an investigation to take place in accordance with Section 10 of the Academic Regulations.

A list of instances that are exempt from the requirement for anonymous marking has been provided in the Appendix to this policy. It is acknowledged that there may be further instances beyond those listed in the Appendix where it is not possible or practicable to guarantee anonymity. In such cases, approval for an exemption from the requirement for anonymity must be obtained from the Associate Head of College (Education & Students) and must be reported to University Teaching Committee.

Where there is an exemption to anonymous assessment, this must be communicated to students in the module handbook and on the module site on the University's virtual learning environment.

Where assessments are not marked anonymously, steps must be taken to give students confidence in the consistency and impartiality of the process. This will include the use of clear assessment criteria, rubrics and grade descriptors (see Item 13 above).

## 18 Group assessment

Assessment tasks that require students to work in groups can have positive benefits for the development of a wide range of transferable skills. The adoption of group assessments requires careful planning and management to ensure that students have the opportunity to benefit from group work without being disadvantaged.

At course level there will be oversight of the extent of assessed group work at each level. The arrangements for managing group assessment within a course will be clearly communicated to students through course handbooks, module handbooks and through the University's virtual learning environment. Typically, such arrangements may include, as appropriate, provisions for the formation of groups, use of group contracts, peer assessment processes, and dealing with disagreements within groups.

At module level there must always be a clear rationale for assessment tasks based on group work. The rationale must be directly related to the learning outcomes and must be clearly communicated to students.

The basis on which marks will be awarded to individual students must be clearly identified and, where appropriate, must enable differentiation of individual students' contributions. The overall marks awarded to individual students at any level should not be skewed by an over-reliance on assessment conducted in groups. Furthermore, the opportunity for students to demonstrate individual capability should not be encumbered by excessive use of group work.

## FEEDBACK

## 19 Course feedback strategy

All courses will have a clear feedback strategy that includes provisions for both formative and summative feedback. The provisions of the feedback strategy will be clearly communicated to students. Students can expect to receive feedback on all forms of assessment, though the format of feedback will vary according to the nature of the assessment (see Item 23 below). All feedback, both formative and summative, will enable students to identify the strengths in their work and the aspects where improvement is needed, together with recommendations as to how such improvement can be achieved.

## 20 Formative assessment and feedback

All modules will contain arrangements for formative assessment and feedback. Formative assessment does not contribute directly to the final mark for the module. Formative assessment and feedback provides students with developmental support in a timely manner so that they have a real opportunity to improve their performance. It helps students to take greater responsibility for their own learning, to understand what constitutes good performance, and to foster a shared understanding between staff and students as to how academic judgements are made. Formative feedback can take various forms, including tutor-provided feedback, tutor-guided self-assessment, peer assessment and whole-class feedback.

## 21 Summative assessment and feedback

Students are entitled to receive good quality feedback on all summative coursework assessments. Summative assessment and feedback involves an academic judgement made against specific assessment criteria, providing a description of what a student has achieved in a given assessment task. As a minimum, feedback will consist of: the mark awarded for the assessed work; an explanation of how the mark has been arrived at and how it relates to the assessment criteria; strengths and weaknesses of the of the assessed work; and constructive advice on how improvements can be achieved in future work.

Good quality feedback on summative assessments includes a narrative commentary that is qualitative. Thus, in addition to a mark that indicates the level of performance, the qualitative comments should enable students to understand the mark they have been awarded and what they should do to improve performance in future assessments. The feedback should help students to reflect on their learning. It should relate directly to the assessment criteria and be honest, comprehensive, clear and constructive. The language used in the narrative should take account of the motivational and emotional impact of feedback on the student.

Feedback on traditional, time-constrained examinations is provided in one of two forms determined by the module leader. Either: (a) generic group feedback that highlights good and poor performance for each individual question, and is made available to all students on the module site on the University's virtual learning environment; or (b) individual feedback for each script/student.

## 22 Feedback arrangements and time limits

The arrangements for feedback on each module, both formative and summative, will be communicated to students in the module handbook and on the module site on the University's virtual learning environment. This will include the arrangements for addressing student queries in relation to feedback received.

It is expected that marks and feedback on summative coursework assessments will be provided to students within fifteen working days<sup>1</sup> from the assessment due date, other than in the case of students who submit assessments after a due date (see below). All students who submit assessments by the due date will normally receive their marks and feedback at the same time.

Students who submit up to 24 hours after an assessment due date can normally expect to receive their feedback within 20 working days of the original due date. Students who are allowed to submit up to 5 days after an assessment due date (because of mitigating circumstances or learning support entitlements) can normally expect to receive their feedback within 25 working days of the original due date.

Specific exemptions to the expectations on feedback time limits (such as those based on course-specific requirements) must be agreed at College level and formally approved by University Teaching Committee. In such circumstances the alternative arrangements must be clearly communicated to students through course handbooks, module handbooks and through the University's virtual learning environment.

It is acknowledged that unexpected circumstances such as staff incapacity may arise occasionally. In such circumstances the Head of School must put in place reasonable alternative arrangements to

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<sup>1</sup> Working days are all those except Saturdays, Sundays, public holidays and periods when the University is closed.

ensure that feedback is provided as soon as possible. Furthermore, students who are affected by the unexpected circumstances must be informed without delay, and the alternative arrangements must be communicated to students as soon as they are established.

## 23 Feedback format

The format for feedback on each module, both formative and summative, will be communicated to students in the module handbook and on the module site on the University's virtual learning environment. The standard mode for provision of feedback to students will be in written format, conveyed digitally via the University's electronic systems. However, innovative feedback practices are actively encouraged. It is acknowledged that such practices may involve a range of formats as appropriate to the requirements of a module or the specific needs of individual students. Thus, feedback may be provided in audio format, video format (e.g. as a screencast) or orally, either face-to-face or via videoconferencing. Furthermore, feedback provided on an individual student's work may be supplemented by generic feedback provided on the assessment as a whole to a group of students. Whichever format is adopted, it is essential that a formal record of the feedback is maintained.

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

## 24 Staff development in assessment and feedback

Staff development in assessment and feedback for all staff will be actively supported. This includes academic staff, academic managers and professional services staff who support student learning and administer assessment processes. Academic Schools are expected to have processes in place to for inducting new staff into marking practices and moderation procedures. In addition, every effort should be made to improve assessment and feedback literacy and understanding of assessment and feedback principles, and to enhance practice through professional development, scholarship and the sharing of good practice. Such development can take several forms, including formal training provided internally or externally, online resources, and simple mechanisms for sharing of good practice amongst colleagues. The Centre for Education and Teaching Innovation may be consulted for advice and guidance on assessment and feedback literacy.

- END -

## APPENDIX: Indicative exemptions

It is acknowledged that some forms of assessment cannot practically or reasonably conform to certain requirements of the Assessment and Feedback Policy, most notably those relating to Electronic Submission (Item 16) and Anonymous Assessment (Item 17).

The lists below provide an indication of the forms of assessment that are considered exempt from the respective requirements. There may be further instances beyond those listed where compliance is not possible or practicable. In such cases, approval for an exemption from the relevant requirement must be obtained from the Associate Head of College (Education & Students) and must be reported to University Teaching Committee.

For courses validated and/or delivered by collaborative partners the expectation is that the same principles will apply. However, it is acknowledged that local custom and the use of alternative technologies may require some minor deviations.

### Electronic submission exemptions

Forms of assessment that are exempt from the requirement for electronic submission include:

- In-class tests (though it is acknowledged that some in-class tests are conducted online)
- Formal, traditional time-constrained examinations that take place in the presence of invigilators
- Oral or viva voce examinations
- Assessments that involve the production of artefacts or portfolios of physical work.
- Observed assessments such as presentations, performances, observed laboratory work, fieldwork, or contributions to debates or discussions.

### Anonymous assessment exemptions

Forms of assessment that are exempt from the requirement for anonymous assessment include:

- Assessments conducted solely for the purpose of formative feedback
- Research dissertations and theses marked by supervisors
- Observed assessments such as presentations or performances (individual and group)
- Laboratory work or fieldwork, except where written outcomes associated with such activities can be submitted separately and anonymised.
- Practical work where the assessment involves the production of a practical output that may be partially created during periods of contact with staff responsible for marking the assessment
- Assessments where students have received individual formative feedback on drafts or preliminary work prior to final submission.
- Group work where the performance of others contributes to the final mark.
- Written submissions associated with presentations, where the markers are assessing the presentation as well as the written submission.
- Contributions to debates or seminar discussions
- Blogs where the identity of the student is apparent from the content or web location of the material being assessed.
- Assessments based on participation in online activities such as discussion forums.

- Oral or viva voce examinations
- Preliminary work which is used or a later linked piece of assessment e.g. dissertation pre-reports.
- Linked pieces of assessment, such as some types of synoptic assessment where earlier marks or feedback contribute to the marking process for a later piece of work.
- Professional placements, volunteering and international activity, together with associated reports, where the marker is likely to be aware of the nature of the student's placement.
- Assessments submitted late, after the dates for release of marks.
- Assessments submitted by students who have learning support entitlements. (The rationale for this exemption is that specific considerations may apply in the conduct of assessments for certain students. The identification of such considerations will invariably compromise the anonymity of a student)

NB: 'Study abroad' students: alternative assessments for study abroad students can be assumed to be anonymously marked. However, it is acknowledged that where only a small number of students do the alternative assessment, anonymity may be compromised.