

Assessment and Feedback Policy 2026-2031

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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 2022-2029, and to promote the core principles and strategic aims of the Education Strategy 2023-2029.

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 levels.

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 colleagues regarding 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 curriculum check-in, modification, and continuous improvement.
- 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. Assessment strongly influences how students learn, so it should be viewed both as a tool for learning and as a measure of learning.

Students learn through purposeful engagement with varied, authentic, and inclusive assessment tasks.

5. Authentic assessment

We take authentic assessment to mean those assessment types which:

- Encourage students to seek creative and, where appropriate, collaborative solutions to problems or challenges
- Engage students in the development of capabilities of relevance to their growth as an individual, employee or citizen – this could reflect learning through ‘real life’ opportunities as well as simulations
- Reflect enquiry beyond the classroom, often in partnership with communities, groups or organisations

Authentic assessment can be focused on the product or process of learning (see above) and can be utilised at all levels and is most effective when aligned with extended periods of authentic learning. It is less effective as a bolt-on to more traditional modes of teaching delivery and should be seen as part of our approach to providing inclusive and accessible assessments.

Colleagues 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.

6. 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.

Inclusive assessment design is grounded in Universal Design for Learning principles, proactively addressing a range of needs to ensure accessibility is integrated from the outset rather than added

later. Providing choice and flexibility, such as essays, podcasts, presentations or blogs for example, allows students to demonstrate learning in ways that align with their strengths and backgrounds. Embedding authentic, real-world tasks increases relevance, motivation, and the development of transferable skills while helping reduce awarding gaps. Clear, transparent criteria, exemplars, and formative feedback support assessment literacy and reduce anxiety. A holistic approach to course assessment design minimises excessive evaluation, supports students in diverse circumstances, and establishes a clear, structured trajectory for learning and development.

7. Student-focused assessment

Assessment will always be designed to meet students' learning needs, 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

8. 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.

9. Consideration of assessment at course-level

A coherent assessment approach is essential at the 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.

10. 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 14 below).

11. 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.

12. 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

13. 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.

14. 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 colleagues 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.

15. Assessment planning

When assessments are scheduled too closely together, students often experience undue stress as they juggle conflicting deadlines and may need to submit most of their work in just one week. This bunching also puts pressure on colleagues, especially those overseeing large modules, as marking tasks accumulate and meeting the University's requirement of a 15-day turnaround becomes more challenging. To address this, it is important to distribute assessment workloads evenly across different modules and courses.

When planning at the course level, it's important to consider how assessment types and workload are used and distributed among students and staff throughout the course. In addition, the School, in collaboration with the registry, will oversee and coordinate assessment deadlines.

An assessment schedule will be produced for each semester, 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 guided in cultivating strong time management skills and assisted with planning assessment workloads. Furthermore, empowering students to make well-informed decisions at an early stage is essential, especially when the offering of numerous optional modules cannot be aligned with a timetable free of assessment deadline conflicts. 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.

16. Assessment load

To ensure parity of awards and to balance student and colleague workload, 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.

17. 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.

18. Anonymous assessment

Summative assessments will be marked anonymously. This means that the student's identity will not be known to markers at the time of initial and second marking. The objective is to reduce the potential for bias and 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 academic misconduct, anonymity is to be lifted to allow an investigation to take place in accordance with Section 10 of the Academic Regulations.

A list of instances exempt from the requirement for anonymous marking is 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 anonymity requirement must be obtained from the Associate Head of College (Education & Students) and reported to the 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 14 above).

19. 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 the course level, oversight will ensure the extent of assessed group work is appropriate, ensuring that this method is not overused, although it is recognised that in some subject areas, group work is fundamental to assessment. 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 provisions for establishing groups, implementing group contracts, utilising peer assessment processes, and resolving intra-group disagreements, as appropriate. These measures ensure that students are not disadvantaged by participation in dysfunctional groups, while still enabling the demonstration of intended learning outcomes.

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

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 overreliance on group assessments. Furthermore, the opportunity for students to demonstrate their individual capabilities should not be compromised by excessive reliance on group work.

20. Use of AI in assessment

It is acknowledged that Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) has the potential to enhance learning, teaching, and assessment in positive ways. Appropriate use of GenAI can enhance critical thinking, feedback processes, accessibility, and assessment design.

With the broad availability of GenAI tools, it is necessary to review and revise assessment methods and design to uphold academic rigour, fairness, and relevance within an AI-enabled context.

GenAI should be incorporated into assessments wherever feasible, ensuring its use is intentional, transparent, and pedagogically appropriate. This approach aims to foster critical thinking and creativity, enhance the authenticity and inclusivity of assessments, uphold academic integrity, and equip graduates to engage effectively in an increasingly AI-driven environment. Therefore, assessment design ought to prioritise the integration of GenAI in support of learning, while maintaining academic integrity, rather than debating its adoption. Students are expected to employ GenAI tools responsibly and transparently, following established guidelines and assessment instructions. Similarly, staff are expected to comply with the code of practice for GenAI usage and remain up to date with best practices, actively participating in relevant developmental opportunities as they become available in this rapidly changing field.

21. Retention of assessed work

The Office for Students (OfS) requires all Higher Education Providers (HEPs) to retain evidence of their students' assessment, including those no longer registered on the course, for a period of at least five years after they have completed their studies.

All assessed work will be retained for 7 years from the publication date of the results. For practical work, the original artefact will not be required to be retained, but the associated written submissions or other items which are submitted to Blackboard will be retained. Further details can be found in the Policy and Processes for the Retention of Assessed Work.

FEEDBACK AND MARKING

22. Underlying principles

All feedback should be guided by the core principles of conciseness, constructiveness, and compassion. These principles aim to keep feedback focused, supportive, and actionable, enabling students to understand their progress and how to improve.

23. 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 on the VLE. 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 26 below). All feedback, both formative and summative, will enable students to identify the strengths in their work and the areas that need improvement, along with recommendations on how to achieve this.

24. Formative assessment and feedback

All modules will contain arrangements for formative assessment and feedback. Formative assessment does not directly contribute to the module's final mark. Formative assessment and feedback provide students with timely developmental support, giving them a real opportunity to improve their performance. It helps students take greater responsibility for their own learning, understand what constitutes good performance, and foster a shared understanding among colleagues and students of 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.

25. 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 each assessment task.

Good quality feedback on summative assessments includes a qualitative narrative commentary. Thus, in addition to a mark indicating the level of performance, the qualitative comments should help students understand the mark they have been awarded and what they should do to improve their performance in future assessments. Feedback should transparently illustrate the allocation of marks through rubrics that clearly define expectations for each assessment criterion. Rubrics, on their own, are not enough for effective feedback.

Importance should be placed on delivering feedback that is concise, personalised, and specifically tailored to the individual student's work. It should offer three positive comments to recognise strengths, identify three targeted areas for development and further challenge, and potentially accompany them with relevant resources and guidance for future assessments. The language used should take into account 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.

26. 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 arrangements to address student queries about feedback received.

Marks and feedback on summative coursework assessments will be provided to students within fifteen working days¹ from the assessment due date, other than in the case of students who submit

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

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 will 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 the College level and formally approved by the 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 a colleague's incapacity, may arise occasionally. In such circumstances, the Head of School must put in place reasonable alternative arrangements to ensure that feedback is provided as soon as possible. Furthermore, students affected by unexpected circumstances must be informed without delay, and alternative arrangements must be communicated to them as soon as they are established.

Nevertheless, despite unforeseen circumstances and potential delays in submission, all students will be provided with updates regarding the progress of marking and feedback on their assessments.

27. 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 providing feedback to students will be in written format, delivered 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.

COLLEAGUE DEVELOPMENT

28. Colleague development in assessment and feedback

Colleague development in assessment and feedback for all colleagues will be actively supported. This includes academic colleagues, academic managers and professional services colleagues who support student learning and administer assessment processes. Academic Schools are expected to have processes in place to for inducting new colleagues 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.

29. 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.

30. 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 colleagues 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 prereports.
- 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.