St Mary’s University College

Assessment Policy

updated and approved January 2018

1. Introduction

Assessment describes any processes that evaluate the outcomes of student learning in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes and abilities. It can serve many purposes:

(i) providing a means by which to judge and certify student achievements – also referred to as Assessment of learning;
(ii) providing a means to enhance student learning - also referred to as Assessment for learning;
(iii) providing a means by which staff can evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

Any assessment can, and often does, involve more than one of these elements.

Assessment and feedback play a crucial role in the education process. Both have a critical impact in shaping students’ dispositions towards learning, their understanding of goals and their motivation. Assessment can define what the student regards as important, determines much of the work students undertake, affects their approach to learning and, it can be argued, is an indication of which aspects of the course are valued most highly. Feedback can help students develop the ability to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning.

St Mary’s University College delivers higher education programmes in partnership with its degree-awarding body, Queen’s University Belfast, and maintains the academic standards of awards made in the University’s name. It follows the University’s Assessment Policy and ensures its internal procedures are effective for:

(i) designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards;
(ii) implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this;
(iii) evaluating how academic standards are maintained through assessment practice that also encourages effective learning.

The College’s implementation of these responsibilities is set out in the following principles:

Contributing to student learning

(i) Assessment practice should promote effective learning.
(ii) The amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate evaluation of students’ achievement of intended learning outcomes.
(iii) Appropriate and timely feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvements.
(iv) Students should be fully aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and the consequences associated with it.
Conducting assessments

(v) Everyone involved in the assessment of students must be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.

(vi) The principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment should be explicit, valid and reliable.

(vii) Assessment should be conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard to security.

(viii) The procedures for marking and for moderating marks must be transparent and fair.

(ix) The criteria for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award must be transparent.

(x) Assessment decisions must be documented accurately and systematically and decisions of relevant assessment panels and examination boards should be communicated as quickly as possible.

2. How to use the Policy guidelines

These principles establish a code of good practice for a range of assessment procedures for Undergraduate and Taught Masters degrees. This Policy articulates for the College the University’s Assessment Policy which has been informed by Section 6 of the QAA Code of Practice for the Assessment of Students (September 2006).

The principles should be used in conjunction with a number of other documents:

University Calendar – General Regulations
College Teaching and Learning Strategy 2017-2022
College Data Protection Policy
College Records Management Policy

The structure of each of the principles is as follows:

- Principle
- Implementation of Principle which states what is required in relation to the particular principle

The Appendix provides Good Practice guidelines for each statement with links to further references and reading.
Principle 1

Assessment practice should promote effective learning

Implementation of Principle

1. Every module must have stated intended learning outcomes which take into account requirements for attaining the relevant academic standards for progression and which are directly related to the assessment of the module.

2. Every module must provide opportunities for all intended learning outcomes to be assessed.

3. Each assessment must have assessment criteria which take into account requirements for attaining academic standards for progression. Students should be made aware of the assessment criteria which should be couched in language which is clear and understandable to the students.

4. Assessment must be designed to facilitate the full range of student achievement and accommodate the diverse needs of students.

5. The College must use a range of appropriate formative and summative assessment methods to enable the full range of student achievement to be assessed.

6. The College must ensure that students are provided with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the format of the assessment approaches employed.

7. Where appropriate, assessments must be designed to assure the practitioner’s fitness to practise and to safeguard the public.

Principle 2

The amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate evaluation of students’ achievement of intended learning outcomes.

Implementation of Principle

1. Students must be provided with adequate time to review and prepare before assessment.

2. Students must be provided with clear information on the timing of individual assessments. If staff wish to introduce unscheduled assessments (e.g. ‘pop quizzes’), this possibility must be clearly stated in the module handbook.

3. Students must be provided with clear information on the weighting of the assessment tasks as a percentage of the module mark.

4. The College must seek to ensure that students do not experience disproportionate assessment across the different plans and sub-plans of each programme specification.

Principle 3

Appropriate and timely feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvements.
Implementation of Principle

1. The College must have a written statement of its policy on the provision and timing of feedback to students.

2. Feedback must be provided to students as soon as possible after the student has completed the assessment task in order to maximise its benefit. Given the direct relationship between feedback and assessment, the assessment strategies for a module should be developed to maximise opportunities for feedback. Feedback should therefore be provided sufficiently early in a module to enable the student to take action to improve their learning for the rest of the module. This is particularly crucial in first year.

3. Feedback must be linked to the stated assessment criteria; highlight strengths as well as weaknesses; be written in clear and accessible language; focus on what the student needs to do to improve their work; and prioritise areas for improvement.

4. The College must facilitate students who wish to discuss their work with a nominated member of staff.

Principle 4

*Students should be fully aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and the consequences associated with it.*

Implementation of Principle

1. The College must ensure that all those involved with assessment are aware of the misconduct regulations.

2. The College must ensure that students are aware of the nature and consequences of academic misconduct.

3. Misconduct regulations must be applied consistently in all cases so that procedures are perceived to be fair to all.

4. The College must maintain a record of academic misconduct cases and consult this record before any decisions on instances of academic misconduct are made in order to establish if any record of previous misconduct exists. The College must inform University Academic Affairs of any decisions taken and Academic Affairs will update an academic misconduct database.

Principle 5

*Everyone involved in the assessment of students must be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities*

Implementation of Principle

1. The College must ensure that all staff, including teaching assistants, external tutors and administrative/support staff, involved in assessment practice, procedures and processes, attend relevant training and receive appropriate support from senior colleagues as required.

2. The College must ensure that all those involved in assessment have been trained in a range of assessment practices and encouraged to reflect and review periodically on their assessment.
3. Where external partners (e.g. school staff or placement personnel) are involved in assessment, there is a responsibility to ensure they are appropriately briefed and supported.

**Principle 6**

*The principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment should be explicit, valid and reliable.*

**Implementation of Principle**

1. The College must publicise information and guidance on assessment that is clear, accurate and accessible to staff, students, placement or practice providers, assessor and external examiners, to minimise the potential for inconsistency or perceived lack of fairness.

2. The College must explicitly demonstrate, through published information such as the Programme Specification, module proforma and handbooks, how the methods of assessment used test the achievement of knowledge, skills and understanding which have been clearly identified as intended learning outcomes.

3. The College must ensure that assessment is operated fairly within programmes and for individual learners; and that assessment policies and principles are applied consistently. Agreed assessment criteria and grading schemes should be consistently used for each level/stage of a programme which reflect the academic standards the students should achieve.

4. The College must set up a procedure for verification of mark transcription from assessments to avoid transcription errors.

5. Where a programme forms part of the qualifications regime of a professional or statutory body, the College must provide clear information in the programme documentation about the specific assessment requirements which must be met for progression towards the professional qualification. This will include the options/modules which must be passed and the level at which the programme or any part of it must be passed in order to meet the requirements of the professional or statutory body.

**Principle 7**

*Assessment should be conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard to security.*

**Implementation of Principle**

1. The College must appoint an Examination Liaison Officer to act as a contact with the University Examinations Office on all matters to do with the administration and conduct of examinations. The Examination Liaison Officer will check that all examinations associated with the College have been scheduled, that the duration of each examination is correct, that modules with common questions are examined at the same time, that the number of students for each examination is accurate and that any discrepancies are reported to the Examinations Office. Examination irregularities are reported to the Principal who must carry out an investigation in line with University regulations.

2. The College should implement clearly and consistently University regulations in respect of the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of the Board of Examiners.
3. The College must ensure security of assessment at the time of submission (providing receipts for submitted work), during marking and on return of assessments/feedback to students. Assessments should be treated as 'confidential' material with regard to security and should be retained for one year following the graduation of a student.

4. The College should ensure that examinations are marked anonymously according to regulations. Coursework may be marked anonymously, according to College policy.

**Principle 8**

*The procedures for marking and for moderating marks must be transparent and fair*

**Implementation of Principle**

1. Every module must have clear and detailed assessment criteria and profile as well as a nominated person responsible for its assessment. This information should be easily accessible to students.

2. The College must publicise their procedures for marking, checking of marking and for moderation of marks (e.g. in module/student handbooks), and this information should be made explicit and easily accessible for students.

3. All assessments must be moderated in terms of outcome. In cases of multiple markers, the College must take steps to ensure that consistency and equity of marking is maintained.

**Principle 9**

*The criteria for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award must be transparent.*

**Implementation of Principle**

1. The College must ensure that progression through the programme at each stage, and the consequences of failure within it, are consistently implemented in accordance with General Regulations and that these are clearly publicised to students, staff and examiners.

2. The College must inform students clearly of the number of re-sits and resubmissions normally allowed. Students requiring resits and resubmissions must be informed of their responsibilities in this process.

3. The College must make clear how the final award outcome is determined.

**Principle 10**

*Assessment decisions must be documented accurately and systematically and decisions of relevant assessment panels and examination boards are to be communicated as quickly as possible.*

**Implementation of Principle**

1. The College must identify the individuals responsible for the accurate computation, recording and checking of assessment decisions. The recording of assessment decisions is the responsibility of the relevant Examinations Liaison Officer.
2. Where marks are provisional, this must be clearly stated.

3. In accordance with University Regulations, the College must retain a signed hard copy record of all assessment decisions.

4. The College must clearly state who has access to assessment decisions, being careful to retain compliance with University Regulations or other relevant legislation. Assessment decisions may be released to authorised persons only.
Appendix

Good Practice and Further References/Links/Reading

Principle 1

Good Practice

1. Involving students in discussion of the assessment criteria to facilitate their understanding of what is expected for a particular assessment task.

2. Involving students in College evaluations of assessment practices.

3. Distributing the timing of assessment tasks within a module. This encourages a deep approach to learning and provides opportunities for early and regular feedback.

4. Designing an assessment that addresses a range of learning outcomes is effective and efficient for both staff and students.

Further References/Links/Reading

  www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp
- REAP (Re-engineering assessment practices) website – www.reap.ac.uk
- Higher Education Academy– www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment
- QUB Disability Services - http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/
- University of Plymouth SPACE Project on inclusive assessment –
  http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=10494

Principle 2

Good Practice

1. Providing a clear timetable of assessment across the programme. This has the dual function of allowing students to have sufficient information about the assessment schedule and allows those involved in marking student work enough time to complete it satisfactorily.

2. Ensuring that the amount and timing of assessment are kept under regular review.

3. Ensuring that the assessment load on students across modules is, as far as possible, distributed reasonably, for example, to avoid coursework from several modules being due on the same day.

Further References/Links/Reading

  http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp
- REAP (Re-engineering assessment practices) website – www.reap.ac.uk
- Higher Education Academy– www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment
Principle 3

Good Practice

1. Regularly reviewing the quality of feedback provided to students.

2. Providing generic feedback to a whole class. This is an early and efficient way to communicate useful information over a range of points to a large group. A feedback sheet, for example, might be used to give all members of a class generic feedback.

3. Providing guidance to students on how often feedback on a piece of work will be given.

4. Sometimes providing feedback on assessments before giving the mark can encourage students to reflect on the comments.

5. Giving feed-forward information. This tells the students not only where they went wrong but helps them to focus on making improvements in subsequent tasks and helps stimulate the transfer of learning to new problems.

6. Providing opportunities to close any gap between the current and the desired performance by offering specific advice on how to improve and, where appropriate, exemplars or model answers.

7. Using computer-aided assessment and feedback, where appropriate, especially for large classes.

Further References/Links/Reading

  http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp
- REAP (Re-engineering assessment practices) website – www.reap.ac.uk
- Higher Education Academy – www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment

Principle 4

Good Practice

1. Engaging students in discussion about what is considered to be plagiarism including:
   - defining the terms used
   - exploring the ethical issues
   - explaining the penalties
   - teaching how to paraphrase and summarise
   - the referencing criteria expected of them in essays and assignments.

2. Routinely requiring students to submit assignments to a resource for checking for duplication of texts to help inform decisions regarding academic integrity.

3. Designing assignments to minimise academic misconduct, for example by:
   - changing assignments yearly
   - the use of original and unique data
   - requiring specific components or process steps
   - the use of tasks requiring students to engage in and explain the rationale for the approach adopted.
Further References/Links/Reading

- JISC website: http://www.jisc.ac.uk/search.aspx?keywords=plagiarism&filter=s
- University Calendar: http://www.qub.ac.uk/archive/info/calendar/
- College Policy on Plagiarism

Principle 5

Good Practice

1. Identifying an individual (normally the Director of Education) who is responsible for disseminating information on training opportunities and good practice on assessment, in addition to normal circulation methods, to help to increase the engagement of staff.

2. Seeking professional recognition with the Higher Education Academy (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/). This provides opportunities for ongoing professional development.

3. Maintaining regular contact with relevant HEA Subject Centres (http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/subjectcentres). This provides subject-specific guidance.

Further References/Links/Reading

- CED website Professional Development pages – www.qub.ac.uk/ced
- REAP (Re-engineering assessment practices) website – www.reap.ac.uk
- HEA Subject Centres - www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/networks/subjectcentres

Principle 6

Good Practice

1. Including an assessment policy and methods in module information/handbooks and a detailed explanation which is given to students in an introductory session at the start of each module.

2. Making clear linkages in the Programme Specification to the modules where each identified learning outcome is assessed.

3. Making clear linkages in the module information to the specific assessments where learning outcomes are assessed.
Further reference/links/Reading

- QAA Code of Practice, Section 3: Students with disabilities http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp
- QUB Disability Services - http://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/sgc/disability/
- Higher Education Academy – www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment

Principle 7

Good Practice

1. Using the General Administrative Centre for the submission of assignments: this provides receipts and a secure and archived mechanism for retention of assignments.

Further reference/links/Reading

- QAA Code of Practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning). http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp
- Higher Education Academy– www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment

Principle 8

Good Practice

1. Implementing of internal moderation across modules.

2. Reflecting on assessment informed by trends in marking.

Further References/Links/Reading

- Higher Education Academy– www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment

Principle 9

Good Practice

Communicating to all students the regulations on progressing from one stage to another and how the final grade is calculated during the first semester as early as practicable in each academic year.
Further References/Links/Reading

  http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp

Principle 10

Further References/Links/Reading

  http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/default.asp