



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Purpose of Principles

This document sets out key principles and priorities to guide practice in assessment and feedback. The principles set out the baseline expectation for quality, ensuring a degree of consistency in assessment and feedback practice across Schools. The priorities set the strategic direction for enhancement of assessment and feedback.

Overview

These principles and priorities form part of a holistic and strategic approach to the design and management of assessment and feedback on all courses and programmes. The assessment and feedback principles are accompanied by a set of priorities for assessment and feedback, which are forward-looking and aspirational, encouraging greater creativity in assessment practice. The priorities encourage greater emphasis on: authentic assessments and assessment as learning formative assessment and feedback; student partnership in assessment; and assessment inclusive by design.

Scope: Mandatory

These principles are University-wide and apply to the assessment and feedback of all taught courses and taught programmes. The principles offer a framework for reviewing and guiding practice. In the first year of operation (2022-23), Schools should focus on reviewing existing practice against the principles and priorities and, identifying areas for action, with a view to demonstrating full alignment with the principles and significant action against the priorities from 2023-24. However, Schools should apply the following elements in full from 2022-23: 1.4, 2.5, 4.2, 4.3, 6.1, 6.4.

Contact Officer	Philippa Ward	Academic Policy Officer	Philippa.Ward@ed.ac.uk
------------------------	---------------	-------------------------	------------------------

Document control

Dates	Approved: 08.09.2022	Starts: 01.09.2022	Equality impact assessment: 04.08.2022	Amendments: N/A	Next Review: 2025/2026
--------------	--------------------------------	------------------------------	--	---------------------------	----------------------------------

Approving authority	Senate Education Committee
----------------------------	----------------------------

Consultation undertaken	Curriculum Transformation Programme Task Group, Directors of Teaching Network, Curriculum Transformation Programme Reference Group, Senate Education Committee, Colleges, Edinburgh University Students' Association, Senate Academic Policy and Regulations Committee, Senate.
--------------------------------	---

Section responsible for policy maintenance & review	Academic Services
--	-------------------

Related policies, procedures, guidelines & regulations	Taught Assessment Regulations, Teaching Matters blogs, Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study, Guidance for Boards of Examiners, Undergraduate Progression Boards Policy, Examination Hall Regulations, External Examiner for Taught Programmes Policy
---	--

UK Quality Code	Consistent with guiding principles outlined in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education November 2018 (assessment)
------------------------	--

Policies superseded by this policy	Regulations 11, 15 and 16 of the Taught Assessment Regulations
---	--

Alternative format	If you require this document in an alternative format please email Academic.Services@ed.ac.uk
---------------------------	---

Keywords	Assessment, assessment principles, feedback, feedback principles, course assessment, programme assessment, marking
-----------------	--



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Full Purpose of Principles

The University will take a holistic and strategic approach to assessment and feedback comprising the following four key aspects:

- a. **Assessment and feedback principles.** A set of key principles to guide practice in assessment and feedback. The principles set out the baseline expectations for quality, ensuring a degree of consistency in assessment and feedback practice. The principles also signal to students what they can expect to experience with regards to assessment and feedback practice. The principles set out in this document sit alongside the taught assessment regulations. Schools are expected to review their practice against the principles, identify gaps and actions to address them.
- b. **Assessment and Feedback priorities.** The principles set the baseline expectations, but we should also strive for creativity and enhancement of our assessment practice. Feeding into and aligning with the implementation of the Curriculum Transformation Project, the priorities for assessment and feedback are forward-looking and aspirational, encouraging greater creativity in assessment practice. There is a priority associated with each of the principles.
- c. **Support/guidance for staff.** To support colleagues in implementing the assessment and feedback principles and priorities, this document includes brief information on the application of the principles. Additional guidance and support will be rolled out as required.
- d. **Guidance for students.** To help students make the most of assessment and feedback, a student-facing guide will explain the assessment and feedback principles from a students' perspective and help students to understand the assessment and feedback process and their role in it.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

1. Assessment will be fit for purpose

- 1.1 Assessment shall prepare students to become practitioners in their discipline;
- 1.2 Assessment shall be *for, as and of* learning;
- 1.3 Assessment shall contribute towards the Edinburgh Student Vision;
- 1.4 Assessment methods shall be appropriate to, and align with, the programme and course learning outcomes.

Application: Assessment carries a variety of purposes, which are not mutually exclusive. Assessment can serve a diagnostic purpose to assess students' prior knowledge and provide a context for future learning (assessment for learning). It can serve a formative purpose, as a means of learning, to develop students' knowledge, skills and attributes (assessment as learning). Assessment can serve a summative purpose, providing assurance of learning, monitoring learning and assessing competence (assessment of learning). In designing assessments, programme teams should be clear about the purpose(s) of the assessment, and should consider whether the chosen method of assessment is the best fit for such purpose(s). Programme teams should also ensure that the methods of assessment used across the programme are appropriate to, and align with, the programme and course learning outcomes.

Priority: Our assessment should aim to be as authentic as possible, aligned with the Edinburgh Student Vision and authentic to graduates' futures. Assessment is authentic when it is realistic, linked to disciplinary practice and to contexts of application and employment, asking students to 'do' the subject, and assessing students' abilities to apply their knowledge and skills to complex tasks and challenges).

2. Assessment and feedback practices will involve conversation with students

- 2.1 Students, teaching staff and markers shall develop a shared understanding of the purpose of assessment;
- 2.2 Students, teaching staff and markers shall develop a shared understanding of the marking criteria (and expectations);
- 2.3 Students shall be supported to undertake assessments and to develop assessment and feedback literacy;
- 2.4 Students and teaching staff shall develop a shared understanding of academic integrity in general and expected academic practices in relation to specific assessments.
- 2.5 Students shall have the opportunity to engage in dialogue (with teaching staff) and contribute to the development of assessment and feedback practices.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Application: The purpose of assessment is to facilitate learning, and should not be shrouded in mystery. Increasing dialogue with students about assessments can help to develop a shared understanding of the purpose(s) of assessment, assessment expectations and marking criteria. Time should be set aside for the discussion of assessment tasks, ensuring students understand the expectations of assessment and the criteria by which they will be assessed, as well as time to reflect on, discuss and learn from feedback. Appropriate support should be provided to enable students to undertake assessments, in particular for assessments that are novel or encountered for the first time. The more closely we can work in partnership with our students as co-creators in the design and management of assessment and feedback practices, the more likely it is that students will: have a better understanding of assessment expectations and assessment literacy, and demonstrate increased autonomy, self-regulation and responsibility and critical reflection. Working closely in partnership with students can also lead to the development of more inclusive assessments and enhance academic integrity.

Priority: To work more closely with students as partners or co-creators in assessment and feedback practices, involving students in decision-making and moving beyond assessment as something that is *done to* students to something that is *done with* them.

3. Assessment and feedback will be inclusive, equitable and fair

- 3.1 Assessment shall be developed taking into account diverse student learning needs and approaches;
- 3.2 As far as possible, assessments shall be designed to minimise the need for individual learning adjustments;
- 3.3 Students shall have the opportunity to experience a range of assessments across their programme;
- 3.4 Assessment outcomes should be equitable; where outcomes are unequal assessment methods shall be reviewed and revised accordingly.

Application: The goal of inclusive assessment is to ensure that the way we assess does not exclude or disadvantage students or create progression and awarding gaps. Inclusive assessment provides all students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement. In practice, making assessment truly inclusive by design (thus minimising the need for individual adjustments) is difficult, but is a goal we should strive for. Inclusive assessment requires taking a holistic approach from the design of assessment tasks to the development of marking criteria and the mode of feedback. This goes beyond meeting the requirements of students with disabilities and requires us proactively to consider the diverse learning needs and approaches of all our students. Programme teams should ensure that students have the opportunity to experience (and are supported to undertake) a range of assessments, and should regularly review student performance in assessment. Programme teams should take action to address any gaps in progression or achievement that are found to exist for subgroups of students (which may include increased support or assessment literacy or changing the nature of the assessment).

Priority: To minimise the use of assessments that require individual learning adjustments to be made and to make assessment inclusive by design, offering choice and flexibility to students, not just across a programme, but within an assessment task.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

4. Assessment and feedback will be reliable, robust and transparent

4.1 Assessment design shall support and encourage good academic practices and minimise opportunities or incentives for academic misconduct;

4.2 Marking criteria (and any marking rubrics) shall be provided to students along with the assessment task;

4.3 Where multiple markers are involved, the marking and moderation process shall support consistency in standards and feedback.

Application: Consistency, reliability and fairness are important goals in assessment. These are enhanced by ensuring that markers and students have a shared understanding of the assessment tasks, the criteria by which the assessment will be judged and the marking scheme. Marking rubrics or grade-related marking criteria can make the marking process more reliable and transparent to students (when given to students in advance of the assessment task and students are supported to understand them, or are involved in designing them), and ensure greater consistency in marking between multiple markers. To increase reliability, it is important that robust moderation processes are applied. In designing assessments, consideration should be given to the potential risks of the assessment to academic integrity with every effort made to reduce or remove opportunities or incentives for academic misconduct. Closed-book exams should not be considered the only way to safeguard against academic misconduct.

Priority: To design assessments with academic integrity in mind, ensuring assessment promotes good academic practice. This can be strengthened by increased student partnership in assessment and increased use of authentic, multi-stage and/or multi-modal assessments.

5. Assessment and feedback will be proportionate to the amount and level of credit

5.1 Assessment load shall be manageable for students and staff, while providing sufficient breadth and depth to maintain standards and facilitate student learning;

5.2 Assessment workload shall be comparable across courses or units of learning at the same level and credit weighting;

5.3 The format and volume of feedback shall vary according to the type and scale of assessment ensuring feedback is targeted appropriately.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Application: Assessment load and challenge should be comparable within programmes and across courses or units of learning of the same level and credit weighting. Assessment loading should also take into account when assessment occurs, ensuring assessments are spread out throughout the year to minimise bunching of deadlines. Clusters of high-stakes assignments can have a negative impact on student wellbeing and performance, and can set the context for high levels of extensions and special circumstances applications. Within a single programme we should seek to avoid over-assessment of the same learning outcomes/competencies, unless there are clear developmental objectives. Given the desire to maintain a diverse range of assessments in use across the University, it is appropriate that assessment loads are determined at a local level. Schools (subject areas or programmes) should determine appropriate assessment loads that are comparable in workload for courses or units of learning at the same level and credit weighting. This should also include agreement on the type and amount of feedback to be provided, to ensure comparability in feedback across similar types of assessment. The nature and amount of feedback will vary according to the type and scale of assessment (e.g. exam feedback may be more focused on the mark and generic feedback, compared with continuous assessed work where individual or group feedback is more likely, and formative feedback opportunities exist).

Priority: To minimise over-assessment, spread assessment out thus making full use of the academic year, and, where possible, make greater use of programme-level assessment to reduce the need for repeated or over-assessment of skills, attributes or competencies in individual courses or units of learning.

6. Feedback on assessment will be constructive, developmental and timely

- 6.1 Feedback shall be provided on all formative and summative assessed work;
- 6.2 All feedback shall facilitate student learning by helping students evaluate and develop their performance;
- 6.3 Students shall be given sufficient time to reflect and act upon feedback between assignments, where this is practical;
- 6.4 Feedback on all assessed work shall normally be returned within three weeks of submission. Where this is not possible, students shall be given clear expectations regarding the timing and methods of feedback.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Application: The primary purpose of feedback should be to facilitate student learning. Assessment tasks should be designed in such a way as to allow the time and space for constructive and developmental feedback to be provided to students, and for students to reflect on and act upon the feedback. For feedback to be useful, it needs to be provided in a timely manner. In many cases, it will be possible to return feedback on assessed work to students within three working weeks of submission, and we should aim to achieve this standard where possible. In other cases (e.g. large classes and/or longer assignments), marking and the provision of quality feedback may take longer than three working weeks. All course organisers should therefore inform students (in the course information) of the date by which they can expect to receive feedback on their assessed work. Feedback is more developmental where it is formative (feedforward), rather than summative. Whilst summative feedback provides an important function, an over-reliance on summative assessment, close to the end of a course, offers limited opportunity for learning development.

Priority: To provide more opportunity for formative feedback in assessment tasks. This should not lead to an overall increase in workload, but a rethinking of the place of feedback in the assessment process. By increasing feedback dialogue with students throughout the assessment process and shifting the balance or emphasis of feedback from the end of the assessment (when students cannot change anything) to earlier in the assessment process allows students to learn from the feedback and improve their performance. In this way, feedback becomes more valuable to students in relation to the assessment.

7. Assessment and feedback will make appropriate use of learning technologies

7.1 Learning technologies shall be used to facilitate efficient, user-friendly and effective assessment, marking and feedback for students and staff;

7.2 Learning technologies shall be used in ways that respect and support the development of students as data subjects and data citizens;

7.3 Learning technologies shall be used with due consideration of the effects of potential biases and limitations of algorithmic systems and/or automated components on which the technology may be based.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Application: Learning technologies provide opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the assessment process for both students and staff. Wherever practical, assessments will be completed, submitted, marked and feedback provided in digital format. Learning technologies can be used to increase the scope for creativity, innovation and experimentation in assessment, support new kinds of assessment, and help students develop the digital and creative skills needed for effective use of contemporary modes of knowledge representation. Learning technologies can also contribute to addressing many of the other priorities, but particularly enhanced diversity, authenticity and choice of assessments. It is important that learning technologies are used appropriately and in ways that respect and support the development of students as data subjects and data citizens. For example, technologies (including those for detecting plagiarism and other forms of misconduct) should be used with due consideration of the effects of potential biases and limitations.

Priority: To make appropriate increased use of technology to support creativity, innovation and experimentation in assessment and feedback (including supporting increased inclusivity and academic integrity). This includes supporting students to develop skills in contemporary modes of writing and representing knowledge, and encouraging creativity and diversity in presentation of academic work.

8. Assessment and feedback approaches shall be developed and monitored at the programme level to ensure:

- 8.1 Overall fitness for purpose of assessment and alignment with programme learning outcomes;
- 8.2 Alignment with and development of the Edinburgh Student Vision;
- 8.3 Variety in assessment across a programme;
- 8.4 Appropriate challenge for the level of study, enabling students to develop and improve during their degrees;
- 8.5 Assessment timing is suitably coordinated and sufficiently flexible affording students appropriate time to undertake each assessment;
- 8.6 An appropriate balance of formative versus summative assessment across a programme;
- 8.7 Consistency in assessment load relative to credit (to protect against over-assessment);
- 8.8 Enough time for feedback to be provided by staff and used by students.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Application: A central principle is that assessment and feedback should be monitored at the programme level. This ensures adherence to the other principles and provides oversight of assessment and feedback at the programme or subject level. Assessment is integral to learning and teaching, and needs to be considered as a central component of programme and course design to ensure overall fitness for purpose of assessment methods and alignment with programme learning outcomes, as well as consistency in assessment effort whilst also promoting assessment diversity across the programme. Greater oversight of assessment at the programme level also paves the way for the development of programme-level assessment - integrative or synoptic assessments - that combine learning from across multiple units of learning in a programme into a single assessment. As well as encouraging students to make connections in their learning across a programme, it can also reduce assessment overload and duplication. It can also free up space for more formative assessment to take place at appropriate points.

Priority: To develop opportunities for programme-level, integrative or synoptic assessments.



Assessment and Feedback Principles and Priorities

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage appropriately with assessment tasks.• Proactively seek support if unclear on what is required in an assessment.• Read, reflect on and act upon the feedback provided.• Engage with assessments honestly and fairly, upholding academic integrity.
Course Organisers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design and manage assessment and feedback in accordance with these principles and priorities.• Engage in continuous professional development to enhance assessment and feedback practice.• Oversee and report on progress against Course-level actions and priorities for feedback and assessment development.
Programme Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee and regularly review assessments within their programmes, ensuring continued alignment with these principles and priorities.• Provide leadership and direction to programme teams in assessment design and innovation.• Oversee programme-level assessments.• Oversee and report on progress against programme-level actions and priorities for assessment and feedback development.
Heads of School / Directors of Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure adherence to the principles and priorities.• Undertake to review School assessment and feedback practice against the principles and priorities, identifying gaps and developing action plans for development.• Oversee and report on progress against School level actions and priorities for assessment and feedback development.
College Committees	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide fora for sharing best practice in assessment and feedback.• Advise on areas of priority or development within the College.• Oversee and report on progress against College-wide actions and priorities for assessment and feedback development.
Senate Education Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oversee and maintain this document.• Advise on areas of priority and development at institution level.• Oversee and report on progress against institution-level actions and priorities for assessment and feedback.

8 September 2022