



Assessment Framework

Guidance Notes

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Purpose

1. This document serves as a framework for course¹ teams designing the assessment of their courses. Assessment design should be developed at the course level and then considered at module level to avoid assessment overload. The intention is that these principles will not only enhance the student experience, promoting equity across disciplines, but also ultimately enhance the working lives of staff.
2. This framework also lies down guidance in assessment to ensure, where possible, that marking consistency is promoted within assessment design and expectations for marking within course teams.
3. Undergraduate courses are expected to consist of 30-credit modules, each with between four and six learning outcomes and up to three pieces of assessment. Foundation courses are in turn expected to consist of 20-credit modules, with two pieces of assessment. Assessment design should also consider the scalability of assessment design, depending on change to cohort size.
4. This guide includes examples of word count equivalency for commonly used assessment methods and also suggests notional assessment work hours/preparation as a proportion of the notional learning hours for a module. This has been created for the purpose of supporting assessment design.
5. Instances of any form of deviation from the Assessment Framework, other than Professional, Statutory, and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirement need to be justified at the approval stage.
6. This document should be reviewed in alignment with other University of Buckingham policies and procedures including (but not limited to) Academic Integrity, Mitigating Circumstances, all course change procedures and the External Examiner Code of Practice.

Design

1. Assessment design should consider the notional learning hours of a module in alignment with [Quality Assurance Agency: Advice and Guidance on Assessment](#). Across the sector, the standard is that between 20% and 30% of the notional learning hours in a module should be spent on assessment preparation and completion:

Unit weighting	Notional Learning Hours	Assessment workload hours (20%)	Assessment workload hours (30%)
20	200	40	60
30	300	60	90

¹ For the avoidance of doubt, "course" shall refer to any course, module or unit of taught curriculum construct, whether delivered face-to-face, online, by means of work-based learning or any combination of these, whether assessed or not and/or whether leading to a higher education or other award or not.



40	400	80	120
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60	600	120	180
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Most institutions within the sector seem to lean towards the lower load of approximately 20% of the notional learning time of a module. Assessment workload hours include, for example, gathering, reading, and organising information, drafting plans, writing up/assembly, editing, revision or rehearsal, and delivery time, i.e. delivering a presentation or completing an exam.

Terminology

1. Assessments can be split into two main types of assessment, i.e. formative assessment and summative assessment. The assessment variations are in line with the [Quality Assurance Agency Glossary of terms](#).
2. **Formative Assessment** is completed for feedback purposes only. Marks which are given for any formative work are purely indicative, they are not involved in the final attainment for the module or overall award.
3. **Summative Assessment** contributes to a student's module mark and, therefore, their overall academic achievement.
4. Unless specified, all assessment laid out within the module specification will be summative. Formative assessment should be incorporated into the design of all modules.
5. Different items of assessment measure different learning outcomes within a module. A single learning outcome should not be double-assessed.
6. To improve the student experience and promote consistency across courses, there is also the intention to streamline the terminology which is used in relation to assessment.
7. Where possible, it is encouraged to use generic assessment terminology such as 'written assignment'. The nature of the assessment can then be included within the module guide.
8. Where possible, course directors are discouraged from relying simply on traditional assessment mechanisms such as exams, essays and reports and, instead, to demonstrate versatility within the course assessment design. Students can also be presented with options within an assessment, provided that those options meet the required module learning outcomes.

Assessment Term Used	Assessment within the category
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Written coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Case study• Essay• Laboratory report• Policy briefs• Reflective account• Report• Research proposal.• Technical report (written)• Annotated bibliography• Blog posts
Coursework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Computer code• Mathematical problems• Technical report (including figures, diagrams etc.)• Role plays/solo/ensemble performances• A collection of studio work• Videos• Podcasts
Presentation (Group/Individual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PowerPoint• Video
Test	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• In class• Multiple choice• Moodle
Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exam
Research Project/Dissertation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Substantive piece of research/coursework
Portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A compilation of smaller pieces of assessment (amounting to 1 mark for the assessment overall)
Module engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tutorial contribution• In class discussion• Course engagement

Note: The above list is non-exhaustive but provides an opportunity to incorporate improved standardisation of assessment terminology.



Types of Assessment

1. In consideration of assessment design, there is a broad spectrum of assessment which can be utilised across a course of study, thus promoting a balance between course focused assessment, and a more modularised focus of assessment.
2. **Holistic Assessment** is designed to review a student's wider performance, not just in a specific module or learning outcome. This is a comprehensive assessment of students' strengths and weaknesses and considering cognitive, emotional and communication skills.
3. **Diagnostic Assessment** allows module leaders and course staff to assess students' strengths and weaknesses as well as their skills before a module or course commences. This can include English language assessments, such as IELTS, and can also be utilised as a basis upon which to determine the best way to work with students.
4. **Ipsative Assessment** is a comparative assessment, which allows the review of a student's current performance compared to previous performance. This is not to enable comparisons to be made within the context of a wider cohort, but is intended to focus on individual personal growth.
5. **Integrated Assessment** is a type of assessment design that seeks to combine students' learning from multiple modules and/or levels into a single assessment; this facilitates synoptic learning by enabling students to make connections between modules and learning outcomes.
6. When designing assessment, it is recommended that all course teams consider the diversity and spread of their assessment design, to consider the course holistically as part of the assessment overview. This should be done regularly, including when moving/changing modules within a course and/or updating module assessments. One of the simplest ways in which to achieve this, is to use of an assessment matrix, available on the Quality SharePoint site.

Regulatory Considerations

This framework aligns with the [Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies](#) and, therefore, supports compliance with the Office for Students' (OfS) Condition of Registration B5 (alignment of awards with national standards).

Inclusive Design

Inclusive assessment design should be ensured and undertaken in consultation with the Wellbeing, Skills and Diversity team and the University's Inclusivity committee. Assessment should also be conducted in alignment with the University's 'green flag' marking policy. However, in line with the OfS expectations for higher education providers, this does not mean that assessment design needs to disregard poor spelling, punctuation and grammar for all students. Assessment design should remain inclusive, whilst recognising written proficiency in English where appropriate as an essential employability skill.



Number and Weighting

1. For a 30-unit module, the expectation would be to include no more than three assessment pieces (including formative submissions), thus an equivalence of one piece of assessment per 10 units of study.
2. For all 20-unit modules, the expectation would be to consist of a maximum of two pieces of assessment (including formative submissions), again providing an equivalence of one piece of assessment per 10 units of study.
3. The maximum recommended assessment load for any module above 30-units is four pieces of assessment.
4. In alignment with the University's External Examiner Code of Practice (EECP), any assignment which makes up 30% or above of the overall module mark is expected to be sent to the External Examiner for review.
5. To align with the EECP and the University Assessment Learning and Teaching Strategy, all assessments, which are worth 30% or above of the overall module mark, should be marked and then moderated in alignment with university practice.
6. When considering word count, there should not be an immediate change to the word count of an assessment due to the level of the module. The word count does not correlate to level of study; however, the substance within the assessment should be reflective of the module level.
7. All word counts for students are subject to the University of Buckingham standard of a discretionary +/- 10%.

Word Count Equivalency

1. The following table is a non-exhaustive list of word count equivalency for common assessment mechanisms, which make up substantive module weighting. This will allow the design of inclusive assessment, without overburdening a student's cognitive load:

Assessment Type	Word Count Equivalency	Notional Assessment Work Hours
Independent written work	1000 words	10 hours
Exam	1 hour	10 hours
Group written work	750 words per member	10 hours
Poster	Poster	10 hours
MCQ test	1 hour	10 hours
Presentation (individual)	15 mins	10 hours
Presentation (small group)	10 minutes per member	20 hours
Viva/oral exam	20-30 minutes	20 hours
Research proposal (small project)	4000 words	40 hours
Research project/dissertation	8000 words	80 hours



Note: where there is more than one piece of assessment per module, the assessment workload will be divided accordingly.

2. The word count allocation for a specific module needs to present an opportunity for students to prove that they have met the module learning outcomes, whilst ensuring that there is no expectation to exceed the notional learning hours.
3. Course teams might also like to provide a word count range, depending on the demands of the assessment.
4. Examples of the ways in which assessment types might be combined for a 20-unit module include:
 - a. one 3000-word essay and a 15-minute presentation
 - b. two MCQ Tests and a 2000-word essay
 - c. a group presentation, a 1000-word reflective report and a poster
 - d. one 2-hour examination and two blog posts at 1000 words each
 - e. a marketing plan and module engagement

These can then be modified to meet the needs of modules with a higher unit value to reflect more notional assessment hours.

5. All the figures listed above are considered as being exclusive of footnotes, appendices, bibliographies and references.

Tasks

1. In instances where it is felt that one assessment would benefit from being broken down into multiple staged/cumulative tasks, for assessment purpose it should be classified as a 'portfolio', thereby addressing multiple learning outcomes, facilitating distribution of assessment workload and promoting timely feedback.
2. In instances where there is no obvious re-sit mechanism for an assessment without students having to re-sit the module, the expected re-sit needs to be laid out within the module specification and included in the Assessment Notes in e:Vision. For example, a module which includes module engagement/tutorial contribution would be re-taken by the submission of an appropriate-length reflective essay.
3. Assessment design should not just be considered within the learning outcomes of the module, but also in the context of the leaning outcomes of the course. It is the responsibility of the course director to ensure that there is versatile and even distribution of assessment types across the course.
4. In instances where there is group assessment as one assessment component , there should be a piece of independent assessment which is of a higher weighting.

Retention

In line with the OfS Conditions of Registration, the University of Buckingham will retain records of assessed work for five years after a student has completed the course. The OfS guidance on the retention of assessed work is available [here](#).



Anonymous Marking

1. Anonymity of student work at the point of marking is often appropriate, both for reasons of equity and to address performance differentials, and to avoid situations where unconscious and conscious bias could play a part. It respects student confidentiality and can help ensure fairness when decisions are being made that will affect continuation and final awards.
2. Sector guidance specifically recommends that institutions have regulations and guidance to govern, among other things 'the use of anonymous marking and the point at which anonymity is lifted' but also emphasises that 'familiarity with students' work, which can identify when students have used assistance or commissioned work, is balanced with the principle of anonymous marking'.
3. Given the University's emphasis on small-group teaching, with small seminar and tutorial sizes and its emphasis on formative assessment in tandem with summative, anonymous marking is, however, not always practical or consistent with specific assessment objectives.
4. Anonymity at point of assessment can be provided through VLE portals such as Turnitin, where, when this option is 'turned on' submitted work is given a unique identifier which cannot be related to a student's name or ID number without reference to a central register. It can then be 'turned off' when marking is complete, e.g. when the 'post-date' has been reached. This means that anonymity should not normally be lifted before the post-date and, if this is done e.g. for the purposes of an Academic Integrity investigation, that requests to do so should be in writing by the relevant Academic Integrity Advocate, copied to the Faculty administration team.

Marking Consistency

1. Disagreement between markers is expected to arise and can often demonstrate robust analysis of the merits of a piece of work. Departments are therefore expected to find a way in which to adjudicate between significant discrepancies, where agreement cannot be reached between parties, either by awarding the deciding vote to the Course Director for resolution, or reassigning marking to a second pair of markers.
2. To encourage marking consistency, course teams are encouraged to discuss assessment rubrics and grade descriptors to promote shared understanding prior to marking.

Moderation and Second Marking

1. Course teams are expected to moderate all assignments which are worth 30% or above of the overall module mark.
2. In alignment with the sample of marking laid out in the EECF, the minimum sample of work which is required to be moderated is 10% of all assessment scripts, or twelve scripts, whichever is greater. This sample should contain all First Class Awards, all Fails, and a portion of the rest.
3. However, if the course teams from any discipline area wish to go beyond moderation and adopt a second marking approach to all work, this can be done at departmental discretion. For larger pieces of summative work, in modules where the major contribution to the



module mark comes from a particular assessment, e.g. the dissertation, project, all such work will normally be second marked.

4. **Moderation** is sometimes called 'check marking' as it involves selectively checking what the first marker has done rather than duplicating everything. In moderation, a first marker marks and writes feedback (i.e. assesses student work) and, following this, the moderator checks those marks and feedback.
5. **Second marking** is often known as 'independent double marking'. Two markers mark the work independently and give comments. They then meet to agree a grade, then their individual feedback is combined and finalised by the first marker.
6. Evidence of either second marking or moderation needs to be made available for the external examiner to review.

Review and Continuation

1. Assessment areas should be regularly reviewed and mapped in alignment with the University's Annual Monitoring procedure.
2. The University will ensure that student outcomes are monitored at course and university level, enabling effective review of assessment and performance. This will also allow the University leadership to review continuation in alignment with the OfS Conditions of Registration.