University Framework for Assessment Design in Taught Programmes

Scope

1. Assessment is defined broadly as any activity (e.g. problem-solving, written exercises, performances, examinations and presentations) that measures intended learning outcomes for a programme and on which students are assessed (either by markers, peers, automated systems, or themselves).

2. The Framework for Assessment Design relates to both summative and formative assessment. Formative assessment (paragraphs 17 and 18) plays a key role in supporting student learning, providing opportunities to practice skills and measure knowledge, and developing students' assessment literacy. Academic units should recognise that ‘low stakes’ summative assessments (< 30%) may be more beneficial than purely formative assessment.

3. The purpose of the Framework is to ensure that academic units consider assessment holistically across each programme (not just at modular level) to guarantee that students are able to demonstrate the learning outcomes, whilst preventing assessment burden on students and staff. The Framework should be used to support effective implementation of the Assessment Design Principles outlined in the University Policy on Assessment and Feedback.

4. While academic units must adhere to the Assessment Framework, it cannot address every situation in every specific discipline. As the University wishes to support inclusive, alternative, and innovative methods of assessment, academic units may interpret the upper limits flexibly when applying them to other types of assessment not included in this document.

5. UG and PGT dissertation and project work is not expected to adhere to the upper limits listed below but is subject to approval by the relevant Dean through the module approval process.

6. Preparatory foundation programmes at FHEQ Level 3 are exempt from the Framework.

Principles

7. The principles of the Framework are:
   a. Assessment should be designed to measure the programme-level intended knowledge outcomes, and the form(s) of assessment used should test intended skills outcomes.

   b. An assessment is a single submission, rather than multiple submissions for one piece of work. An assessment should consider the total time required for completion and whether preparation and completion has been accounted for elsewhere, e.g. in a taught session.

   c. Where assessment is beyond the Framework, academic units must consider if there are an appropriate number of intended learning outcomes and whether some outcomes being assessed
might be met more appropriately elsewhere in the programme or are being assessed in multiple places in the programme.

d. Formative assessment should be provided in every module. Formative activities could be undertaken within taught sessions or out with the timetable. Where formative activities are solely undertaken within a taught session, or are optional practice activities, these would not be considered to contribute to assessments as set out in 9. Formative assessment and practice should be embedded within module delivery as an ongoing process that contributes to summative assessment.

e. Assessments, and the feedback received on them, should be used to structure and scaffold students’ learning throughout a degree programme, with feedback feeding forward across modules and stages. For this reason, assessment should be considered at both stage and programme level. In particular, academic units should work to ensure that students have exposure to a range of appropriate assessment types and that workload is proportionate across the academic year and programme. It is recognised that it may be difficult to obtain the optimum distribution of assessment load on students when one module contributes to a number of different programmes, or in the case of Joint and Combined Honours students who take modules across multiple academic units. In such circumstances, DPDs should consider the needs of students and make whatever adjustments are possible and appropriate.

f. Academic units are encouraged to engage with Theme 4 of the University Education Strategy to provide students with an education experience supported and enhanced by technology. Utilising technology enhanced learning to develop e-assessments will allow academic units to provide inclusive, alternative, and innovative methods of assessment.

g. Academic units should consider the progression of assessment (i.e. from Stage 1 to Stage 2, or from UG to PGT) not purely in terms of assessment length or duration but also in terms of complexity. An essay with a higher word count or a longer exam is not necessarily more difficult, nor does it necessarily assess higher-level cognitive skills. As noted in paragraph 7a, assessments should be designed to measure intended learning outcomes; therefore, as learning outcomes change over the stages of a degree, so too should the design of assessment questions and formats.

h. If students at different FHEQ levels are being co-taught, it is not appropriate to assign an identical assessment as the expectations and learning outcomes are necessarily different. Although assessment types and lengths may be the same, some differentiation should be made in the questions or tasks assigned to reflect the higher level intended knowledge and skills outcomes.

i. Academic units should consider reasonable assessment adjustments, which may include developing multiple forms of assessment for each submission.

Assessment types and limits

8. The University utilises 20 credit modules as the standard, which is the basis for the Framework. Where modules with lower or higher credit weights exist, the Framework should be applied flexibly; a 30 credit module may not need as much as 50% more assessment than a 20 credit module, and a 10 credit module may need more than half that of a 20 credit module.
9. For a 20 credit module, a maximum of two summative assessments may be set, with no more than three assessments in total e.g. two summative assessments and one formative assessment, one summative and two formative assessments, or one summative and one formative assessment. The Framework should be applied flexibly to modules with a higher or lower credit weighting; a 30 credit module may set four assessments, of which at least one must be formative, and a 10 credit module may set two assessments, one summative and one formative.

10. All upper limits stated in points 11, 13 and 16 are based on 100% assessment contribution. Should a specific assessment contribute less than 100% of the final module mark, the length may be reduced accordingly.

Examinations

11. All examinations (unseen or closed book; practical; open book; online) must be no more than 3 hours. It is the discretion of the academic unit to determine if reading time is required within examinations.

Written assessments

12. Written assessment is a broad term for summative and formative assessments, including blog posts, learning diaries, reflective writing, computation exercises, portfolios, posters, laboratory reports, essays, literature reviews, and research reports. This wide diversity is to be encouraged, and academic units must consider what upper and lower limits in terms of length are most appropriate. The upper and lower limits should reflect the length that students need to achieve the learning outcomes, acknowledging that sometimes the skill is in one’s ability to be concise.

13. All written assessments (individual and group) must be no more than 3,500 words (seven single spaced pages).

Written assessments with a non-textual component

14. Many written assessments will include information presented in a non-textual format (diagrams, tables, figures, images, etc.). If the creation of non-textual material is a key skill being assessed (and is linked to the intended learning outcomes), as opposed to an element of presentation, the time spent and skills developed in doing so should be considered when deciding on an upper limit. Non-textual components should be considered within the upper limit, rather than appended to the final submission. Such types of written assessment may necessarily be shorter in length than 3,500 words. It should be made clear to students how the quality of the non-textual components will affect their marks.

Visual and audio presentations

15. Visual and audio presentations include oral presentations, lightning talks, three-minute theses, videos, vlogs and podcasts.

16. All visual and audio presentations must be no more than 15 minutes for an individual presentation and 30 minutes for a group presentation.
Formative opportunities

17. Formative assessments include examinations, written assessments, presentations and online tests that do not contribute to the final mark but which a student is expected to complete.

18. Formative practice includes examinations, written assessments, presentations and online tests that would benefit the student’s development but there is no requirement for completion.