University Assessment Tariff: Guidelines on Summative Assessment 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 on a module and on which students are assessed (either by markers, peers, automated systems, or themselves).

2. The University Assessment Tariff relates to summative assessment. It does not explicitly provide guidelines on formative work (i.e. those assessments that do not count toward the final mark in the module). However, the principles outlined below do consider the place and value of formative and ‘low stakes’ assessment in the context of overall module assessment.

3. The University Assessment Tariff should be taken as guidance and, as such, it cannot address every situation in every specific discipline. As the University wishes to support alternative and innovative methods of assessment, academic units are encouraged to interpret the tariffs on written work and exams flexibly when applying them to other types of assessment (e.g. portfolios, learning diaries, seminar performance, etc.).

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

Principles

5. The principles of the Assessment Tariff are:

a. Assessment should be designed to measure intended knowledge outcomes, and the form(s) of assessment used in any given module should test intended skills outcomes. For this reason, a 20 or 30 credit module would normally have multiple types of assessment (e.g. a written exercise and an exam, or an oral presentation and a literature review), although 5 or 10 credit modules may only have one type of summative assessment. Where assessment seems excessive on a given module, academic units should consider if there are an appropriate number of intended learning outcomes and think about whether some outcomes being assessed might be met more appropriately elsewhere in the programme or are being assessed in multiple places in the programme.

b. If a module only has one summative assessment (e.g. a final examination or a final research essay), then it should provide opportunities for formative assessment. Formative assessment plays a key role in supporting student learning, providing opportunities to practice skills and measure knowledge, and developing students’ assessment literacy. Units should also recognise that ‘low stakes’ assessments might at times be more beneficial than purely formative assessment and that they may choose to incorporate those instead.

c. Assessments, and the feedback received on them, should be used to structure and scaffold students’ learning throughout a degree programme. For this reason, academic units should think about assessment not only at module level but also (where possible) across a stage and programme. In particular, units should work to ensure that students have exposure to a range of appropriate assessment types and that workload is balanced across the academic year and
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.

d. In deciding the number and methods of assessment for each module, consideration should be given to the type and quantity of feedback that will most benefit students. Academic units should take the provision of appropriate feedback (including feedback turnaround deadlines) into account when deciding on appropriate assessment deadlines, types, and lengths.

e. Academic units should think about 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 Principle 1, 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.

f. 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.

g. One-year master’s programmes pose challenges for assessment, as students need to build skill sets and assessment literacy quickly. It may be appropriate to build ‘low stakes’ and/or formative assessment into the curriculum.

h. Academic staff should have an agreed statement that stipulates any penalties for going over the set word count (or page limit); this should be agreed at School or subject-level. Penalties may be unit-wide or may vary depending on the type of assignment and the learning outcomes that it is testing (e.g. brevity). There may be instances where a penalty is not imposed, or where it is stipulated that markers will only assess up to the maximum word count. Word counts should be clearly published (on the MOF and on student assessment instructions), and any stated penalty should be clearly communicated to all markers and students, and then consistently applied. If there is a School or subject-wide statement, care should be taken to communicate any penalties with students from other academic units, including Joint and Combined Honours students.

i. When there are a number of small assessments (e.g. short exercises or writing assignments), units should remember that the University only requires moderation when a piece of work counts for 30% or more of a 20 credit module. When there are a number of brief assessments, it may be appropriate to moderate only a small representative sample of student work, and to ensure the final module marks are appropriate. Academic units should address moderation in such circumstances in their local moderation policies.

j. The overall word counts and assessment durations given below are upper limits only and not strict requirements. Academic units are encouraged to make use of the full range of assessment lengths, recognising that it may not always be appropriate to allow for the highest possible word count or examination length. Work in a foreign language may stipulate a lower word count, for example, and artistic performances would not necessarily require the same time as a laboratory exam, although both would be considered ‘practical’. Units may also wish to consider how to reflect progression in
the word count, possibly expecting a higher word count for PGT or final-stage UG students. In any of these situations and in others, units should regard the tariffs as flexible.

Assessment types and tariffs

6. The University wishes to encourage the use of 20 credit modules where possible, and this has been used as the basis for the tariff. The tariff should thus be applied flexibly to modules with higher or lower credit weighting; 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.

7. In all examples given below, an upper limit is given for assessments that contribute 100%, 70% or 50% or less to a final module mark. If a module has a number of small assessments (e.g. 5 exercises that each count 10%), then guidance is given on the total amount that may be appropriate.

Examinations

8. Unseen or closed book examinations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of assessment (for module)</th>
<th>Upper Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% and under</td>
<td>1.5 hours</td>
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Note: Total hours should normally be no more than 4 hours in examination (e.g. 4 1-hour exams each worth 25%)

9. Practical exams/open book exams:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of assessment (for module)</th>
<th>Upper Limit</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50% and under</td>
<td>2.25 hours</td>
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Note: Total hours should normally be no more than 5 hours of practical exams (e.g. 2 2.25-hour exams each worth 50%)

10. Online examinations would normally be expected to adhere to the same upper limits as stipulated in the above categories.

Coursework

11. Coursework is a broad term that includes everything from blog posts and reflective writing to computation exercises, lab reports, literature reviews, and research reports. This wide diversity is to be encouraged, and academic units must consider what word count is most appropriate. The word count 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of assessment (for module)</th>
<th>Upper Limit</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>4000 words or equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>70%</td>
<td>2500 words or equivalent</td>
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<tr>
<td>50% and under</td>
<td>2000 words or equivalent</td>
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Note: Total word count should normally be no more than 6000 for a 20 credit module (e.g. 3 2000-word essays each worth 1/3 of the final mark)

Coursework with a non-textual component
12. Many types of coursework 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, then the time spent and skills developed in doing so should be considered when deciding on a required word count. Such types of coursework may necessarily have a lower word count, even a substantially lower word count where the non-textual component dominates the learning outcomes. It should be made clear to students how the quality of the non-textual components will affect their marks.

Oral presentations

13. Oral presentations should not normally be less than 5 minutes (given as the minimum amount of time in which a student can successfully cover the content) and should not normally exceed 20 minutes. Group presentations may be slightly longer than individual presentations, but would rarely exceed 25-30 minutes. If there are large groups, academic units may wish to consider combining an oral presentation with other forms of assessment (posters, portfolio, etc.).

Group work

14. The length of a group assignment should not be a multiple of the suggested individual assignment length. For example, a group of 3 students should not submit a 6000 word essay because the tariff for an individual essay worth 50% or less is 2000 words. Instead, academic units should consider an appropriate length or duration that may be marginally higher than the tariffs stated above.