Queen Mary Code of Practice on Assessment and Feedback

Queen Mary
University of London

ESD Educational and Staff Development

www.esd.qmul.ac.uk

Queen Mary Code of Practice on Assessment and Feedback

1. Preamble

1.1 This code of practice is intended to inform policy and practice on assessment and in the giving of feedback to students.

1.2 Students of the College have a right to high quality assessment and feedback, which [a] meets their needs as learners, [b] the College's obligations and responsibilities to treat them all fairly and equitably and [c] ensures the maintenance of academic standards. This Code of Practice has been drawn up with reference to the QAA Code of Practice on Assessment of Students (2006).

1.3 Across the HE sector nationally, assessment and feedback have been the lowest scoring areas in the National Student Survey, and in the first two years of operation the College scored particularly poorly in this area.

1.4 Departments, Schools and Institutes should adhere to the Principles of this Code of Practice and adopt local strategies based on it. The progress with implementation of these local strategies will be evaluated through the Annual Report on Teaching, annual review of modules and programmes, and College internal reviews.

1.5 In this Code of Practice, 'assessment' refers to any activity, task, assignment or examination set as part of the student's academic programme, whether or not the mark or grade for this work contributes to final summative assessment.

1.6 'Feedback' refers to oral or written developmental advice on performance that ensures the recipient has a better understanding of values, standards, criteria, etc' (Fry et al, 2003). It should provide students with information on their achievements so as to inform their approaches to learning and improve their performance. Feedback should also give students opportunities for reflection and allow them to make specific improvements in future assessment.

1.7 Feedback may be given through project supervision, personal tutoring, or through less formal means (for example, in seminars, tutorials or laboratory classes) but these are not necessarily bound by this Code. Seminar tutors and demonstrators have an important role in giving this type of informal feedback, but academic staff are responsible for the quality of such feedback.

1.8 Whilst this Code is concerned primarily with assessment and feedback given by academic staff, it is important to note that self-reflection activated through assessment and peer assessment also impact on student work.

1.9 This Code of Practice (has been) approved by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and by Academic Board and will be reported to Council. It will be reviewed at the end of the first year of operation to ensure its fitness for purpose for use in the College.

1.10 Educational and Staff Development have produced a Good Practice Guide on Assessment and Feedback to Students which may be of use to staff in implementation of this Code. This can be downloaded from the ESD website www.esd.qmul.ac.uk.

2 Principles of the Code of Practice on Assessment and Feedback

The principles below are those which will underpin all assessment and feedback given through modules/courses/units and programmes.

Queen Mary Principles of Academic Assessment

1. Assessment will be designed to aid students' learning and maintain academic standards.

2. Assessment tasks and processes will be fair.

3. Assessment will be explicitly aligned to appropriate criteria as determined by schools, departments and disciplines.

4. Assessment criteria will normally be published for all modules/courses/units.

5. Assessment will align with the requirements of relevant professional bodies.

6. Assessment methods and content will be reviewed periodically to ensure continuing fitness for purpose.

7. Summative assessment will be designed to mark the work submitted and not the student submitting it.

8. Marking consistency will be checked and, in accordance with College policy, double marking undertaken for summative assessment.

9. A diverse range of assessment methods will be used, wherever possible, to capture diverse learning outcomes and accommodate all learners

10. Marking will be undertaken professionally and in appropriate settings.

Queen Mary Principles of Feedback on Student Learning

1. Feedback will be given in ways that promote students' learning

2. Feedback will be given as often as is practicable using a variety of strategies, as deemed appropriate.

3. Curriculum design will be informed by a requirement to integrate opportunities for giving and receiving feedback.

4. Feedback will be relevant, informative and appropriately detailed

5. Feedback will be given within a reasonable timescale determined by school or departmental policy and advertised clearly to students. However, feedback should always be in a timeframe that allows students to learn for subsequent summative assessment.

6. Feedback will be efficient and use a range of approaches as deemed best practice in each discipline.

7. Feedback will provide academic staff with information that can be used to inform their teaching and curriculum development.

8. Members of a course team and academic advisers should be informed of the progress of students and their areas of success or lack of understanding.

9. Further to Assessment Principle 9 above, feedback will be appropriate to the nature of the assessment task.

Some other useful definitions

Assessment criteria

This is important for students – for whom such criteria can be useful in framing and developing their assessment tasks; and for staff – for whom a shared understanding of the criteria can ease marking and lessen confusion (particularly where there are multiple markers, or double marking is done). Marking criteria may, as described above, be task-specific, or generic grade descriptors may be used. It is also possible for a combination of both to be used (for example, task-specific criteria could outline area expected to be covered or methods used, whilst generic descriptors outline the skills or competences needed to be demonstrated for specific grades).

Criteria-referenced assessment

Work which is marked according to a set of pre-defined criteria. These criteria could be specific to the piece of work itself (marking criteria) or to the grade awarded (grade-related criteria). In this method of assessment, it should be possible for all students to gain an A (or to fail) depending on their grasp of the subject.

Formative assessment

Work which does not ultimately count towards the final mark for the course unit. In some cases, formative assessment could be plans, drafts or sections of work which will be summatively assessed, on which feedback is given so that the student can improve or alter their performance. The most important point about formative assessment is that its purpose is primarily developmental, rather than judgemental.

Norm-referenced assessment

Work which is marked according to the position of the individual within the group. In this approach, there is no objective definition of grades, rather the top X% gain an A, the next Y% a B, and so on. Using this method of assessment means that it is difficult (if not impossible) to compare performance across courses, as a course unit with strong, high performing students will have the same proportion of A grades as a course unit made up of weaker, poorer performing students. A good example of norm-referencing is TV quiz shows, where the highest score (mark) in an edition will get a contestant through to the next round, even if that score would not have been high enough to win another, comparable, edition.

Summative assessment

Work for which the mark counts toward the student's final mark for the course unit or module.

References

Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (2006) Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality and Academic Standards, Section 6, Assessment of Students – September 2006.

www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section6/COP_AOS.pdf

Fry, H., Ketteridge, S. and S Marshall (eds) 2003. A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Second edition, London: Routledge p 435

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