Dr Graham Kirby, Director of Teaching, School of Computer Science

The School of Computer Science has trialled workshops where students, tutors and programme co-ordinators are given samples of completed projects which had been awarded different grades, and the associated marking criteria; participants were asked to evaluate the grade that the piece of work should be awarded. The aim was to raise students’ awareness of the process of grading, the key criteria used to grade, and the how grades reflect performance. It was hoped that students would then be in a better position to understand the requirements of assessment and they would perform better.

The workshops ran successfully and led to discussions of fairness in assessment and appeared to be well received by students.

In further discussion with the group, CS would repeat the workshop, and would continue to investigate how best to raise students’ understanding of the purposes of assessment and to avoid committing academic misconduct.

Feedback for ELT Students on Assessment

Students from different cultures arrive with different experiences and expectations of the norms of assessment – both in the types and methods of grading. The job of foundation programmes in CIFP is to acknowledge students’ experiences and to adjust their understanding to what is required in St Andrews. Students are following programmes related to their future studies and so need to have an understanding of how different Schools assess. The 20-point scale is obviously strange for them and so we also have to help them understand what is good/ average/ poor performance. The way that we do this is varied: we analyse tasks with the students to check their understanding, help them to scaffold answers, proof-read to improve their answers, develop their study skills to manage assessment, and to check their understanding of criteria and to evaluate model answers. We also encourage them to engage with tutors and lecturers in their associate Schools ahead of assessments and ask for feedback after assessments.

On the modules that we run we are as explicit as possible when we set a task in the criteria that we will use and give sample answers as frequently as possible.

School of Mathematics and Statistics

Answers to mathematical questions are usually seen to be either right or wrong and therefore one would imagine that there is not much that first years need to know about how assessments are marked. However, at degree level, the mathematics required to answer a question may be rather lengthy and involved, especially at honours level. As a result it is important that students learn at an early stage to set out their working clearly and explain the steps that are involved in reaching the answer. This will not only mean that they get higher marks in their assessments because they can get credit for knowing the method, even
if they make some simple mistake, but they are much more likely to get the answers correct to more difficult questions as they have learnt to work logically through a problem in a step-by-step manner.

A session near the start of the semester where students could consider different answers to the same questions, and to discuss the marks each of these answers would get, is a very useful means of highlighting this issue to first years before they take their first assignments. Additionally, raising these points with tutorial markers is also important, so students are regularly reminded to apply best practice.

November 2013