



University of
St Andrews

Assessment policies and procedures

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09	Updating outdated processes under 1.6; remove references to Section 4 in Table of Contents; change wordings under 1.1		Academic Policy Officer (Taught Degrees), Proctor's Office	June 2022

UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
ASSESSMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES

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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS
ASSESSMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES

1. PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT AND ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS

1.1 Setting Assessments

Details of assessment are required in the submission of every new module, and major changes to assessment have to be notified to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching), which will scrutinise these for consistency within a School, and broad consistency across the Faculty.

Because all **new module submissions must be reviewed by an External Examiner**, it follows that External Examiners should be involved in agreeing that the proposed scheme of assessment is appropriate to the learning outcomes of the module.

External Examiners should normally see and approve the final versions of all end-of-module examination question papers before they are submitted to Registry. Where an External Examiner makes suggestions for substantive change to examination questions, a written response should be made by the appropriate School Officer to the External Examiner to indicate either the acceptance of the suggestion, or any compelling reasons for varying or declining the suggestion and kept on file. Substantive changes to examination papers will not normally be permitted after submission to Registry, but exceptional requests for such changes must be approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) as well as the External Examiner.

The Head of School has ultimate responsibility to ensure that end-of-module examination papers are submitted to Registry no later than the date indicated by Registry each year.

The **nature, description and timing of assessed coursework (“continuous assessment”)** should be set out in **module handbooks** at the start of the module so that they comprise part of the initial module information made available to students and so that appropriate short loan lists can be in place. It is desirable for students to have a good understanding of the totality of what is expected of them on entry to the module. Such information also enables students to begin work early in the module, manage workloads, acquire necessary resources and obtain advice in good time, as well as enabling them to make appropriate choices of modules in the first place.

In order to ensure that no student is disadvantaged by preparation for the exam diet, **deadlines for assessed coursework** should not be set during the revision period. Only exceptionally will permissions be granted on a module-by-module basis for assessment to take place during the revision weeks, either when the module is initially approved or subsequently by the Proctor.

External Examiners should be given regular opportunities to review the totality of the set assessment for a module (examinations and coursework) and to advise on the appropriate balance of different forms of assessment, potential overlaps between the content of assessments, and the degree to which the total of assessed work corresponds to the complete set of learning outcomes for the module (including generic or transferable skills). Each module should be subject to such a review at least once every four years.

The University has fora within which **discussion of best practice in setting assessments** occurs. These include the Learning & Teaching Committee, LTC Open Fora and workshops run by CAPOD.

1.2 Marking Examination Scripts and other Assessment

When marking any piece of assessment, the marker should always strive to use the full range of marks available to them e.g. 0-20 on the common reporting scale. A student should be given the top mark when they produce the highest quality of work possibly expected of a student at their level. By corollary, students producing work that bears no resemblance to university-level material should be given the lowest mark.

Schools are expected to **produce and publish grade/mark descriptors for each level of study and type of assessment** (where appropriate), which conform to the SCQF guidelines for that level (eg 1000-level modules map onto SCQF level 7, 2000-level modules onto SCQF level 8, etc.). Grade/mark descriptors should be sufficiently relevant to the assessment for which they are used to provide meaningful feedback to students about their performance. Additional comments on assessment should amplify further the judgements made, highlighting areas for improvement as well as justifying the award of the mark.

The descriptors will have been notified to the External Examiner as part of an initial briefing, on which an External Examiner may comment.

External Examiners should see samples of both examinations and continuous assessment and should agree in advance the nature of the sampling with the School. The nature of the sample may be different for Honours and sub-Honours work, but it is expected that a sufficient sample of work at all significant borderlines should be scrutinised, particularly at Honours level and potentially in modules that are critical for Honours entry.

Individual marks are not normally liable to change by an External Examiner, but **comments by an External Examiner on consistency and standards are of the highest importance** and should be answered by action within the School. Any comments on these issues will be raised at the Academic Monitoring Group.

The University has accepted the use of **oral presentations** as a legitimate part of assessment. Where oral assessments form part of the module result, some evidence should be placed on record and made available to the External Examiner as to the criteria used and the reasons for the particular marks and/or grades awarded. Unless there is good reason to select another format, it is expected that this evidence will take the form of sound recordings. Any other format should be approved by the External Examiner.

The University requires **anonymisation** by matriculation number at all levels for assessed written coursework and examinations where practicable. For coursework, once the marking (and moderating or second marking, where applicable) has been anonymously completed, it is permissible to record marks against the student's name and provide formative feedback to the student on an individual basis. For end-of-module examinations, only the School Examinations Officer or other administrator nominated by the Head of School has the right to break the examination script seal, for the purpose of entering or confirming the mark against the student's name on results sheets, and this transcription should be checked by a second individual. The breaking of anonymisation, once marking has been completed, may occur either before or after Module Boards have sat.

Schools vary in practice with regard to **marking strategies**. Marking strategies should be appropriate both for the form of assessment and for the subject disciplines, and they should be in accordance with best practice in that discipline. Whatever the School's conventions, the University's minimum expectations regarding second marking and moderation should be respected; and the **External Examiner should be briefed about the School practices** and has the right to comment.

A student's final module grade should not normally be awarded on the basis of a single individual's assessment of all elements, and in extraordinary cases where this does occur, this should be notified clearly to the External Examiner and to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

The identification of markers and moderators is the responsibility of the Head of School (or other delegate). A marker may be appointed outwith the School or University, if necessary, for example when an appropriate specialist is not available in the University.

Where **(student) peer assessment** is employed for summative assessment, it must be appropriately monitored by the module coordinator, and a record must be kept of the process and outcomes. In such cases it should not normally constitute more than 25% of the work of the module. Schools should also consider carefully the extent of peer assessment that is employed for summative assessment across modules in a programme. Procedures for its use should be explicitly discussed with and approved by the relevant External Examiner, who should take into account the balance of assessment methods across the module and programme of study.

1.3 Module Boards

The results of every module should be considered at an individual Module Board. **Module Boards should consist of the module coordinator, the relevant External Examiner and the signatory designated by the Head of School**, who is responsible for reporting results. Schools can choose to include other staff (other members of the assessment team, Examination Officers, Directors of Teaching, etc) at Module Boards if they wish. Where the External Examiner is not present for a diet, his/her views on the module must be presented formally by a member of the Module Board, and minuted. In exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Head of School (or delegate), a member of the assessment team for that module may deputise for the module coordinator or if no such alternative exists, another competent member of academic staff.

Degree Classification Boards are formally separate from Module Boards; the decisions of a Module Board may not be reopened subsequently.

Every **Module Board should keep a written minute of its decisions**, including the rationale for all key decisions. Schools are encouraged to make best use of the time of the External Examiner by presenting well-prepared information.

1.4 Role of External Examiners at Module Boards

The **functions of an External Examiner** in this regard can be defined as follows:-

- advice on particular problematic cases that cannot be resolved within the School;
- external monitoring of marking standards and procedures;
- benchmarking standards in modules and programme development.

Procedure as regards the first function designated above is straightforward. In these particular cases marks and/or grades are necessarily open to change in the light of the External Examiner's advice. Schools should, however, make every effort to resolve discrepancies in marking prior to referral to the External Examiner.

The **monitoring and benchmarking functions of the External Examiner should be carried out through selective sampling of scripts and assessed work**. It is therefore not normally appropriate that an External Examiner should be used as first or second marker, or asked to mark a large batch of scripts in its entirety. An External Examiner should be substantially concerned with sample monitoring.

It follows that the **External Examiner's role in changing grades should be defined carefully**. The External Examiner may be consulted on specific problem cases. It would never be appropriate, however, to change grades of individual students simply on the basis of a sampling exercise. If serious issues arise about the standard of marking (consistently too high, consistently too low, or too bunched), an External Examiner has a duty to note this, and it may result in an adjustment of grades at the time of the Module Board. A Module Board may shift *all* grades in line with the External Examiner's recommendations, or revisit the assignment of marks to grades without altering the rank position of individuals within the module.

As noted above, it follows that all continuous assessment **grades should be considered as technically provisional until approved by the Module Board**, though the number of instances where wholesale changes of the nature mentioned above will occur is expected to be small, especially if Schools follow best practices of checking standards of question setting and marking across modules. This is particularly appropriate for team-marked modules where some central monitoring of marking by the module co-ordinator is expected. All examination grades, or final project/dissertation grades, should be considered as open to revision in the light of an External Examiner's recommendations. As before, where sampling of examination scripts results in consistent upward or downward movement at one or more levels, all similar grades should be shifted in line with the External Examiner's recommendations, and where a wider grade distribution is called for, the rank order of students should be retained.

In order to address issues of workload or expertise, Schools may request the **appointment of several External Examiners**, including specific External Examiners for sub-Honours modules, for reassessment diets or for postgraduate-level modules. Where multiple External Examiners exist for a single programme, at least one should provide feedback for the programme as a whole as well as for modules.

1.5 External Examiners and Dissertations/Projects

Schools should decide, in consultation with the External Examiner, how **dissertations and projects** are to be assessed. Arrangements will depend on the number and nature of projects involved, and their weighting in the degree programme. However, it is the University's expectation that in most cases a) second marking will be employed; and b) External Examiners will not act as second markers, but rather will continue their function as reviewers of assessment.

1.6 Presence of External Examiners at Module Boards and Degree Classification Boards

The basis of the modular system is that a numerical grade based upon a qualitative judgment of the student's performance is assigned for each module and the aggregation of these grades (weighted according to the credit value of each module) determines the final degree outcome.

The essential input of the External Examiner as monitor and benchmarker of standards must therefore take place at the modular level. Attendance of an External Examiner at all the

Module Boards in his/her assigned subject area, preferably at the end of both semesters but as a minimum at the end of Semester 2, is indispensable.

1.7 Reassessment Diet

The **reassessment diet** takes place late in the summer. Because of the tight turnaround for reporting results, Schools may choose to have dedicated External Examiners for this process; they will have to negotiate the presence of an External in St Andrews. Alternatively, if their External Examiner is unable to attend the relevant Boards, then they must agree in advance the processes by which the External Examiner will be enabled to perform his/her function.

1.8 Viva Voce Examinations

The University recognises that the **viva is a legitimate assessment method** for particular modules, especially at postgraduate level. Where vivas are used, however, they must apply to all students in a module. Vivas must not be used in the degree classification process.

1.9 Reporting Procedure for External Examiners, and Procedures for Response

Formal **feedback from External Examiners** happens normally at four points:-

- scrutiny of new module and programme proposals;
- scrutiny of assessment actually set in a module;
- verbal or written feedback at the time of Module Boards and Degree Classification Boards, where appropriate;
- written end-of-session report, which is required by the University before the fee is paid.

As regards **module and programme proposals**, where an External Examiner makes suggestions for substantive change in proposals, a written response should be sent by the appropriate School officer to indicate the School's response to the suggestions made, with a view to reaching an agreed position. Exchanges of messages should be retained as evidence.

As regards **feedback at Module Boards**, it is essential that, at the conclusion of each diet of Module Board meetings, time be allocated for the External Examiner(s) to offer feedback on the outcomes and procedures involved and on wider issues of quality assurance and enhancement encompassing programmes as a whole. If External Examiners are present at **Degree Classification Boards**, this may provide another opportunity for such feedback. This feedback must be minuted by an Examinations Officer or other nominee, and a copy sent to the External Examiner(s) subsequently, for the record. Where matters are raised by an External Examiner for consideration or action by the School or the University, a written response must be sent by an appropriate School officer to the External within the time specified in the documents referred to below, and kept on file for the purposes of monitoring and review. Where University procedures are involved, the minute and any correspondence must be copied to the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

1.10 Security of the Assessment Process

The Head of School is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the School has processes in place to protect the **security of examination questions and of assessment results** prior to reporting to Registry. In particular:-

All Assessments: Marking of assessed work should be carried out in an appropriately private environment. Assessment results must be logged centrally in the School as soon as the marks are assigned (not solely at the end of the semester). Heads of School, in conjunction with their Head Secretary or School Administrator, must ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to guarantee the secure storage of assessment papers and results, to which records the Head of School must have access at any time.

Coursework Retention: Only samples of coursework (appropriate to the discipline) need to be kept for a period of two years (for the purposes of internal monitoring reviews).

Examinations: Setting: At the time of setting, modifying and obtaining External approval for examination questions, secure processes must be employed both in electronic and hard-copy communications.

Examinations: Storage: Heads of School, in conjunction with their Head Secretary or School Administrator, must ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to guarantee the secure storage of examination papers, to which documents the Head of School must have access at any time.

Examinations: Transport: Heads of School shall ensure there is safe and secure transport of examination papers when they are in the care of the School.

Examinations: Retention of Marked Scripts: Marked examination scripts should be retained in a secure location for one year following the reporting of the results for sub-honours modules and for one year following the year of graduation for all modules leading to the classification of a degree award.

Retention of Evidence of Academic Misconduct: Coursework or examinations that have been the subject of a case of proven academic misconduct (either minor or major in terms of the Good Academic Practice Policy) must be kept for a period of two years from the date of the Module Board(s) that awarded a grade for the relevant module(s).

1.11 Incomplete Assessment Results

When there is an **incomplete set of assessment results** for cohorts of students as a result of a significant disruption of the assessment process, the University's policy is that the outstanding module assessments must be completed and marked before module grades can be assigned. This is required in order to preserve the integrity and quality of the grades that the University awards.

Similarly, the University's policy is that **all module grades must be duly reported before a qualification or degree classification can be assigned**. The University will not award qualifications or assign degree classifications on the basis of partial or incomplete results.

If necessary, where a full set of results is not available for a student due to no fault of the student, a lesser qualification may be awarded on a temporary or permanent basis on condition that the full requirements of the lesser qualification have been satisfied.

In particular circumstances where there are incomplete sets of assessments results for a cohort of students as a result of a significant disruption of the assessment process, the University may waive normal requirements for progression within a programme. Such decisions require the approval of the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

In circumstances where student results are incomplete or delayed due to no fault of the student, the Head of School must ensure that the School can and will provide timely supporting references and documentation about work completed upon request.

Incomplete Module Assessment

On completion of the module the Module Board shall consider cases where the assessment of the module is incomplete due to extenuating circumstances in the following way:-

- The Module Co-ordinator must declare in the Module Booklet or the School student handbook the minimum proportion (or elements) of assessment that must be completed for credit to be awarded for the module. This requirement must be defined by the School and can constitute 100% but must be no less than 75% of the total assessment.
- Where the evidence supplied indicates a valid reason for incomplete assessment and the minimum requirement (as defined by the School, but no less than 75%) has been achieved then the Module Board can elect to award the grade calculated using the marks completed that are provided.
- Where less than the minimum requirement has been achieved and the documented evidence supplied indicates valid reason then the Module Board should advise a deferred assessment (0D) to the Registry and the School should provide alternative assessment or extensions for continuous assessment elements and/or deferred examinations.
- 'Valid reason' could be established by a sub-committee of at least three members (mixed gender) of academic staff prior to the Module Board. This sub-committee can request documentary evidence. This task can be performed by the existing S-code committee, if preferred.
- Where the student has not submitted a Self-Certificate of Absence or not presented satisfactory documentary evidence when requested or not given valid reason AND completed less than the minimum requirement then 0 X should be reported.
- Where the student has not submitted Self-Certificates of Absence for missing elements and the minimum requirement has been completed then the student can be awarded credit for the module but the grade must be calculated on the basis of being awarded zero for the missing elements of assessment.

1.12 Role of External Examiners in Taught Postgraduate Programmes

The duties of the External Examiner in relation to **taught postgraduate programmes** are similar in principle to those in undergraduate programmes, and some External Examiners may operate in both areas. Taught postgraduate module results must normally be reported on the same deadline and in the same way as undergraduate module results. For a definition of specific duties regarding dissertations, see Policy for Supervisors and Students in Taught Postgraduate Programmes.

1.13 Notification of circumstances affecting Academic Performance

Students are responsible for bringing to the attention of their examiners any evidence of exceptional circumstances (personal, medical or otherwise) that may affect or have affected their academic performance (please see the [Policy on Extenuating Circumstances](#) for more information).

It is their responsibility to ensure that all such evidence is communicated to the Module Co-ordinator or Director of Teaching. Notification should be submitted **prior** to the examination diet or before the final determination of grades in the relevant modules or subjects. Any circumstances reported in this way will be considered by the relevant Examination Board(s). In the case of

Junior/Senior Honours and taught Postgraduate students an S-Code may be applied to the affected modules if this is **requested by the student**.

Failure to notify circumstances affecting academic performance in advance of the final determination of grades may affect a student's ability subsequently to submit an academic appeal. In order to establish grounds for an appeal a student must demonstrate the existence of extenuating personal circumstances materially affecting academic performance **of which the University was unaware** when the academic decision was taken, and **which could not reasonably have been disclosed by the student (an explanation for earlier non-disclosure is always required)**.

Where the University has been notified of circumstances affecting academic performance, in advance of the final determination of grades, the same circumstances may not be used as grounds for academic appeal as due account of them will already have been taken in determining the final result.

1.14 Reporting of Absences from Examinations

Students must report absence from an examination due to illness or other exceptional circumstances by submitting a Self-Certificate of Absence as soon as the candidate is able to do so, preferably before the examination is due to take place and in any case no later than 3 days after the examination.

Students must contact the School responsible for the module being examined in order to request alternative arrangements, which are at the discretion of the School. (Students are only required to notify the Examinations Officer if there is a problem submitting a Self-Certificate).

Medical or other relevant supporting evidence may be required by the School in support of the student's request for alternative arrangements.

In the case of any long-term illness or impairment, students are recommended to contact Student Services for advice and support.

If a student has missed an examination for whatever reason, the above reporting procedure also applies.

2. ASSESSMENT IRREGULARITIES

There are a number of policies which provide information on how to deal with cases of **assessment irregularity**. The Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching) is available to provide guidance and advice on any of these matters.

No Detriment Rule: If a clerical error is made reporting a student's module grade, it will stand if it is in the student's interest.

Academic Misconduct: When academic misconduct is suspected during the examination process, the procedures to be followed are set out in the [Policy on Good Academic Practice](#).

Degree Examination Regulations: The Rules for Candidates when sitting examinations are published on the website. Advice can also be sought from the University Examinations Officer.

Appeals and Complaints: For advice and information see the Policy on Student Academic Appeals or contact the Senate Office.

3. DEFERRED ASSESSMENT

Deferred assessment refers to the submission and marking of a piece of work or examination beyond the date of the module board thus making it impossible to report a module grade at that meeting.

Deferred assessment is not a right and permission will be granted only when the School judges that admissible grounds for deferral exist.

Requests for deferred assessment must be made to the relevant School Officer in advance of or as soon as practically possible after the published completion or examination date.

In each School the Director of Teaching (or named delegate) is responsible for authorizing deferred assessment requests.

The deferral of assessments is not appropriate for minor ailments or permanent or long-term conditions that are under medical control. Students with prolonged chronic illnesses or disabilities should instead contact Student Services for advice in advance of any assessment submission date or published examination dates.

All requests for deferred assessments must be submitted to the relevant School. Requests for deferred assessments should be supported by appropriate written evidence such as a letter from Student Services, letter from the police or evidence from a member of staff who was alerted to the circumstances at the time. Self-certificates alone for examinations and class tests will not be accepted. Schools can choose to accept the reasons given by the student for missing an examination or class test, or can refer the student to the Advice and Support Centre who will in turn advise the School accordingly. The School that was initially informed of the request for deferred assessment should inform all other relevant Schools. Schools can also liaise directly with Student Services for assistance. The primary reasons for granting deferrals are medical conditions that affect students for a substantial proportion of the time that would be expected to be expended on completion of the assessment. Deferred assessment on non-medical grounds will be approved only for serious personal reasons such as bereavement of a close relative or illness of dependents. Attendance at interviews or assessment centres and travel arrangements are not normally sufficient grounds for deferral of an examination or test.

Students who have not requested a deferred assessment in advance of the published completion date or examination date without good reason will not have the request approved.

At the time that a request for a deferral is made, the deadline for completion will be determined by the School. For work that is due during normal semester time, this will not extend beyond the academic year within which the piece of work or examination was due to be completed, ie the August resit diet. For work that is due to be submitted in the summer period, this may be extended at the discretion of the School for up to a maximum of 12 months.

Extensions to deferral deadlines are not permitted. Students who do not complete the deferral by the agreed deadline will normally be awarded a mark of 0 (which may affect the final degree classification or the progression of studies). If deferred deadlines are not met, the School must refer the student to Student Services, the Registry Officer (Student Support), or the appropriate Associate Dean Students where options such as leave of absence, S-coding, decanal discretion etc. can be discussed.

Once granted a deferred assessment by the School, the student cannot then retract the request.

Deferred assessments will be in the same format and length as the original scheduled assessments unless otherwise approved by the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

Alternative examinations for students who were unable to take an examination at the normal time may be scheduled within the same diet if possible. (Time at the end of each examination diet is kept free for this type of eventuality). If this cannot be accommodated, then the examination becomes a deferred examination and must be taken at the next resit or full examination diet. Alternative examinations are subject to the same conditions referred to elsewhere in the policy.

Students who fail a deferred examination will be permitted to continue their studies pending achievement of any missing credits at the next examination diet provided that all other conditions for progression have been met.

Deferred examinations and class tests will always comprise different questions from those used in the original diet or test.

Exceptions to policy on deferred assessment must have the approval of the Assistant Vice-Principal (Dean of Learning & Teaching).

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
01	Updates made to policy	Updated	-	Dec 2015
02	Addition of wording to confirm that any formal decisions made within Schools relating to a student's progression must be followed up in writing and via a formal communication	Updated	-	July 2016
03	Updates to S-Coding in Semester 2 of AY 2019/20	Updated	Kevin McNamara	April 2020
04	Additional paragraph inserted in Section 1.1 relating to deadlines for assessed coursework.	-	Kevin McNamara	June 2020
05	Changes to titles/contact details to reflect decanal restructuring	Updated	-	February 2021
06	Changes to Associate Provost title		Emily Feamster	August 2021
07	Deletion of section on S-coding and add paragraph re No-Detriment Rule.		Proctor's Office	August 2021
08	Removal of section 4	Updated	Proctor's Office	January 2022
09	Updating outdated processes under 1.6; remove references to Section 4 in Table of Contents; change wordings under 1.1		Academic Policy Officer (Taught Degrees), Proctor's Office	June 2022