Quality assurance for assessment

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Contents

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1. Statement

1.1 This policy outlines the University's approach to maintaining high standards and consistency in assessment, ensuring fair and reliable outcomes for all students.

2. Purpose

2.1 This policy provides detail of the quality assurance arrangements and considerations for assessment design, implementation, marking and reporting.

    2.1.1 This policy should be considered alongside the [Assessment and feedback policy](#) and the [Exam Rules](#).

3. Scope / jurisdiction

3.1 This policy applies to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes at the University of St Andrews and any portions of postgraduate research degrees taught by the University.

    3.1.1 This policy also applies to any other SCQF credit-bearing educational offering (e.g. short courses, micro-credential modules) unless otherwise specified.

    3.1.2 This policy does not apply to the University's educational offering which does not have associated credits.

4. Quality assurance of assessment when designing and approving modules and programmes

4.1 External alignment

Assessment is critically important in ensuring the academic standards and integrity of degrees and other awards made by the University. Assessment should be designed in accordance with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, with a particular focus at the design stage on alignment with the module's intended learning outcomes and teaching activities, and a holistic awareness of the development of a student's graduate attributes throughout their programme of study.

    4.1.1 Assessment must align with the specified level of academic study, which should be set with reference to the qualification and level

descriptors provided by the [Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#) (SCQF), and the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications, Characteristics Statements, and any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

4.1.2   Assessment should also fulfil any applicable professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.

4.2   Internal alignment

Assessment methods must be defined at the point of module approval and/ or amendment and must comply with the Assessment and Feedback Policy. All modules, programmes, and other credit-bearing provision must comply with University regulations and policies.

4.2.1   New or significantly amended modules, programmes, and other credit-bearing courses must be approved by the Dean of Learning and Teaching or Provost through the Curriculum Approvals Group (CAG) as their delegates.

4.2.2   Proposals must be submitted and evaluated in accordance with the [policy on Module and Programme Approval](#) and, where relevant, the [policy on Collaborative Provision of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes](#). It is expected that School/Departmental Teaching Committees will be engaged in scrutinising curriculum changes.

4.3   External Examiners

External examiners must be involved in agreeing that the proposed scheme of assessment is appropriate to the intended learning outcomes of the module. They should scrutinise and comment on new module and programme proposals, and review and provide written advice and approval on significant module and programme amendments, in line with the [policy on External Examining](#) and the [details provided by the Curriculum Team](#).

4.3.1   Where an External Examiner makes formal written suggestions for substantive changes in the proposed assessment, a written response must be sent by the appropriate School officer, with a view to reaching an agreed position.

4.4   Curriculum Approvals Group

On behalf of the Dean of Learning & Teaching and the Provost, Curriculum Approvals Group (CAG) will scrutinise proposals for consistency of assessment within a School, and broad consistency across a faculty.

4.5   Module-level quality considerations for assessment

Assessment must be designed so that students are assessed using published criteria, regulations and procedures, which are applied consistently. Consideration should be given to how:

- Assessment methods and criteria are aligned to intended learning outcomes
- Assessment supports students' learning
- Assessment is inclusive and equitable and does not disadvantage any group or individual
- The amount of assessed work and the scheduling of assignments are manageable
- Whether existing marking criteria can be applied to assessments or if new ones need to be developed for certain types of assessments.

4.6   Programme-level quality considerations for assessment

Assessment should be designed taking into consideration the overall intended learning outcomes outlined in programme specifications and how those outcomes will be achieved and demonstrated. A comprehensive approach to aligning modules and assessments ensures that students' learning journey is structured cohesively, supporting them in achieving the intended learning outcomes.

4.6.1   Programmes of study should therefore include a range of different forms of assessment that align with the requirements of a particular discipline (or disciplines, where a programme is designed to be interdisciplinary) and challenge students accordingly. Though it will often be appropriate, it is not necessary to include different forms of assessment within one module.

4.7   Graduate attributes

Graduate attributes can be used as a framework to approach assessment design in a holistic way considering which attributes are being developed over the course of the module or programme.

4.7.1   The University has 20 graduate attributes, clustered into categories of entrepreneurial mindset, leadership, diversity, global outlook and social responsibility. Highlighting these in the context of assessment outlines the knowledge, skills and qualities that are developed longitudinally across the course of a programme, and helps students make links between the assessment and the skills they are using and developing in the completion of it while enabling them to develop an increased range of graduate attributes over the course of a programme.

4.8   Review of assessments

Module coordinators are expected to regularly evaluate whether any change to assessment in a specific module is required. Such changes must be discussed with the relevant DoT and adhere to the School's internal review mechanisms. A holistic review of assessments across a range of modules/programmes may take place in the following ways:

4.8.1   Every six years as part of the [University-led Reviews of Learning and Teaching](#).

4.8.2   By Schools/Departments initiating their own strategic reviews of their portfolio of assessments used across multiple modules, to ensure that their programmes contain variety and complementarity of assessment.

4.8.3   On the recommendation of External Examiners, who should be given regular opportunities to review the totality of the set assessment(s) 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 intended learning outcomes for the module (including generic or transferable skills and graduate attributes). (See Section 10.3 below for further information about the role of External Examiners in Module Boards.)

5.   Quality assurance when marking assessment

This section provides detail of marking descriptors, broader marking approaches, and the concerns that should be considered when marking particular types of assessment.

Please also see Section 8 of the [Assessment and feedback policy](#), which outlines examples of standard setting used when marking assessment and the policy associated with this.

5.1   Mark descriptors

Mark descriptors are key words and phrases that succinctly identify the particulars on which marks can be awarded. Mark descriptors offer guidance to students preparing for assessments, and direct how staff mark assessment. Mark descriptors must be provided for each assessment marked by descriptive criteria and must be made available to all students on the module.

It is important to maintain a clear distinction between marks and grades. A

mark is attached to an individual piece of work and a **grade** is used to report the final module outcome.

5.1.1   Mark descriptors must clearly explain how students will be assessed and how marking scales will be applied. All staff who mark assessments must be briefed in these expectations and mark in accordance with them.

5.1.2   Mark descriptors must clearly and precisely identify what qualities are being evaluated in any given piece of assessment.

5.1.3   Mark descriptors must suit the level of work (1000–5000), the nature of the work (examination essay, extended dissertation, short answer [gobbet], etc) and should relate directly to intended learning outcomes specified by modules and programmes.

5.2   Good practice in setting marking descriptors

Factorised marking descriptors in a grid, as shown below, can be an effective approach when using descriptors. A short piece of text in each cell describes what would be required of a piece of work to merit a particular evaluation. As many descriptors as required can be used.

The grid serves as a guide:

- to inform students what is expected and required of them
- to examiners while marking
- to provide a basis for clear feedback on performance to students.

Mark descriptor	0-3	4-6	7-10	11-13	14-16	17-20
Evaluation	Descriptive text in cell					
Core knowledge						
Resource use						

5.3   Marking considerations – types of marking

It is important to consider what the appropriate form of marking will be when setting assessment. **Types of marking** include, inter alia:

5.3.1   **Quantitative:** marking that requires the accumulation of marks through a series of short exercises or problems producing a cumulative mark for the whole piece.

5.3.2   **Qualitative:** marking that requires academic judgements about the quality of a piece of work. For this, factorised grade descriptors are valuable marking tools.

5.3.3   **Competency-based marking:** common in cases where it is important that standards of competency are demonstrated by the

student and maintained in the discipline; Medicine provides clear examples of this.

5.3.4 **Percentage scales:** this is appropriate for many quantitative exercises in which marks are accumulated across a series of exercises or steps within a larger problem.

5.3.5 **Marking in other scales:** certain forms of assessment will produce marks out of a particular number (N). For example, multiple choice questionnaires can contain any number of elements that will produce an overall mark of N. Marking short answer questions (gobbets) might produce marks of this nature.

5.3.6 **Common Reporting Scale:** marking on the Common Reporting Scale (as outlined in Section 19 of the Assessment and feedback policy) is most appropriate for longer items of written work, including coursework essays, examination essays or dissertations and reports. The use of factorized mark descriptors enables an explicit reference to be made to the knowledge and attributes that the work seeks to test and develop.

   a. Care must be taken when marking on the 20-point scale: being able to make twenty clearly discriminable judgments is feasible, but more than this. requires examiners to be confident of the ability to discriminate at finer levels of resolution.

   b. Anything more than half-marks should not be attempted when marking on the 20-point scale. The combined mark of two members of staff, or the combination of marks from a series of essays, can be reported to one decimal place.

5.4 Marking considerations – specific types of assessment

Specific types of assessment will warrant different marking considerations to ensure quality assurance. Some examples of assessments, their design and marking considerations and their associated quality assurance considerations are outlined below. This should be read in conjunction with Section 4 of the Assessment and feedback policy.

5.4.1 **Oral assessments:** the use of clear criteria for the marking of both the content and form of an oral presentation should be available to students in advance of the assessment being undertaken. It is recommended that oral presentations have more than one marker, where possible.

   a. Where only one marker is available a sound and/or video recording of oral assessments should be made to i) ensure that

feedback can be provided to students, ii) for moderation, second or blind double marking, iii) for review by external examiners, and iv) for the purposes of an academic appeal, if necessary.

b. Constructive criteria-linked written feedback should be provided on all marked oral presentations, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Oral presentations are highly suitable for peer evaluations.

5.4.2 **Poster presentations:** Posters should provide concise, evidenced, relevant and accurate information, have a logical flow, be visually engaging, and use appropriate visual aids. Marking descriptors should list clear criteria for evaluating both the content and design of the poster, as well as how it is presented, if applicable.

5.4.3 **Group-work assessment** should not normally constitute more than 30% of the work of a module. When setting groupwork, module coordinators should clearly outline the assessment expectations. To ensure consistent marking, clear marking descriptors should be used.

a. Module coordinators should consider how groupwork facilitates a variety of tasks, how it fosters graduate attributes and how workload is best balanced across the group to showcase group and individuals' strengths. Group work should provide opportunities for critical engagement and reflection.

b. Appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that students know how to address any group dynamic concerns. Staff may want to consider defining roles within the group and ensure that these are rotated or consider redesigning group tasks if it aids the group dynamic. It may be helpful to incorporate individual accountability as part of the assessment, giving each student a marked contribution.

c. Staff should ensure that they set up a contingency plan to manage unforeseen circumstances: it may be helpful to consider how the group assessment can be redesigned if group members dropout later in the semester or permit asynchronous contributions where someone is unwell for a short time, for instance. It is imperative to consider contingency planning before designing group work.

5.4.4 **Peer assessment** should not normally constitute more than 25% of the work of a module. The use of peer-to-peer assessment has value in making transparent to students how assessment criteria work in practice. Students should be helped to understand the importance of peer assessment and given clear, specific marking criteria.

a. Students who participate in peer assessment should be provided with unconscious bias training.
b. It is best practice to provide students with marking training and/or best-practice examples of assessing peers where possible. Anonymous marking should be encouraged, where possible.
c. It is imperative that marks are justified with constructive and detailed feedback.

5.4.5 **Dissertations/Projects:** Schools should provide clearly established standards on the scope and expectations of the level of research required to all students. Students should be briefed on expected supervision arrangements, the ethical approval process, where applicable, and should be provided with clear marking descriptors.

a. Marking 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 i) second-marking or blind double-marking will be employed; and ii) External Examiners will not act as second markers but rather will continue their function as reviewers of assessment.

b. Blind double-marking is a requirement for all MLitt, MSc, and MRes dissertations as outlined in Postgraduate Taught Senate Regulations and the Final module in a PGT programme policy. Where blind double-marking takes place, there must be a clear written record of how the agreed mark was decided, and an agreed joint set of comments must be provided to the student.

5.4.6 Where staff require advice on the quality assurance of assessment design, implementation or marking strategies they should seek advice from the International Education and Lifelong Learning Institute (IELLI), the Quality Team, and/or the Associate Deans/Provost (Education).

5.5 Moderation, second marking, and blind double marking

The University's policy on moderation, second marking and blind double marking is outlined in Section 10 of the Assessments and Feedback policy. Assessments contributing at least 40% of the overall module grade of every module must undergo moderation, second marking, or blind double marking. In modules with multiple assessed components, a single significant element may be moderated, provided it meets the 40% threshold at the module level.

5.5.1 Schools can determine their own sampling approach with advice from their External Examiner(s). Schools may wish to take the following approach:

a. For modules with larger cohorts, a representative sample of approximately 10% of student work is generally considered sufficient.

b. For smaller cohorts, sampling up to 25% may be appropriate.

c. In all cases, the sample should encompass a range of performance levels, including first-class work, borderline cases between classifications, mid-range work within a classification grade, and failed submissions.

5.5.2   In cases where module moderation is not appropriate, blind double marking ensures fairness. Where blind double marking or second marking is applied to an assessment, all submissions should be blind double marked or second marked.

5.5.3   Schools should ensure that an approach to moderation, second marking, and/or blind double marking is established for all modules. Schools should encourage reflection and discussion of moderation, second marking, and blind double marking approaches.

5.5.4   It is best practice to use standardised proformas for moderation and the agreement of blind double marking to ensure a clear written record exists for audit purposes. It is important to routinely review moderation processes.

6.   Quality assurance in feedback to students

6.1   Quality assurance of feedback ensures that students receive clear, constructive, and consistent feedback that enhances their learning.

6.2   Feedback is not just associated with assessment outcomes. Feedback may also be delivered in real time throughout formative activities and as part of the preparation for summative assessments. Illustrative examples include feedback provided during practical sessions, feedback following whole-class discussions and debates, and feedback during observational activities.

6.3   Assessment feedback must be returned within a timeframe that enables the student to learn from the feedback before a further assessment of the same type is delivered. (See Section 12 of the [Assessment and feedback policy](.).)

6.4   Schools should ensure that all markers are provided with clear expectations for feedback quality, details of the marking considerations to be taken in account, the marking descriptors to be used, the manner and timeline in which feedback should be provided.

6.5   Schools should make clear to students how and when feedback will be received. Staff in Schools are encouraged to:

- consider School wide standardised feedback templates for common assessment types
- share best practice amongst staff in providing feedback
- reflect with students on effective feedback techniques
- invite external examiners to audit feedback processes
- regularly review feedback practices based on assessment type and staff/student needs.

6.6   Two forms of feedback can be identified: that given to a class group (generic feedback) and that given to a specific student (individual feedback). These two forms are independent:

6.6.1   **Generic feedback** – with no individual names present – can be given to a class, or sub-group. This might include statements as to what the answers were, statements of what an expected answer might have included and what typical problems with the answers were. Generic feedback might incorporate statistical information, such as grade distributions allowing individual students to understand how their performance relates to that of the cohort overall.

6.6.2   **Individual feedback** should outline the strengths and weaknesses of the work submitted (couched in terms of the mark descriptors used) and should be made available to all students in a timely manner.

6.7   With respect to exam feedback, Schools should facilitate time to allow students to see their own exam scripts in a controlled setting and allow them to have discussions of individual performances with appropriate staff (normally the module co-ordinator or the member of staff who marked the work). Specific times can be set aside for this during the first two weeks of a semester during which students can book time with a member of staff.

6.7.1   Schools must determine how best to deliver feedback on their examinations – the decision will necessarily be bound up with the nature of the material being examined. As the outright return of the exam script will leave a School/Department without any record, the student should only be given a copy of the script if the School deem that to be appropriate. Students are responsible for the legibility of their own scripts; and markers' marks and comments should be legible.

6.7.2   The process for a student to obtain a copy of their exam script is outlined in Section 12.4 of the Assessment and feedback policy. This

process will be kept under review by the Dean of Learning and Teaching.

6.7.3 The size of the class should not be a determining factor in any decisions made about feedback on examination performance. Note that it would not be good practice to allow students to complete multiple-choice questions by marking a script with the questions on it. Such a script could legitimately be requested by a student, which would put the MCQs into the public domain, eliminating them from any question bank being maintained.

7. External Examiners' role in overseeing assessment marking and exam question setting

7.1 External examining is a key element of the assessment setting and marking process and ensures that the University is maintaining appropriate academic standards set for its awards. The role of the External Examiner in Module Boards is addressed in Section 10.3.

7.2 When overseeing exam setting and marking it is vital that External Examiners are briefed on the School's approach to marking and moderation. They should also be provided with mark descriptors and have the right to comment on these.

7.2.1 This is particularly important when External Examiners first assume their role. It is recommended that, in their first year, External Examiners are given access to all set assessments and that time is taken to establish in-School processes with them.

7.2.2 This includes determining which assessment materials will require their prior review of throughout their tenure, noting that exam questions must be reviewed as outlined below.

7.3 External examiners must also:

7.3.1 Be briefed on the School's marking strategies and have the right to comment.

7.3.2 Be consulted on how dissertations and final projects are to be assessed.

7.3.3 See and approve **all** end-of-module examination papers. If an External Examiner makes suggestions for a substantive change to examination questions, the appropriate Module coordinator or School Officer should provide a written response to indicate either acceptance of the suggestion, or any compelling reasons for varying or declining the suggestion. Such responses should be kept on file.

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7.3.4   Be given opportunities to see how a mark was determined for all pieces of assessment, the feedback that was given to students, and where appropriate, details of how a final mark was decided if an item of assessment was blind double or second-marked.

a. Where oral assessments form part of the module grade, evidence of how the grade was determined should be placed on record and made available to the External Examiner.

b. Evidence should include video or oral recordings if individually marked, or joint marking proforma where blind double marked.

8.   Assessment security and retention schedules

8.1   The Head of School is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the School has processes in place to protect the security of examination questions prior to sending these to Registry and of assessment results prior to reporting them to Registry. General guidance is available via Exam paper security guidance. The following recommendations should be adhered to, in line with the University's Principles of Records Management.

8.2   Setting examinations

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

8.3   In-School storage of examination papers

Heads of School, in conjunction with their School Manager, must ensure that there are appropriate measures in place to guarantee the secure storage of examination papers. The Head of School must have access at any time.

8.4   Transportation of examination papers while in the care of the School

Heads of School must ensure there is safe and secure transport of examination papers when they are in the care of the School.

8.5   Safety when marking and storing assessments

Marking of all assessed work should be carried out in an appropriately private environment. Assessment results must be logged centrally by the School as soon as the marks are assigned (not solely at the end of the semester).

8.5.1   Heads of School, in conjunction with their School Manager or Administrator(s), must ensure that there are appropriate measures in

place to guarantee the secure storage of assessment scripts and results.

8.5.2 Heads of School should ensure that staff are briefed on the safe storage and transportation of assessment materials.

8.5.3 Heads of School must be granted timely access to assessment materials held by staff during the marking process, upon request.

8.6 Retention of coursework

A sample of assessed coursework held by a School must be retained for six years after the end of the academic year in which they were created (year of submission plus six years).

8.6.1 For modules with larger cohorts, a representative sample of approximately 10% of student work is generally considered sufficient. In smaller cohorts, sampling up to 25% may be appropriate.

8.6.2 The sample should encompass a range of performance levels, including first-class work, borderline cases between classifications grades, mid-range work within a classification grade, and failed submissions.

8.7 Retention of marked examination scripts

A sample of exam scripts must be retained for six years after the end of the academic year in which they were created (year of submission plus six years), in line with the guidelines in Section 8.6 above. A copy of the Exam papers should be archived by the School for at least the academic year in which they were created, plus six years.

8.8 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 from the date of the Module Board(s) that awarded a grade for the relevant module(s) plus six years.

9. S-Coding committee

9.1 The School S-coding Committee, appointed by the Head of School, reviews all S-coding requests. It consists of the Director of Teaching and at least two experienced academic staff members, with a professional services staff member assisting with minutes only, as required.

9.2 S-coding decisions are made confidentially, and sensitive details are not shared at Module Boards.

9.3 The Committee's decision is final if the decision is:

9.3.1 not retrospective, upheld and within the S-coding limits, or

9.3.2 the request is not retrospective and declined.

9.3.3 In all other cases, the committee's decision is advisory and must be referred to the Dean of Learning & Teaching.

9.4 Full details of S-coding are available in the [S-coding Policy](#).

10. Quality assurance of the final grade for a module

All grades should be considered as provisional until approved by the Module Board, and considered as open to revision in the light of an External Examiner's recommendations.

10.1 Module Boards

10.1.1 Module Boards are responsible for ensuring the consistent and fair application of the University's assessment, grading, and feedback regulations. They are critical in maintaining academic standards and upholding the integrity of the assessment process.

10.1.2 At the conclusion of each semester or teaching period, Module Boards oversee and confirm final module grades. In doing so, they ensure that marking practices align with institutional policies and that all assessments meet the required standards of academic rigour and integrity.

10.1.3 Module Boards should ensure that appropriate scrutiny of the marks presented have been undertaken and the University's marking conventions have been upheld.

10.2 Arrangements for Module Boards

10.2.1 Module boards typically meet at the end of each semester or teaching period (including August/September for PGT programmes) to review marking standards from each module and to monitor and benchmark standards within and across modules offered by a School or Department.

a. Module boards may be held in-person or online.

10.2.2 The results of every module should be considered at an individual Module Board.

10.2.3 Schools can choose to hold all Module Boards for given programmes together in one cumulative board meeting.

10.2.4 Module Boards should at the very least consist of the module coordinator, the relevant External Examiner and the signatory, as designated by the Head of School, who is responsible for reporting results.

    a. Schools may include other staff (other members of the assessment team, Examination Officers, Directors of Teaching, etc) at Module Boards if they wish.

    b. In exceptional circumstances and with the approval of the Head of School (or delegate), a member of the assessment team for a module may deputise for the module coordinator or if no such alternative exists, another competent member of academic staff.

10.2.5 The basis of the modular system is that a numerical grade based upon an academic judgment of the student's performance is assigned for each module. The aggregation of these grades at honours and PGT levels (weighted according to the credit value of each module) determines the final degree outcome. The essential input of the External Examiner as monitor and bench marker of standards must therefore take place at the modular level.

10.2.6 Prior to the reporting of module grades, Schools will be provided with a historical record of grades from the last six years for each module (if applicable), with the Mean, Median, Minimum Grade, Maximum Grade and Standard Deviation shown.

    a. Schools should use this data to identify any modules where the current year's outcome is substantially different from the historical record.

    b. Adjustment to the module grade distribution should be considered where appropriate and discussed with the relevant External Examiner.

10.2.7 In modules designated as 'flexible' (i.e. modules whose codes contain the FLEX tag), the School should hold at least two Module Boards per academic year, at regular intervals. In view of the nature of these flexible modules, when students complete the module in-between boards, Schools may report these results without convening additional Module Boards, provided that:

a. The External Examiners are given access to a pre-agreed set of data and information pertaining to these student results,
b. The External Examiners are satisfied that these results do not substantially change the overall grade distribution,
c. The External Examiners provide a written confirmation that these results are approved, and
d. Schools keep a record of these results approved by the External Examiners for minuting at the next Module Board.

10.2.8 Where grades are reported outwith Module Boards as per 10.2.7, Schools may request External Examiners to review a particular grade or advise on specific cases as normal.

10.2.9 Results for flexible modules approved and reported in-between boards via this method cannot be overturned later by a Module Board. Schools should ensure that External Examiners of flexible modules are aware of this when they are asked to approve the results.

10.2.10 If the School or the External Examiners are of the view that the grade distribution is likely to be affected substantially due to either i) the size of the cohort being reported in this way or ii) a substantial deviation of these results from previous distributions, an additional Module Board must be convened, with sampling of the results by the External Examiner in accordance with normal processes.

10.3 External Examiners' role in Module Boards

10.3.1 Schools must ensure that they comply with the University's external examining requirements.

10.3.2 External Examiners should attend all the Module Boards in their assigned subject area either in-person or online, preferably at the end of both semesters for Undergraduate programmes. External Examiners for PGT programmes may also be required to attend Module Boards in August/September. If an external is unable to attend, they should provide a written deposition to be presented at the Module Board.

10.3.3 External Examiners should be provided with sufficient information to allow them to robustly review all modules. An External Examiner should be substantially concerned with sample monitoring.

a. The monitoring and benchmarking functions of the External Examiner should be carried out through selective sampling of scripts and assessed work. The nature of the sample may be different for PGT, Honours and sub-honours work, but it is expected that a sufficient sample of work at all significant

classification borderlines should be scrutinised, particularly at PGT and Honours level and potentially in modules that are critical for Honours entry.

b. A sufficient sample should be agreed upon by both the School and their External Examiner(s). For modules with larger cohorts, a representative sample of approximately 10% of student work is generally considered sufficient. In smaller cohorts, sampling up to 25% may be appropriate.

c. The sample should encompass a range of performance levels, including first-class work, borderline cases between classifications, mid-range work within a classification grade, and failed submissions.

d. The sample provided to the External Examiner should include samples of both continuous assessment and examinations.

e. Schools may determine the most appropriate way of providing this information to their External Examiners, and it is recommended that Schools consult with their External Examiners on this process.

10.3.4 The functions of an External Examiner with regard to the monitoring of samples can be defined as follows:

a. Monitoring the standard of assessment, marking and feedback procedures.
b. Providing feedback on the assessment marks and insights into the School's/Department's internal quality control.
c. Suggesting ways in which the programme may develop or that modules may interact better.
d. Identifying any anomalous marks and discuss with Schools the reasons why these might have occurred.
e. Monitoring any adjustment of the distribution of grades in modules.
f. Advising on problematic cases that cannot be resolved within the School.

10.3.5 As outlined in Section 4.8 above, the School/Department should ensure that External Examiners have opportunities to review the full scope of assessments for each module at least once every 3-4 years to ensure continued relevance to the intended learning outcomes and the overall programme, and to confirm that the balance of assessment is appropriate.

10.3.6 All marks on a module are open to change in the light of the External Examiner's advice at the Module Board. Schools should, however,

make every effort to resolve discrepancies in marking prior to referral to the External Examiner.

10.3.7   It is not appropriate that an External Examiner should be used as first or second marker, or asked to mark scripts in their entirety.

10.3.8   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. However, it would never be appropriate to change grades of individual students solely based on a sampling exercise.

a. If serious issues arise concerning the standard of marking (consistently too high, 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.

10.3.9   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 grades and procedures involved and on wider issues of quality assurance and enhancement encompassing programmes as a whole.

a. This feedback must be minuted, and a copy sent to the External Examiner(s) subsequently, for the record.

b. Where the External Examiner is not present for a Module Board, their views on the modules reviewed must be presented formally by a member of the Module Board, and minuted.

10.3.10 Written comments by an External Examiner on consistency and standards, which are of the highest importance, should be answered within the School.

a. 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 in a timely manner and kept on file for the purposes of monitoring and review.

b. Where University procedures are involved, the minute and any correspondence must be copied to the Dean of Learning & Teaching and/or Provost, as appropriate.

10.3.11 Should an External Examiner not be able to engage with the Module Boards, due to ill health or other extenuating circumstances, Schools should first determine if the work could be undertaken by another existing External Examiner for the School.

a. If Schools are unable to find an appropriate External Examiner, they should contact the Dean of Learning & Teaching or Provost, or their delegate, for advice.

10.3.12 Staff attendance at Module Boards should be a priority for all module co-ordinators and staff attendance should be recorded on the [standard form available from the Module Results team](). One form can be completed per School/Department for all Module Boards each semester and should be returned via email to the Module Results Team after the Module Boards are complete.

10.3.13 Written minutes should be retained for all Module Boards providing a record and rationale of decisions made. Where end of semester Module Boards meet concurrently, one set of minutes is appropriate.

a. This set of minutes should also include External Examiners' comments about the programme(s) as a whole.

b. Module Board records should be kept for the year of creation plus six years.

11. Options available to Module Boards

11.1 Approve grades

Module boards may approve module grades by accepting all marked complete assessment submitted by the marker(s) following the School/Department's internal review processes.

11.2 Incomplete module assessment

The Module Board may consider cases where the assessment of the module is incomplete due to extenuating circumstances. This is outlined in Section 5.3 of the [Assessment and feedback policy]().

11.3 Grade adjustments in preparation for the Module Board

The following is intended as a guide to Module Boards for when grade adjustment might be considered. The Dean of Learning & Teaching or Provost, or their delegate, will also follow this guidance when signing off reported module results.

11.3.1 Grade adjustment might be appropriate when:

a. fewer than 5% or more than 30% of students have obtained a grade of 16.5 or more.
b. The highest grade(s) awarded is/are less than 16.9.

c. There is very strong bunching such that 80% or more of grades lie between 14–16, with few below or above this range.

d. The mean or median grade is less than 12 (typically for Honours/PGT modules).

11.3.2 Careful analysis of the module data might reveal specific problems with elements, which could be adjusted and then re-entered into the overall calculation. Alternatively, the overall grade distribution might require attention.

11.3.3 Example methods of grade adjustment that could be considered include:

a. For grades on the 20-point scale, adjustments can be made to stretch or compress the range. Stretching the range (either at the top end or the bottom end, or both): this can be done using simple arithmetic by, for example, fixing a point in the grade distribution and then incrementally adding to the grades above or subtracting from the grades below, as required. Similarly, compression can be done by the opposite operations.

b. For overall module grades on a percentage scale or similar, marks can be adjusted by continuous mappings. Examples include linear mappings and piecewise linear mappings in which the marks needed to achieve each borderline are adjusted. Such adjusted marks should then be converted to grades on the 20-point scale.

11.3.4 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.

11.3.5 The number of instances where wholesale changes will occur is expected to be small, especially if Schools follow best practices of checking standards of question setting and marking across modules.

11.3.6 If Module Boards are not confident in their ability to deal with aberrant grade distributions, they should contact the Dean of Learning and Teaching or the Provost, or their delegate(s).

12. Reporting grades

12.1 Designation of responsibility

Each School/Department must appoint an official staff member responsible for approving and signing off module results. This responsibility should be

assigned to the Head of School, Director of Teaching, or an authorised Examinations/Module Results Officer.

12.2   Reporting deadlines

Deadlines for reporting module results are outlined in the *Key Dates and Deadlines for Staff* document, available [on the Semester Dates page](#). 5000-level taught postgraduate module results must normally be reported on the same deadline and in the same way as 1000 to 4000 level module results, apart from those completed over the summer months.

12.3   Reporting process

All Schools must use the Module Management System (MMS) to report module results following examination diets in May, January, and August. MMS must also be used to finalize deferred or undecided results. The Codes for Reporting are available in the Appendices of the [Assessment and feedback policy](#).

After submitting module results via MMS, Schools are required to submit [formal documentation to Registry](#) confirming the approval of results by the Module Board, including external examiners.

12.4   Non-standard and online modules

MMS must be used for result reporting for all modules, including non-standard, online and FLEX modules. However, Schools must first notify the Module Results Team (email moduleresults@st-andrews.ac.uk or phone +44 (0)1334 46 4100) to ensure the necessary system functionality is in place.

12.5   Grading and reporting standards

Module results must be reported using the designated **module results reporting codes** in conjunction with the numeric marks [from the Common Reporting Scale](#).

Schools must pay careful attention to all module grades, and failing grades should only be reported if the School is confident that this is appropriate and justifiable.

12.6   Role of Associate Deans/Provost Education in reporting grades

The Associate Deans/Provost Education approve submitted grades and scrutinise grade patterns, module grades and the distribution of results and report to Academic Monitoring Group.

As part of this process, the Associate Deans/Provost Education review all module grades against a six-year historical record.

13. Classification

13.1   Classification of General degrees, Honours degrees, Integrated Masters degrees, Postgraduate Certificates, Postgraduate Diploma, and Taught Postgraduate Masters degrees are dealt with under the Classification Policy.

    13.1.1   Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma are unclassified awards.

13.2   The School of Medicine hold Classification Boards for the awards of MBChB only. Further information on these Classification Boards can be found in the MBChB programme regulations.

14. Academic Monitoring Group

14.1   Academic Monitoring Group (AMG) reviews the quality of educational provision and student experience delivered by the University. This group consists of the Vice-Principal Education (Proctor), the Dean of Learning and Teaching, the Provost, the Associate Deans and Provost Education, the Head of Education Policy and Quality and members of their team, the Planning Officer, the Head of Service Enhancement, Business Transformation, and student representatives.

14.2   AMG reviews all annual academic monitoring reports submitted by Schools, sharing best practice and identifying issues to take forward for future action:

    14.2.1   AMG considers action plans from University-led reviews of learning and teaching, and reviews collaborative programmes new postgraduate taught programmes and new awards.

    14.2.2   AMG monitors issues and trends related to the quality of modules, programmes and student experience. It also monitors issues and trends relating to recruitment progression and achievement.

    14.2.3   AMG ensures that the University complies with the UK Quality Code and the SCQF and other external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRBs, and engages with the QAA on institutional reviews and monitoring.

15. Contacts

15.1 Questions about this policy and associated processes may be directed to the Academic Monitoring team (academicmonitoring@st-andrews.ac.uk), or to the relevant Associate Dean or Provost Education:

Associate Dean Education (Arts & Divinity) (assocdeanarts-education@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Associate Dean Education (Science) (assocdeansci-education@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Associate Provost Education (assocprovost-education@st-andrews.ac.uk)

16. Version control

Version number	Purpose or changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and School or unit	Date
1.0	New policy	Published	Academic Policy Officer (Digital & Student Experience)	04/09/2025