

School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering Assessment and Feedback Policy Document August 2011

The University has recently approved the University Assessment Policy (June 2011). The aims of this document are to ensure the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering implements and complies within this framework.

Assessment and feedback within the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering is used to evaluate the outcomes of student learning in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities and then to inform both the student, and the School where improvements can be made. It is used with the express purposes of:

- (i) providing a means by which to measure a student's achievements;
- (ii) provides a means to enhance student learning;
- (iii) provides a means by which staff can evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching.

Assessment and feedback play an essential part in the education process, influencing students' engagement, motivation and learning strategies. It is recognised that it can define what the student regards as important and determines much of the work students undertake. The resulting feedback can then help students develop the ability to monitor, evaluate and regulate their own learning. From the staff perspective however, it is recognized that effective assessment and feedback can be a time consuming process that requires a high degree of professionalism to provide consistent and valuable marks and feedback against the stated learning outcomes.

The School consequently echoes the the University's implementation of these responsibilities as set out in the following principles:

Contributing to student learning

- (i) Assessment practice should promote effective learning.
- (ii) The amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate evaluation of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes.
- (iii) Appropriate and timely feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvements.
- (iv) Students should be fully aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and the consequences associated with it.

Conducting assessments

- (v) Everyone involved in the assessment of students must be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities.
- (vi) The principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment should be explicit, valid and reliable.
- (vii) Assessment should be conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard to security.
- (viii) The procedures for marking and for moderating marks must be transparent and fair.
- (ix) The criteria for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award must be transparent.
- (x) Assessment decisions must be documented accurately and systematically and decisions of relevant assessment panels and examination boards should be communicated as quickly as possible.

Principle 1: *Assessment practice should promote effective learning.*

For every module, there should be a handbook providing stated learning outcomes and the assessment procedures to be implemented on the module; these should take into account the requirements for attaining the relevant academic standards. The assessment procedures should address ALL of the stated learning outcomes, and the criteria / marking schemes / rubrics for each unit of assessment should be clearly stated in advance in clear and understandable English. Ideally each module should use several forms of assessment procedure to accommodate and evaluate a range of student abilities and levels of attainment, and to facilitate both timely formative and summative feedback. Students should be provided with a reasonable time to evaluate the forms assessment being used so that they can make value judgments against the assessment on the importance of the skills and knowledge being gained within the module.

Principle 2: *The amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate evaluation of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes.*

Students must be provided with clear information on the timing of individual assessments in writing and be provided with adequate time to review and prepare before assessment. Staff are asked to consider the assessment requirements of other modules that the students are taking so that deadlines can be evenly distributed. The weighting of the assessment tasks as a percentage of the module mark should be clearly stated in the module handbook at the outset of the course. If staff wish to introduce unscheduled assessments (e.g. 'pop quizzes'), this possibility must be clearly stated in the module handbook.

Principle 3: *Appropriate and timely feedback is provided to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvements.*

Feedback on work is dependent on the nature and level of the work being assessed. Some general principles are considered below. It is assumed that all courses (level 1 and 2) with assessed practicals, workshops and tutorials will provide timely and formative feedback to students within the first four weeks of commencement of the course in some form. All staff are encouraged to give both positive and negative feedback in a supportive and encouraging fashion, with the intention to motivate, develop and encourage all students to enhance their academic potential.

- **Tutorials:** It is assumed that all work submitted to a tutorial will be marked and returned during the tutorial. Detailed formative assessment will be provided verbally during the tutorial, students wishing more detailed individual feedback can make an appointment to discuss the work with the tutor following the tutorial.
- **Workshops:** Students are encouraged to gain formative feedback on their progress during the workshop by discussion with the session facilitators overseeing the set activity. Students should receive marked work back following an assessed workshop within three weeks, with generic feedback to the class by e-mail, and only specific points highlighted on the returned work.
- **Practicals:** Any prelabs associated with set laboratory sessions should be returned marked to the students within one week. Post lab reports should ideally be marked and made available to the students within two weeks of submission of the report – the School reserves the right to retain scripts of on-going lab experiments to avoid issues of copying. It is expected that generic feedback is given to the entire class through an e-mail, and specific points highlighted on scripts as appropriate. Markers receiving work submitted late, or work with missing sections of assessed coursework are not required to provide detailed feedback.
- **Class tests / Take-home tests:** These should be marked and the marks returned to the students within four weeks. For pieces of work contributing to 20% of a module at stages 2, 3 and 4, the assessed work can be retained for review by the external examiners, but staff setting the assessment are required to provide generic feedback to the class covering general points of difficulty. Individuals can make an appointment to discuss their performance once the marks and generic feedback has been.
- **Design and research projects:** All criteria for assessment of project work should be clearly stated from the outset of a project. Students are encouraged to gain regular (normally weekly) informal feedback from the project / group supervisor and have several formal meetings to review progress over the duration of the project. Final reports submitted will normally be reviewed and assessed by supervisors prior to final submission to provide formative feedback. Final reports are retained for the external examiners to assess and not returned to students. Specific marks are not returned to students, although supervisors are encouraged to discuss coursework marks with students as the project progresses informally.
- **Essays and other assessed pieces of coursework:** Under the normal procedures these will be returned marked to students unless they are a large component of the module's assessment procedure, in which case they will be retained for the external examiners to review. Each student can expect to receive a mark and an overview of their performance on generic assessed coursework within four weeks of the submission date. Individuals can make an appointment to discuss their performance once the marks and generic feedback has been provided.
- **Examinations:** The School retains all examination papers, but the marks for individual questions will be available from personal tutors following first semester examinations. Generic information on each of the papers should be provided by module coordinators following the examination board meeting. Students who wish to see their marked script must do so through written request to the School manager and the School will endeavour to accommodate the student concerned in a timely fashion.

Principle 4: *Students should be fully aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and the consequences associated with it.*

The School highlights at induction, through the School handbook and through a series of presentations what constitutes academic misconduct, in particular fabrication, copying from another student and plagiarism and they are informed from the outset of the consequence of such misconduct. Particular attention is drawn to the regulations within the induction programme, but also through the practical courses and the instructions for particular pieces of assessed work.

The School attempts to follow the University misconduct regulations, while exercising discretion and confidentiality. All those suspected of minor offences are dealt with by module coordinators according to the University regulations. A record of such action is maintained by the Director of Education and students who repeatedly offend are to be brought before the School's Misconduct Committee, chaired by the Head of School or nominee, and further action will be taken in consultation with Academic Affairs if necessary. Students accused of a major academic offence, as set out in the University calendar will be referred immediately Academic Affairs. All students assumed to be guilty of an academic offence and penalised accordingly are informed of their right to appeal the decision and the procedures they would need to undertake to do this.

Principle 5: *Everyone involved in the assessment of students must be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities*

All new permanent teaching staff are required to undergo the University's PGCHET and then to attend additional training courses if identified through their annual appraisal procedures. The School reviews and monitors the assessment performed by teaching assistants and probationary staff (See appropriate School policy document). In addition, the DE is responsible for reviewing student feedback on both courses and individual staff members to ensure maintenance of the teaching quality.

Principle 6: *The principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment should be explicit, valid and reliable.*

The School publishes information and guidance on assessment in clear, accurate and accessible English to staff and students through the Module handbooks, and written information with regard to specific tasks distributed either by e-mail or posted on Queen's on-line to students and Clerical Staff responsible for accepting assessed coursework. The programme specifications and module handbooks should reflect how the methods of assessment match the appropriate learning outcomes and should be reviewed annually through the annual module and programme review procedures. It is the responsibility of module coordinators to ensure that assessment is operated fairly within their courses both for individual learners, and across all students and that all rules and regulations are applied consistently.

Mark transcription from coursework and examination papers to assessment records (spreadsheets) should be completed by the module coordinator AND the appropriate exams liaison Officer. Marks are then checked at the examination board for inconsistencies in a student's performance. Module marks posted on QSIS are then entered again by two people; the Examination Officer and member of the Clerical clerk. All entered marks should then be checked a second time before final posting to avoid transcription errors.

Principle 7: *Assessment should be conducted with rigour, probity and fairness and with due regard to security.*

The School appoints an Examination Liaison Officers to both the Chemistry and Chemical Engineering programmes who act as a contact with the University Examinations Office on all matters to do with the administration and conduct of examinations. The Examination Liaison Officer will check that all examinations associated with their academic area have been scheduled, that the duration of each examination is correct, that modules with common questions are examined at the same time, that the number of students for each examination is accurate and that any discrepancies are reported to the Examinations Office. Examination irregularities are reported to the Head of School who must carry out an investigation in line with University regulations. The School clearly and consistently implements University regulations in respect of the membership, procedures, powers and accountability of Board of Examiners. All examination scripts are marked anonymously according to regulations. Only the Examination Liaison Officers and the School Manager has access to the identity of the anonymous codes, and these are used upto the completion of the academic records presented at the appropriate examination board. Coursework in general is not marked against anonymous code given the requirement to provide timely feedback. The School ensures security of assessment at the time of submission through a completed sign-in sheet with in

the general office, and all submitted work is routinely stamped and dated. All forms of assessments are to be treated as 'confidential' material and only returned directly to individual students as appropriate. All major pieces of assessed coursework are retained for one year following the graduation of a student.

Principle 8: *The procedures for marking and for moderating marks must be transparent and fair*

Students should be given clear guidance as to each piece of assessed coursework regarding the marking criteria, weightings, deadlines, staff marking and procedures for moderating assessed coursework in writing at the time the piece of work is set. This is particularly important with regard to project and design work modules at the higher levels of the course.

All Examination questions are required to have a detailed breakdown of the marks allocated to each section. Small group tutorials should not contribute more than 10% of a module mark to avoid any inconsistencies in marking affecting an overall degree classification. Tutors are encouraged to follow the stated marking criteria. All final year project work will be marked by two members of staff independently, and then moderated by an appropriate panel to ensure even distribution of marks. The School reserves the right to moderate marks through the examination board, or subcommittee thereof in the interest of perceived fairness, even after provisional marks have been released to students.

Principle 9: *The criteria for progressing from one stage of a programme to another and for qualifying for an award must be transparent.*

The progression criteria and how the final degree award is determined, for each programme taught within the School are explicitly presented in the School's handbook and discussed with the students at induction. Students deemed to be at risk of not progressing due to poor attendance, poor coursework submission or low achievement are initially called to the Schools *Student Support Committee* to explain the course requirements and the consequences of continued lack of engagement, and to assist in over-coming any declared issues. Students who are deemed to have failed prerequisite courses, or who are carrying two failed modules and so ineligible to progress, as identified by the Schools examination boards are called to the School's Progress committee, where the opportunity to repeat, submit missed coursework and the number of resit opportunities is explained to them in detail. This is then conveyed in writing following the meeting.

Principle 10: *Assessment decisions must be documented accurately and systematically and decisions of relevant assessment panels and examination boards are to be communicated as quickly as possible.*

The School has three or four Examinations Liaison Officers in the School appointed for three year terms. There is a lead examination officer in both Chemical Engineering and Chemistry, responsible for the submission of the degree qualifying marks, supported by a colleague to oversee the level 1 and resit papers. The Senior examination liaison officers are responsible for the recording of assessment decisions and posting and releasing the marks on QGIS assisted by designated members of the School's clerical staff.

The School's examination boards are responsible for validating the assessment decisions, in accordance with the University regulations. The School manager and / or School Administrator is responsible for keeping an accurate record of the proceedings which is then reviewed by the Chair of the examination board, normally the Head of School or his nominee (A Head of Teaching). A hard copy off all examination board minutes is retained by the School Manager.

Hard copies of the Assessment Records are collected following examination board meetings and destroyed. Copies of the Assessment records can only be retained by the Examination Liaison Officer, the School Manager / Administrator, the Director of Education and the Advisor of Studies.

The School will endeavour to release all marks in a timely fashion according to the stated times used to provide coursework feedback as stated above, and in the case of examinations in compliance with the designated date by which marks are to be posted. The School states that all marks released prior to being confirmed by the examination board are to be considered provisional and are to be used merely for the purposes of providing feedback on a student's performance.

The School reserves the right in exceptional cases to withhold posting marks in cases where the mark is incomplete, or there is doubt to the validity of the assessment procedure, or in cases of late disclosure of exceptional circumstances.