ASSESSMENT POLICY STATEMENT

Overview of the University's approach to assessment

1 Introduction

1.1 The Assessment Policy Statement aims to give an overview to staff and students of the key principles which underpin the University's approach to assessment. Details of this approach can be found in a number of regulatory, policy and procedural documents including:

- the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH)
- the Common Credit Framework (CCF)
- the Academic Appeal Regulations
- the Mitigating Circumstances Regulations
- the Academic Misconduct Regulations
- the Policy on Internal Verification
- the Policy for Making Adjustments to Assessment Tasks for Students with a Disability
- the Policy for the Submission, Retention and Return of Student Work

Together these regulations, policies and procedures ensure that assessment of students studying on the University's courses is underpinned by fairness and transparency. All academic staff, academic support staff and students should ensure that they are familiar with these documents.

2 Principles of assessment

2.1 The purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have achieved the stated learning outcomes of a unit, and that they have achieved the standard required for the Unit credit to be awarded. In most situations, assessment will also quantify the level of performance by the use percentage marks for feedback, processing assessment outcomes and calculation of awards.

2.2 Students' work should only be assessed against the assessment criteria published in each Unit Descriptor. These are set in accordance with national standards in the discipline, with reference to the appropriate outcomes in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and subject benchmarks (HE) or course specifications (FE). These ensure that students are tested for both subject-specific knowledge and general transferable skills.

2.3 The University distinguishes between assessment criteria and learning outcomes, assessment criteria being the key characteristics against which a learning outcome will be judged. The South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation Transfer (SEEC) gives the following example of a learning outcome: "by the end of the unit students will be expected to be able to design a page layout to a given brief", and of the related assessment criteria "clarity of chosen font; appropriate colour combinations; attractiveness of the design; match with publisher's brief within stated budget". Assessment criteria are included within each Unit Descriptor and referenced to learning outcomes.

2.4 The University has developed a lexicon of different assessment requirements (see Appendix 1), which outlines the main features of the requirements used on courses.

2.5 Students should be informed in advance of the assessment requirements for each unit as defined in the Unit Descriptor. More detailed information about assessment briefs and deadlines will be included in the Unit Handbook.

2.6 There should be clear published methods for recording and communicating the outcomes of assessment and providing feedback to students.

2.7 The assessment arrangements for work placement and exchange should be clearly communicated to students prior to starting the relevant period of study, and applied consistently.

2.8 Procedures must be in place for maintaining standards and ensuring comparability within the University, between the University and its partners, and externally across the sector.

2.9 Assessment processes should be equitable, inclusive, transparent, reliable and valid.

2.10 There should be regular monitoring, evaluation and review of assessment practices and policies.

3 Assurance of academic standards

3.1 All undergraduate and postgraduate courses offered by the University are subject to a rigorous process of validation. For FE awards an internal approval process applies before submission to the awarding body for validation. Courses are validated for a period of a maximum of five years, after which time the course is subject to review.

3.2 Responsibility for validation and review (including the determination of procedures and regulations for the process, and confirmation of the outcome of events) is delegated by Academic Board to the Academic Quality Committee. The approved procedures for validation and review are contained within the University's Quality Assurance Handbook (Sections C and H).

3.3 Validation and review panels consider the standard of the course against all relevant criteria, including the expectations of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education and ensure that the proposed curriculum and assessment methods will meet the stated learning objectives of the course.

3.4 Non-material changes to validated courses are approved by School Boards of Study, enabling a timely response to issues identified through course monitoring. Material changes are considered at institutional level. The criteria for changes to courses and the processes for approval of those changes are described in Section E of the Quality Assurance Handbook.

3.5 In addition, all courses are subject to rigorous annual academic monitoring, which assures the University that the academic standards of its awards are secure. Annual academic monitoring is a self-critical process in which the views of staff, students, externals and others who contribute to the delivery of courses are considered, as well as substantial statistical data on assessment performance and trends. Procedures for annual academic monitoring are approved by the Academic Quality Committee, and are published in the Quality Assurance Handbook.

3.6 Assessed work will be subject to internal moderation to ensure that the standard of marking is consistent and that the level of marks is appropriate. Internal moderation may take several forms, but is most often carried out on a sample of assessed work. The procedures for moderation are described in the *Policy on Internal Verification*.

3.7 For undergraduate and postgraduate HE provision, appropriately qualified and experienced external examiners are appointed for each award to confirm that the standards of awards are appropriate for awards in the discipline at the given level, and that assessment has been conducted competently and impartially. They are also asked to compare student achievement with that at other institutions across the sector.

3.8 For FE awards, the system of internal and external verification is defined by the awarding body.

3.9 The CCF specifies how assessment outcomes are aggregated to determine: progression, award and classification; the conditions under which compensation may be applied; the type and nature of reassessment opportunities (including penalties to be applied); penalties for late or non-submission; and arrangements for deferred submission or examination.

4 Systems to support assessment

4.1 Boards of Examiners

4.1.1 For all University taught awards, the Boards of Examiners are charged with confirming the outcomes of assessment, and ensuring that the standard of student achievement is commensurate with the agreed learning outcomes for the units and courses for which they are responsible. The Boards of Examiners are responsible for making decisions about progression, award and classification.

4.1.2 For FE awards, the structure and composition of the assessment boards are defined by the awarding body which will also oversee their operation.

4.2 Staff Development

4.2.1 All academic staff are encouraged to obtain a teaching qualification which will develop an awareness of the purposes and practices of assessment, and its place in learning. Further training is offered to all academic and sessional staff to

enable them to develop their knowledge and skills in the design and conduct of assessment. This may take the form of induction, but may include a range of training events dedicated to particular issues.

4.2.2 The University provides a Graduate Certificate, Postgraduate Certificate and MA in Creative Arts Education for academic and academic support staff. These courses have professional accreditation links with the HEA. The Graduate Certificate and Postgraduate Certificate jointly cover the mandatory content of the Diploma in Education and Training for the FE and Skills Sector. There is an expectation that new inexperienced academic staff will undertake the Postgraduate Certificate. Experienced staff will be expected to achieve Higher Education Academy Professional Recognition at the appropriate level. Where this policy applies, new staff members are informed in their interview letters.

4.2.3 Existing staff with less than three years teaching experience and who do not hold a recognised teaching qualification are also offered the opportunity to undertake the course. Fellowship status of the Higher Education Academy is strongly encouraged for experienced HE staff.

4.2.4 For FE staff, membership of the Institute for Learning is required.

5 Conduct of assessment

5.1 All courses of study delivered by the University are taught and assessed in English.

5.2 Where any course leads to, or forms part of, the qualification of a professional or statutory body, a clear statement of this fact will be contained within the Programme Specification. The value and status of this qualification across the national sector will also be stated.

5.3 A collection of Course Handbook materials is prepared for each course offered by the University. The handbook contains information about the aims and objectives of the course; the course structure; learning and teaching issues and the curriculum, as well as containing the Unit Descriptor for each unit taught on the course (this information is now included within the course documents section of myUCA for each course). The Unit Descriptors detail the assessment requirements, and give specific weightings of each component. Validation and review panels consider the overall burden of assessment for students on each course, which is further reviewed during the annual academic monitoring exercise.

5.4 A Unit Handbook or other detailed information about the unit is issued at the start of each unit and includes:

- **unit information** (timetable for delivery including assessment submission dates/unit descriptor/any explanatory notes/distinctive features of unit);
- **unit references** (advanced reading lists/ links to websites/ other reference material);
- **unit materials** (lecture notes/hand-outs/resources/examples of past and current student work);

- **unit assessment** (description of assessment in unit that expands on information in unit descriptor/briefs/assessment processes formative/summative/explanation of assessment criteria in unit);
- **unit staff** (contact details of staff teaching on unit using only ucreative email and phone/contact time and availability of staff outside scheduled teaching time/ details of learning and student support available);

This information must also be available for each unit on myUCA.

5.5 For HE, each unit passed allows the award of credit proportional to its size.

5.6 Because of the practical nature of courses offered by the University, and the very individual nature of many projects, it is not possible for work to be assessed anonymously. The assessment criteria, mark descriptors and verification procedures ensure that assessment is conducted fairly.

5.7 Students are provided with regular feedback on their work. Feedback to students is further explained in section 8 below.

5.8 The University believes strongly in the importance of the integrity of academic conduct and takes all forms of academic misconduct seriously. Procedures have been put in place to deal with instances where students are suspected of academic misconduct; if the case is proven, this can, in the most serious instances, lead to exclusion from the University. For further information see the *Academic Misconduct Regulations*.

6 Marking

Higher Education

6.1 The regulations for assessment are contained in the Common Credit Framework.

6.2 For the purposes of calculating unit and award outcomes, a mark between 0 and 100 is given for each assessment component.

6.3 All assessment components must be passed for a pass to be achieved in the unit.

6.4 Assessment components are weighted in terms of their contribution to the overall unit mark, as stated in the validated unit descriptor.

6.5 Where an assessment component comprises two or more assessment tasks, the mark shall be awarded to the assessment component rather than to the individual assessment tasks (e.g. for a portfolio a single holistic mark is assigned see Appendix 3).

6.6 Mark Descriptors have been developed to assist in the assurance of standards and equity across courses (these are appended to the Common Credit Framework).

Further Education

6.8 Grades for FE assessment are given in accordance with the regulations of the awarding body. Grading descriptors for FE courses are specified by the relevant awarding body and are outlined in Course Handbooks.

7 Security of assessment information

7.1 All assessment information which has been entered onto the student record system is backed up regularly by IT Services.

7.2 Access to assessment information is governed by the University Data Protection Policy, and is restricted to those with the appropriate privileges.

8 Feedback to students

8.1 Constructive feedback is essential for successful learning. Feedback motivates and supports reflection, especially when valid criticism is accompanied by appropriate praise and commentary.

8.2 Feedback should be provided in a variety of formats, including group written or oral feedback relating to common themes emerging from assessment, individual oral feedback, individual written feedback, peer commentary, etc. In creative arts subjects, there is typically a substantial element of oral formative feedback on practical work contributing to students' learning.

8.3 The University has agreed that, as a minimum, written feedback must be provided on all summatively assessed components and must address all the relevant assessment criteria.

8.4 In order to ensure parity in practice, the University has developed an Assessment Feedback form (for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students). Students must receive a separate Assessment Feedback form for each assessment component of each unit. Completed Assessment Feedback forms must be returned to students along with their work within four weeks of the final submission deadline for that assessment component, with the exception of:

- dissertation units: feedback must be provided within eight weeks of the submission deadline; and

- approved late submission (see the Mitigating Circumstances Regulations and the Policy for Adjustments to Assessments for Students with Disabilities): assessment feedback deadlines will be adjusted to relate to the new submission deadline.

8.5 The following principles are intended to inform the academic practice of providing written feedback.

- Feedback should motivate, be positive and include constructive comment on things that have been done well;

- Feedback should provide guidance on what could have been done better and how, so that a student knows how to improve next time;

- Feedback should provide enough detail to evaluate the ideas and techniques that students have used in their work to enable them to digest their learning and to improve their understanding of how they can improve;

- Feedback comments should describe achievement with respect to a clearly referenced assessment criterion;

- The Mark Descriptors should be used to frame description of achievement in a course and its units using language relevant to the subject or discipline so that feedback reflects the level of achievement; and

- Where appropriate, feedback should reference spelling, grammar and use of English.

8.6 The commentary should be explained in straight-forward language consistent with that used for the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, contextualised by the nature of the assignment. It should not introduce confusion in the mind of the student about the basis for the assessment. Written feedback must be consistent with that given orally.

8.7 Where an assessment component comprises multiple assessment tasks, a single Assessment Feedback form for that component will be provided within three weeks of the final submission deadline for the component. In addition, it is good practice to provide informal (ungraded) feedback on the individual assessment tasks at the time that they are undertaken.

8.8 Summative assessment contributes to a unit outcome; whilst formative assessment is purely for the purposes of development learning and does not attract a mark. Formative assessment should be accompanied by informal feedback in order to develop students' learning in preparation for summative assessment.

9 Professional and Statutory Awarding Bodies

9.1 Where a course of study forms part of the qualifications regime of a professional or statutory awarding body, information about the specific requirements that must be met to obtain the award or professional qualification will be published in the Course Handbook.

10 Collaborative provision

10.1 The University is responsible for the standards of assessment for all of its awards, including those delivered by a collaborative partner. Accordingly:

- Assessment regulations, practices and criteria adopted by partner institutions for courses validated by the University will be approved at

validation and must be equivalent to and consistent with those applied at the University; and

- The University will appoint external examiners and convene Boards of Examiners for University awards delivered by collaborative partners in accordance with the procedures and policies detailed in the Quality Assurance Handbook.

10.2 Where the University delivers awards validated by another awarding body (FE and Research), the University will adopt the assessment regulations of that body.

11 Review of assessment regulations

11.1 Assessment regulations, policies and procedures are kept under review by the Academic Quality Committee, which makes recommendations to Academic Board.

Appendix 1: Assessment methods

OBJECTIVE:

To describe a number of assessment methods which reflect practice within the University and the sector.

Key Information Sets (KIS) are required to be returned by all institutions for all undergraduate courses. Assessment methods are one of the information sets that are collected from course documents such as Unit Descriptors.

ASSESSMENT GENERALLY

The UCA Common Credit Framework (CCF) stipulates that each unit will be assessed by a single component or multiple components and that each component must be passed. A component is an element of assessment that is associated with a summative mark which contributes to the overall unit mark.

Courses are encouraged to use formative assessment methods to enable students to develop their work and progress through each unit. All units are summatively assessed on completion of each component.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Several assessment methods may be used within any given Course or Unit, depending on the nature of the subject and the learning goals of the curriculum. These methods may be used to describe a single component or multiple assessment components in the Unit Descriptor. The methods below are defined according to the Guidance developed by QAA and HEFCE for classification of KIS data. For some of these methods, additional clarification of the UCA context is provided below the KIS definition.

It is regarded as a feature of good practice that Courses employ diverse assessment methods, providing students with a range of opportunities to demonstrate their strengths and to utilise a wider set of skills.

Written Exam: a question or set of questions relating to a particular area of study

KIS Written exams usually occur at the end of a period of learning and assess whether students have achieved the intended learning outcomes. They may be 'seen', where the student is aware in advance of the question(s) they are expected to answer, or 'unseen', where the questions are only revealed 'on the day'. In an 'open-book' exam, a student is allowed to use a selection of reference materials during the assessment. The questions asked as part of a written exam may be essay, short answer, problem or multiple-choice. Written exams usually (but not always) take place under timed conditions.

UCA Examination (essay, multi-choice, Q&A) – Students participate in formal written examination usually within a specified time limit. The content of examinations may be seen in advance or unseen (assessment decisions might be open or closed to students).

Written Assignment, including Essay: an exercise completed in writing

KIS Written exercises that typically have deadlines attached but which are not carried out under timed conditions. A well-known example is the essay, where

students are required to write about a particular topic or answer a question in depth. Other examples include written briefings on particular topics.

UCA Developed responses to given or negotiated problems, in a format and to a deadline specified within the Unit.

Report

A description, summary or other account of an experience or activity.

KIS There are many different kinds of report - often students are required to produce a report after participating in a practical activity such as fieldwork, laboratory work, work experience or placement. Reports typically have a prescribed format.

UCA This would include Work-based Assessment: Assessment is made in collaboration with, or taking into account the views of, work-placement employers, using the model stated in the Unit.

Dissertation

An extended piece of written work, often the write-up of a final-year project.

KIS A dissertation is a substantial piece of writing deriving from research that a student has undertaken. Dissertations are the result of a student's independent work, carried out under the guidance of a supervisor. Different subject areas may follow different conventions in relation to the production of dissertations. (Note that other outputs from projects are listed separately).

Portfolio

A collection of work that relates to a given topic or theme, which has been produced over a period of time.

KIS Typically, a portfolio contains a number of pieces of work, usually connected by a topic or theme. Students are usually required to organise the collection of examples and the portfolio often includes some reflective accounts (diaries/logs). Students on education courses may, for example, collect in a portfolio essays around particular teaching methods, lesson plans, teaching materials that they have developed and a report about the teaching experience itself. See Appendix 3: Portfolio Assessment

Project output (other than dissertation)

Output from project work, often of a practical nature, other than a dissertation or written report.

KIS Students are assessed on the output of a period of project work (other than in the form of a dissertation or written report). Examples are diverse and include the staging of a play or other performance, a piece of artwork, a new product or a poster.

Oral assessment and presentation (individual or group)

A conversation or oral presentation on a given topic, including an individual contribution to a seminar.

KIS Examples of oral assessments and presentations might include conversations, discussions, debates, presentations and individual contributions to seminars. This category would also include the viva voce exam which is typically used by institutions in specific circumstances such as clarifying assessment decisions reached via other means.

UCA An assessment is made based on evidence presented orally to assessors, assessment decisions are based on the oral evidence and that might be supplemented with written or visual material. This could include a Viva Voce: students participate in a formal oral examination. The precise content of a viva voce examination is usually unseen.

Practical skills assessment
Assessment of a student's practical skills or competence.

KIS Practical skills assessment focuses on whether, and/or how well, a student performs a specific practical skill or technique (or competency). Examples include clinical skills, laboratory techniques, identification of or commentary on artwork, surveying skills, language translation or listening comprehension, and so on.

UCA Critiques or Discursive Assessment – Achievement of students against the specified learning outcomes of the Unit is discussed and debated within an 'open' staff/student forum.

Set exercises
Questions or tasks designed to assess the application of knowledge, analytical, problem-solving or evaluative skills.

KIS Examples might include data interpretation and data analysis exercises and problem-based or problem-solving exercises. The categorisation of set exercises will depend on the nature of the exercise being set. Typically, set exercises will not be conducted under exam conditions and will therefore normally be coursework. Where the set exercise is performed under exam conditions and does not involve the use of practical skills it should be treated as a written exam otherwise it should be a practical exam.

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

These might include:-

Peer Assessment – Students participate in the assessment of themselves and their peers and for awarding marks, using the model specified within the Unit.

Self-Assessment – Students participate in assessing their own work and for awarding marks, using the model specified within the Unit.

Individual Tutor-led Assessment – Initial assessment decisions are made by a single tutor, subject to internal verification procedures.

Team Tutor-led Assessment – Initial assessment decisions are made by an academic team, arriving at marks collaboratively, or by synthesising the marks of individuals within the team.

Work-based Assessment – Assessment is made in collaboration with, or taking into account the views of work-placement employers, using the model stated in the Unit.

Continuous Assessment – Assessment occurs periodically throughout the Course of study. A final mark is achieved by the aggregation of marks specified within the

assessment scheme of the particular award/institution. This may refer to marks awarded to more than one component in a Unit or to a series of assessment tasks examined holistically in a unit.

USEFUL REFERENCES

http://www.hesa.ac.uk/component/option,com_studrec/task,show_file/Itemid,233/mnl,12061/href,Calculations_methods.html/

Appendix 2: Portfolio assessment

1 Portfolio assessment is the holistic consideration of a body of evidence of student learning made up of a number of assessment tasks, which are not separately assessed or individually weighted. A portfolio is usually a single assessment component.

2 The key issues bearing on portfolio assessment relate to the transparency of the assessment process. It is important that academic teams make clear the relationship between learning outcomes, assessment criteria and "evidence" (that is, student work) so that students understand the component/portfolio mark.

3 It is necessary to document this relationship in Unit Handbooks, so that it is clear to all involved in the assessment process and available to internal and external auditors (including moderators, external examiners and QAA reviewers).

4 It is essential that the Unit Handbook and (where appropriate) the project brief specifies clearly the nature of the evidence required for the portfolio.