

Guidelines on Assessment

Purposes of Assessment

1. Assessment is seen as serving two basic purposes:
 - A formative purpose, since through it evidence can be obtained about what students have learned, and about whether and how well students have applied their knowledge. These serve as a guide for future teaching and learning. Formative assessment is designed to enable the teacher to provide feedback to students on the efficacy of their learning and on their strengths and weaknesses, so that they can take appropriate action. It enables staff to judge the effectiveness of their teaching.
 - A summative purpose, since through it, at the end of modules or courses, evidence can be obtained about how well students are learning with regard to the objectives of the module or programme. This evidence matched against appropriate criteria, enables decisions to be made as to assess whether:
 - students have passed or failed and/or whether they may or may not progress to the next module or next part of a course;
 - students are qualified for an award and, if so, at what level.

Characteristics of Good Assessment

2. Good assessment is:
 - Valid – it measures the learning construct(s) or the objective(s) that it is supposed to be measuring, and is appropriate to student level and needs;
 - Reliable – as a result of setting out clear criteria for marking and grading, there is consistency of judgement across markers and of level of challenge across tests at the same level;
 - Beneficial in Impact – it has a “healthy wash-back” effect on the teaching and learning that takes place during a course, i.e. it encourages the use of executive, conceptual, procedural and representational knowledge. It allows students to express their thinking, demonstrate what knowledge they have constructed and show what they are capable of doing with regard to the objectives of the programme. It should not limit their learning to memorisation of facts or the reproduction of the thoughts of others. It should enable teachers to encourage students to find things out for themselves and to think and construct their own knowledge from the descriptions of the world provided by others. We need to assess what is important, rather than making important what is easy to assess;
 - Practical – staff and students can do the assessments required within the constraints of the time and resources they have. Over-assessment is avoided;
 - As Authentic as Possible – the assessment should ask students to carry out some real and purposeful tasks that go beyond the mere regurgitation of knowledge.

Some Principles Underlying Good Assessment

3. The fundamental principle underlying assessment in the Programme is that it should be firmly aligned with the learning outcomes and relevant QF level of the module that is being assessed, so that it can reveal whether and to what degree the aim and objectives have been achieved. Other principles that underlie good assessment practices at tertiary level are listed below.
4. Good assessment should demand a creative or critical response from the students rather than mere regurgitation of pre-digested knowledge;
5. Good assessment focuses on the higher-levels of learning that combine:
 - executive knowledge (the ability to plan and carry out tasks/projects);
 - conceptual knowledge (the ability to generate, connect and use ideas);
 - procedural knowledge (the ability to perform skills and carry out particular procedures);
 - representational knowledge (the ability to understand or express knowledge through language, visuals and other means).
6. Good assessment draws on a range of assessment instruments across a Programme to emphasise different aspects of learning. The instruments might be drawn from the

following:

- tests;
 - tasks;
 - projects and project reports;
 - compositions/essays on particular topics;
 - literature reviews or summaries of website searches;
 - creative endeavours;
 - performances;
 - oral presentations;
 - written presentations;
 - oral tests and interviews;
 - portfolios of work demonstrating a range of learning products; and
 - end-of module written examinations.
7. In good assessment clear criteria are established indicating what students have to know and to do and how well they have to do things to merit a particular grade. “Grade Descriptors” are therefore required;
 8. In good assessment teaching staff make clear to students early on in each module how the learning in that module will be assessed and on what criteria student performance will be judged;
 9. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that the evidence collected in assessments about the strengths and weaknesses of students is acted upon in the next stage of teaching and learning;
 10. The Programme Development and Review Committee and the Assessment and Examinations Committee have agreed that over the Programme as a whole approximately 30% to 70% of the assessment weighting should be given to course assignments and approximately 70% to 30% should be given to end of module examinations, though the requirements of individual modules may vary within this according to the purpose and content of the module.