Aston University

ASSESSMENT REGULATIONS AND POLICIES

1 Marking Policy and Definitions of Marking Practices.....2
2 Class Tests.....5
3 Giving Effective Feedback on Assessed Work.....7
4 Accreditation of Prior Learning.....11
5 *Viva voce*.....12
6 Generic Band Descriptors.....13

Chapter 1

Marking Policy

Assessments and Marking Schemes

1 Schools should ensure that programme and module specifications (including marking schemes and assessment weightings) are available to students at the beginning of the academic year.
2 Examination and coursework questions should appropriately reflect the Level of the credit to be assessed, and are expected to differ according to Level, either in the assessment question set, or in the mark scheme to be used.
3 Changes to assessment which have a retrospective effect on current students must not be introduced without full consultation with all students affected.

Moderation and Anonymous Marking

4 All formal written examination scripts administered by Registry to be marked anonymously to ensure fairness at the marking stage.
5 A minimum of 20% of final year/Master's written examination scripts will be moderated.
6 A minimum of 20% of final year/Master's coursework which contributes a significant percentage of marks to the overall module mark (i.e. 30% or more), or which assess a crucial aspect of the module, will be moderated.
7 All substantial final year projects (i.e. projects carrying 20 credits or more) and Master's dissertations will be moderated.

Definitions of Marking Practices

All markers should have access to mark schemes and model answers where appropriate.

Independent double-marking

Two markers are responsible for marking the work of all candidates (or a sub-set of candidates) in the group independently i.e. without seeing the marks of the other marker. The final mark is normally obtained from an average of the two marks. If there is a large discrepancy between the two marks (e.g. 10% or more) either the two markers will discuss and agree the final mark or a relevant member of staff (e.g. Programme Director or module leader) will mediate a discussion between the two markers to agree a final mark. If no agreement can be reached a third internal marker will normally mark the work.

This type of marking should be used for dissertations and major undergraduate projects.

Moderation

Moderation is the name given to procedures for checking the accuracy and appropriateness of academic assessment. It usually involves a person 'new' to the item being moderated. That may be a person external to the University or a member of staff who has not been directly involved in the process to be moderated. Things which are moderated at Aston include examination papers and marking.

Moderation: Second-marking

Two markers are responsible for marking the work of all (or a sample of) candidates consecutively. The second marker sees the marks of the first marker. The final mark is normally the first mark.

If there is a large discrepancy between the two marks (e.g. 10% or more) the relevant member of staff (e.g. Programme Director or module leader) will mediate a discussion between the two markers to agree a recommendation on the final mark to be made to the Module Board. This may involve adjusting the marks of the cohort. If no agreement can be reached a third internal marker will normally mark the work.

This type of marking is used at postgraduate level and undergraduate level.

Moderation: Sampling

A defined sample of work is marked by a member of staff who is not the main marker (or member of a team of markers).

The aim of moderation is to highlight any potential marking problems. For example marks may be found to be too low or too high either overall or in a particular band (e.g. 30 – 40%). In the case of a marking team the marking of one member may be found to be out of line with the others.

A report of moderation should be made available to the Examination Board. Moderation normally will not produce marks for each individual moderated. Evidence of moderation e.g. checks on sections of the question paper made by the moderator should be provided.

Issues identified by moderation may be dealt with by a Module Board either by adjusting the marks for the cohort or a relevant section of the cohort or (in extreme cases) by requesting a remarking all of the scripts.

Moderation as defined here is most often used at undergraduate level.

Choosing a sample

Regulations specify that at least 20% of final year examinations and coursework should be sampled. All first markers (e.g. if a team of markers is involved) should be sampled. A sample will usually contain scripts at the boundaries of mark bands e.g. 30%, 40% etc. and a few scripts from the centre of bands e.g. 35%, 45% for comparison. This pattern is normally repeated for each marker sampled.

Arithmetic checking

A check is made that all questions have been marked and that the recording and addition of marks adding to the total mark is correct. This is separate from marking of the work and may be done by someone who is not a member of academic staff.

This type of check is particularly important in assessments like multiple choice questions.

Rounding of marks

Rounding of marks means changing fractional marks to the nearest whole number. Boards of Examiners should have a clear policy on whether and how marks are rounded which is:

1. applied to all students considered by the Board
2. and is agreed with the External Examiner(s).

Marks should only be rounded once – at the module level, normally if multiple assessments have contributed to the module mark.

GS Last up-dated September 2013

Chapter 2

Class Tests

At present class tests, although often contributing towards units of assessment, are in many cases not held under the same conditions as University examinations. Both academic staff and students have raised issues concerning the conduct of class tests and First Degrees Committee at its meeting on 3 November 1994 recommended that a minimum standard be accepted by academic departments.

Proposed recommendations are that class tests should follow University regulations for the conduct of examinations;

1. Class tests and computer generated exercises contributing towards sessional grades must be held in the rooms designated by the Registry as suitable for University examination purposes and following the Registry guidelines for the maximum number of candidates to be seated. They should not be held in tiered lecture halls unless the numbers involved are very small. Where the room is not normally used for University examinations, Schools should consult Registry regarding the maximum number of candidates to be seated. All rooms used should have adequate heating, lighting and ventilation.
2. A minimum of two weeks' notice of the date, time and location of a class test must be given.
3. Notices should be prominently displayed in the vicinity of the class test to inform other students and staff that a test is in progress.
4. Invigilation should be carried out by the same categories of staff as deemed appropriate for invigilating University examinations and the responsibilities of the invigilator will be as follows:
   - (i) to deliver question papers or other material to the test room,
   - (ii) to have a list of expected candidates and to keep a record of all those in attendance,
   - (iii) to issue candidates with instructions concerning the conduct of the test;
     - that all bags and outdoor clothing should be kept away from desks
     - that they should not leave their desk without permission
     - that they should not communicate with any person except the invigilator for the duration of the test
     - when candidates may start and when to stop the test
     - details of any permissible aids,
   - (iv) to ensure that the examiner concerned is given completed scripts or other test material at the earliest opportunity,
   - (v) to be responsible for the overall conduct of the test and to ensure that any incident of malpractice or any other incident that might

render the test invalid is reported to the Head of School as soon as possible.

GS last up-dated September 2012

Chapter 3

Policy on Giving Effective Feedback on Assessed Work

What is feedback?

The QAA Code-of-practice defines assessment as "any processes that appraise an individual's knowledge, understanding, abilities or skills." Any means by which students are given information on these constitutes feedback.

1 Aston University values and emphasises those activities that encourage students to reflect on and review their academic work to improve their performance.

2 Feedback can take many different forms. It may be spoken or written. It includes discussion and debate, annotations on written coursework or exam scripts, separate completed feedback sheets, peer-review and self-assessment/reflection.

3 Feedback will be given on work that contributes to the mark for a module. It may also be provided on work that does not contribute a mark depending on what the module leader has identified as important at that point in the module and whether the assessment feeds into similar pieces later on in the module of the programme. We use and value all kinds of feedback.

4 It has a range of purposes, such as helping understanding of progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, assisting in improving performance.

Responsibility for Feedback

5 Each module leader should ensure that the University's policy on giving effective feedback is addressed in relation to **all assessed work** in the module. The School should have a mechanism in place to ensure confidence that this policy is being applied across the School.

6 Students will be provided with information on the learning outcomes, nature of the assessment tasks and assessment criteria for each module.

Return of Marks to Students

7 Aston University recognises how important the timing of the return of marks is to students. Staff will aim to return provisional marks for assessments (examinations and coursework) to students **within 4 term-time weeks of the submission deadline**. Provisional marks are marks which have not yet been considered and formally confirmed by the Module Board. Students should be informed that provisional marks may be changed by Module Boards. When it is not possible to return provisional marks to students within 4 weeks students will be informed of the date by which the work will be marked.

8 Schools normally will release provisional marks to students via MAP.

Feedback to Students on Examination Performance

9 As a minimum requirement all Schools will provide feedback on examination performance to individual students on request, particularly in cases where the student has performed poorly or less well than expected. Schools may use other approaches to examination feedback including provision of generic feedback reports to all students.

Other sources of information

10 School information for students including module guides and student handbooks may also include useful information on feedback. The Learning Development Centre is also a useful source of advice and guidance.

Advice and guidance on good practice for effective feedback

Key Principles for Effective Feedback

For all assessed work, other than examinations, module leaders should have in place a process which ensures that feedback is:

- **Timely**
  Feedback should be returned as quickly as possible to students, and in sufficient time for students to be able to review the work in order to improve, on the basis of the feedback, the next related piece of work.
- **Perceived as relevant and meaningful**
  Students need to know how to correct their mistakes. Provide focussed specific comments on aspects of the work, and direct them to further reading to improve their understanding of key points. Distinguish between different skills and attributes of the piece of work, so that students can identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and identify discrete areas for action and improvement. Clear marking criteria which articulate the important aspects of a piece of work provide a framework against which feedback can be given. It is good practice to give students the marking criteria.
- **Encouraging**
  Feedback should offer a balance of encouraging comments and criticism; it should state what is good about the piece of work as well as what could be improved.

Balance of Assessment Methods

It is recognised that increasing class sizes place considerable demands on teaching staff, and that some types of coursework may take significant amounts of time to mark and return to students if the quality of feedback provided is to be useful to them in improving their learning. Teaching staff are therefore encouraged to consider a range of assessment methods which include some where feedback can be given more quickly.

All modules should have a feedback strategy which explains the purpose of feedback and how and when feedback will be given
There should be information for students that explains how feedback will be given: written or oral, group or individual, on feedback forms etc. Students must be advised when to expect feedback.

There should be an appropriate balance of feedback
Programme teams should agree the regime of assessment that will provide the appropriate balance of feedback. They should consider placing additional emphasis on feedback on assessed pieces in the early stages of programmes and where students are making a transition between learning institutions (as, for example, with 'top-up' students).

Students should be prepared to receive feedback
This can be done by a variety of means, including:
- Managing students' expectations so that the purpose of feedback is clearly understood prior to assessment or evaluation. Discussion of learning outcomes and assessment criteria with the class can ensure that students properly understand what is required of them. Some students may not understand the language used in assessment criteria and assessment feedback without having the opportunity to discuss them with their tutor.
- Identifying all channels of feedback (for example, oral in class, from peers, self-feedback through reflection, written on assignments, group feedback). Many students only consider 'feedback' to be the written comments on assessed pieces of work, and fail to fully recognise the valuable feedback that they are given on an on-going basis throughout their programmes of teaching. Regularly pointing out to classes when feedback is being given can help students appreciate and use all modes of feedback to improve their learning.
- Encouraging the application of feedback by asking students to use their feedback to improve their later assignments.

All feedback should be designed to support students in closing the gap between current and desired performance

Feedback should be provided in relation to assessment criteria that are linked to programme or module learning outcomes. It should identify strengths and weaknesses in relation to specific assessment criteria, and should offer guidance to the learner on how to correct their mistakes. For example, where written feedback is provided this might be in the form of specific 'action points' alongside the normal feedback that identify for the learner what he/she needs to do next time to improve performance. Especially for work not contributing to the marks for a module, this may involve students identifying their own action points in class, based on feedback they have received from class activities.

Many of the criticisms that students make of the feedback they receive relate to this issue – they comment that feedback is often too vague and does not help them to identify the things they need to do to improve, or that it is too general in that they cannot identify which sections of their work need improvement.

Feedback techniques (extract from QAA Code of Practice: Assessment of Students)

It may be helpful to consider how different forms of feedback can be used for different purposes. For example, students are likely to find it helpful to receive constructive comments on their work from a range of sources including teachers, personal tutors, peers and, where appropriate, practitioners. Encouraging students to reflect on their own performance, as well as receiving feedback from others, can be a useful part of the learning process, especially when opportunities for self-assessment are integrated in a module or programme.

It is also possible to provide generic feedback to students in ways that help them to improve their individual performance by learning from the cohort as a whole. For example, making available anonymously a summary of all comments provided to individual students on an assessment task set for a group can help each student to think about how his/her work could be improved, especially if the comments are clearly related to learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Another strategy that can be economical of staff time but that can provide helpful feedback to students is publishing, anonymously, assessed work at different levels showing examples of progression and staff expectations of increasing development.

In meeting the needs of students for feedback on their progression and attainment, it can be helpful to consider:

- the desirability of providing feedback at an appropriate time in the learning process, and as soon as possible after the student has completed the assessment task
- specifying the nature and extent of feedback that students can expect and whether this is to be accompanied by the return of assessed work. It is important to consider the particular needs of students studying part-time and/or remotely
- the effective use of comments on returned work, including relating feedback to intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria, in order to help students identify areas for improvement as well as commending them for achievement
- the role of oral feedback, either on a group or individual basis, as a means of supplementing or replacing written feedback
- providing guidance about the point in the module or programme where it is no longer appropriate for a member of staff to continue providing feedback to a student on his/her work. This is normally when a student is approaching an assessment, such as submission of a dissertation, or handing in a coursework assignment.

Chapter 4

Accreditation of Prior Learning

1. Where a percentage mark is available for *certificated* learning undertaken at another institution this mark should normally be used. The responsibility for making a decision on whether a percentage mark from another institution should be used resides with the School concerned. For example, in some cases it may not be appropriate for the School to accept a percentage mark from a different institution or professional body where approaches to marking standards might be very different (QAA Guidelines, Principle 2, point 2).

2. The University should award credit, but not marks, for prior experiential learning. This proposal takes into account the University's current relative lack of experience in this area, and the perceived difficulty of identifying a fully reliable method of awarding marks which will be accepted by all Schools. It is intended that the proposal be kept under review (QAA Guidelines, Principle 2, point 2).

3. Where credit is awarded but no mark is available, degree classification will be calculated on the basis of the other marks (i.e. Aston marks, and any marks from prior certificated learning deemed appropriate for use) using the formula for degree classification specified in the appropriate regulations (QAA Guidelines, Principle 2, point 2).

4. The smallest amount of learning which can be submitted for accreditation should be 10 credits (QAA Principle 2, point 3).

5. Any claim for AP(E)L should be submitted before the beginning of the relevant Stage of the programme. In the case of a Master's programme this means submission before the programme has begun. AP(E)L claims put forward after the beginning of the relevant Stage will not be accepted (QAA Principle 4).

6. Current regulations regarding the currency of credit apply to credit claimed and awarded via the AP(E)L process. For example, for a postgraduate programme current General Regulations state that 'The Board of Examiners shall have the discretion to decide the period of validity for credit, which will not normally be more than five years' (QAA Principle 4).

7. AP(E)L should be clearly recorded on transcripts.

GS June 2005

Chapter 5

Guidelines on the *viva voce*

Definitions

Oral assessments take place within modules. An oral assessment may be the only method of assessment for a module, or may be one among a number of different assessment methods used. An oral assessment results in a mark or grade which contributes to the assessment outcome of the module.

Interview - Any meeting between students and staff and/or External Examiners which cannot result in a change to the student's grade or mark. Interviews are a valuable source of information about programme quality but unlike a *viva voce* these are not a method of assessment. Interviews will often focus on the students' knowledge and understanding of the programme as a whole in order to test how effective current programme design and learning and teaching methods are in promoting achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Viva voce is:

1. a specific oral examination of a dissertation or thesis at undergraduate or master's level (or above) resulting in a mark or grade which contributes to the assessment outcome of a module or item of assessment;

OR

2. a general oral examination at undergraduate or master's level which aims to test the knowledge and understanding of a student or group of students across the programme or stage as a whole rather than in a particular module or item of assessment. This type of *viva voce* can result in a change to the student's classification and is often used to assess 'borderline' candidates.

Guidance on the general *viva voce*

The general *viva voce* (2) is a method of assessment and subject to the same requirements for consistency, transparency and fairness as other University assessments. It is recommended that:

- clear criteria explaining how candidates for a general *viva voce* will be chosen should be agreed;
- the examination offered to each individual candidate should be consistent. This may be achieved by developing an outline plan for the *viva voce* which is applied to all candidates;
- safeguards against possible bias be put in place for example a minimum of two Examiners or a shared examination plan.

The following information should be available to students where a general *viva voce* may be held at some stage of the programme:

- clear criteria for how candidates for general *viva voce* will be chosen;
- general information on how a general *viva voce* will be conducted;
- statement of what the outcome of a general *viva voce* can mean for the student's assessment result e.g. how degree classification could be altered as a result of a general *viva voce*.

Chapter 6

Generic Band Descriptors

Suitable for Undergraduate programmes (and integrated Master's programmes) - Levels 4, 5 and 6.

DESCRIPTION: Work within the mark ranges below demonstrates the following characteristics:	MARK RANGE
Unique or insightful work, which is either of publishable quality in a reputable journal or attains the professional standards expected for the discipline, or; work which displays a critical awareness of the principles and practices of the discipline. Thorough comprehension of the assessment's requirements, fully realises learning outcomes for the assessment and develops them far beyond normal expectations.	100 – 80%
Displays an individual perspective which is supported by reasoning or evidence. Insightful, logical and articulate, demonstrates a comprehensive coverage of subject matter, engagement with scholarship and research, very good analytical/creative ability. Surpasses the intended learning outcomes.	70 – 79%
Sound and well thought out, organised, secure knowledge of subject, appropriate use of critical references, realises the intended learning outcomes broadly, well expressed, good analytical/creative skills.	60 – 69%
Displays adequate use of critical method but may be poorly argued. Adequate or routine knowledge of subject. Evidence is referred to but there may be inconsistencies in the way it is used. Clear evidence that learning outcomes are being achieved.	50 – 59%
Competent but largely descriptive in approach. Displays understanding of subject with some limitations e.g. an element may be missed. Evidence that learning outcomes are being achieved.	40 – 49%
Evidence that some learning outcomes have been achieved or most learning outcomes achieved partially. Although work may include brief signs of comprehension, it contains basic misunderstandings or misinterpretations, demonstrates limited ability to meet the requirements of the assessment.	30 – 39%
Brief, irrelevant, confused, incomplete. Does not come close to meeting the required learning outcomes.	29% and below

The objective of the descriptors is to establish a University-wide reference point which does not conflict with any guidance/descriptors currently used in Schools. There is no intention to replace existing School descriptors, or to require that each School develops specific School descriptors in addition to these. Each School should determine how best to use these descriptors in the context of its own programmes.