

Policy on Assessment of Student Learning in Taught Programmes

This paper presents an overall framework for assessment of student learning in taught programmes at CUHK and sets out the University-wide policy and philosophy guiding assessment practices that should be applied across the board. This policy ensures that all assessments are undertaken in a fair, credible, rigorous and transparent manner, and thus demonstrates the University's serious efforts on assessment of its students as an integral part of their learning.

INTRODUCTION

1. Assessment is an integral part of teaching and learning (T&L). This paper sets out the institutional policy on assessment in taught programmes at CUHK, and consists of the following parts:
 - Principles and approaches of assessment
 - University-wide code of practice
 - Monitoring of quality and impact

PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES OF ASSESSMENT

Purpose of assessment

2. Assessment has an important role in T&L strategy, as it:
 - (a) provides evidence of student attainment of the desired learning outcomes for particular courses and for the overall programme, such evidence being necessary for certification and employment;
 - (b) ensures appropriate standards for all taught programmes; and
 - (c) enables students to understand their own learning progress and set learning goals for themselves, in this sense being a learning activity in itself.

Types of assessment

3. Objectives (a) and (b) above are often said to be *summative*, while objective (c) is often said to be *formative*. When designing appropriate means of assessment at the time of setting learning outcomes, attention should be paid to the balance of summative and formative forms of assessment.

4. Taking reference of the University's graduate attributes, learning outcomes of individual programmes and the generic level descriptors of the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF), a well-designed course will embrace learning outcomes across different domains. Diverse and integrated assessments aligned with learning outcomes should be in place to effectively measure the level of performance in various domains and to capture different levels of attainment of the learning outcomes.

Principles of assessment

5. Assessment drives and motivates student learning, and is integral to the entire learning process. It is therefore important to factor assessment into consideration at the time of programme and course design when the desired learning outcomes are drawn up. With the introduction of the outcomes-based approach (OBA), the University's assessment policy is based on the principles underlying its *Integrated Framework for Curriculum Development and Review* (Integrated Framework, *IF*), which guides the curriculum design and implementation of all taught programmes: the stated desired learning outcomes guide the choice of content, the design of student learning activities and assessment tasks, which include forms of assessment, expectations with respect to student achievement, scale of grading student performance, determination of results of assessment, feedback to students etc. Guided by the OBA and *IF*, assessment practices should reflect the following principles:
 - (a) OBA requires clarity on expected outcomes, therefore assessment should be based on *criterion referencing that relates to the learning outcomes so as to testify if the outcomes are duly achieved*. More details concerning criterion-referenced assessment will be covered in the ensuing sections.
 - (b) Assessment tasks should have an *appropriate level of cognitive demand*, and assessment tasks assigned to students should be appropriately demanding.
 - (c) Appropriate assessment tasks should consider learning outcomes across different domains, e.g. *knowledge, skills and values (KSV)*, with degrees of emphasis that depend on the subject. One important KSV composite is students' capacity for *lifelong learning*.
 - (d) Assessment should cater for *diversity* in the student cohort, both in terms of ability and in terms of learning styles and interests.
 - (e) Students need to receive *timely feedback* on all assessment tasks.
 - (f) Assessment needs to be pragmatic so that the *workload* on both teachers and students is reasonable.
 - (g) Assessment should be *transparent* with clear processes known to teachers and students.
 - (h) Assessment should be *fair* with checks and balances at all stages of the system – from setting the assessment scheme to finalizing grades.

OBA, criterion-referencing and grade descriptors

6. OBA should be guided primarily by internal consistency at programme level: desired learning outcomes defined by programmes cascade down into the design of individual

courses, each with an internally coherent set of learning outcomes, content, learning activities and assessment tasks. Programme learning outcomes must in turn be internally synergistic with the graduate attributes and the overall strategic goals of the University, and externally benchmarked (see paragraph 14) in order to check on overall standards in each discipline.

7. OBA should be accompanied by criterion-referenced assessment and development of grade descriptors which comprise broad specification of criteria by which standards are defined for each grade. Different sets of grade descriptors can be produced according to the nature of courses and/ or assessment tasks involved. Individual programmes should develop their own descriptors (a) once and for all at the time when a course is introduced and approved, and not at every offering of the course; and (b) in broadly the same way across courses with a similar design at the same level in the same discipline. The adoption of grade descriptors as part of the University-wide code of practice will be explained in greater details in paragraphs 16-17, and programmes are required to move along this direction in measured steps.
8. The entire flow of assessment, including the assessment tasks and standards defined in terms of levels of student performance, are integrated as expressed in grade descriptors compiled at the outset when formulating the desired learning outcomes. In the actual grading stage, the marker should base primarily on the prescribed standards, i.e. grade descriptors defined for the course/ task concerned.
9. To avoid unnecessary grade inflation/ deflation, programmes/ teachers should check and review, at regular intervals, (a) the effectiveness of assessment tasks; and (b) the suitability of the standards defined against the actual distribution of grades and the way they are applied in practice. If large numbers of students are consistently lumped together in the grades at the extremes (*A* or *D*), it may be possible that the assessment tasks tend to be too easy or too difficult, both of which fail to align with the desired learning outcomes, or the grade descriptors that guide the marking/ assignment of grades are not appropriately defined to reflect different levels of attainment of the learning outcomes.
10. For assessment to be conducted in a credible, fair and transparent manner, the following information pertaining to assessment should be clearly stated in the programme/ course outline for students' information: the assessment tasks that they will need to undergo, e.g. class work, tests, assignments, laboratory work, field work, projects, reflective journals, reports, case studies, examinations; the timeline of undertaking these tasks; the grading standards by which their performance is rated, and the channels/ means through which they receive feedback on their performance.

UNIVERSITY-WIDE CODE OF PRACTICE

11. In the light of the above principles, the University has established a code of practice on assessments, which shall be applied to all taught programmes/ courses across the board.

Programme assessment scheme

12. To align with the University-wide assessment policy, programmes should formulate their own programme assessment schemes which are specific to the nature of their disciplines, with the following components:

- (a) A statement of the *programme learning outcomes* that cover appropriate areas (see paragraph 4).
- (b) A *course X learning outcomes grid* showing how each required course in the programme contributes to achieving these programme learning outcomes. Additional comments about how elective courses map to programme learning outcomes would be useful. An example can be found on the website¹ of the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR).
- (c) A set of *course outlines* (developed using the approved course template²), in which the rationales for the choice of all assessment tasks are mapped against the course learning outcomes. The course assessment scheme states why and how marks will be assigned to each assessment task. Examples of assessment rationales for course outlines are available from “Guidelines and Procedures for Writing Course Outlines”³. As the University gradually moves towards OBA, it is expected that there will be a process of developing grade descriptors for criterion referencing (see paragraphs 6-9). Some guiding questions that can be used in developing a good course assessment scheme are in **Appendix 1**.
- (d) An *overall programme assessment scheme* which summarizes the proportion of each type of assessment tasks/ activities (e.g. formal examinations, short tests or homework, essays, individual project reports, group project presentations and reports, class participation) and explains how this assessment scheme will support students in attaining the desired programme learning outcomes. An example is available at CLEAR’s website⁴.
- There is no prescribed minimum percentage of marks that must be allocated to formal examinations. The spread of assessment tasks should be guided chiefly by the desired learning outcomes. Minor pragmatic adjustments to the percentages of assessment components should not unduly alter the final balance.
 - Courses may specify that students must pass in some or all of the components of assessment, e.g. students must pass both the group project and the final examination. Such requirements must be clearly specified.
 - The overall programme assessment scheme needs to explicitly address any previous comments by Visiting Committees, or programme review panels about the assessment scheme in general.
13. Programme assessment policies should be clearly communicated to students through the designated webpages of the respective programmes and in the programme handbooks/ outlines.

¹ http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/tnl/assessment_exampleIFAA.pdf

² http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/download/CO_Template_Oct2014.pdf

³ http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/services/course_plan.htm

⁴ http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/tnl/assessment_exampleIFAA.pdf

Benchmarking

14. There should be an effort to benchmark standards externally, for example through External Examiners⁵, Visiting Committees, or less formally by inviting peers from comparable institutions to provide written comments on samples of examination/ test scripts and/ or other student work that contribute significantly to assessment. Programmes should comment on benchmarking on assessment matters in the annual report they make to the University on their programme action plan.

Assessment panel

15. All programmes (or Departments or Graduate Divisions) should establish assessment panels⁶, or have the entire programme committees (or Department Boards or Graduate Divisions) operate as the assessment panels with the ultimate responsibility and authority over all aspects related to assessment, including but not limited to ensuring that this policy is observed, endorsement of course assessment schemes, determination of assessment results, award of degree honours classifications, consideration of any representations concerning unusual circumstances during the course of student assessment, and handling of grade appeals. An assessment panel shall be formed within each programme/ Department/ Graduate Division/ Faculty, chaired by the Department Chairman/ Head of the Graduate Division/ Dean of the Faculty (or his/ her representative), with at least two members other than the Department Chairman/ Division Head / Faculty Dean himself/ herself. The terms of reference for assessment panels are in **Appendix 2**.

Grade descriptors

16. Grade descriptors form the basis for criterion-referenced assessment. In the spirit of OBA, assessment can be perceived as a holistic evaluation of student performance against pre-set criteria/ standards which can be translated into different levels of attainment of the desired learning outcomes for the programmes/ courses concerned. Grade descriptors also facilitate the grading and mark moderation process and help promote consistency in cases where there are multiple markers. From the students' perspective, grade descriptors serve as explicit and clear signals that enable them to understand the level of performance and the quality of work expected.
17. The development of grade descriptors should be done at the time when learning outcomes and means of assessment are determined. In setting the standards of performance at different levels, teachers should consider and decide what standards students can be reasonably expected to meet, and compile the descriptors explicitly by reviewing critically the grade distribution statistics of the courses concerned over the past years and by making reference to the guidelines for defining grade descriptors. Grade descriptors unique to specific disciplines or categories of courses or assessment tasks should be included in course outlines which are readily accessible to students. A few templates are in **Appendix 3**. Teachers are also advised to approach CLEAR for training and guidelines on the drafting of grade descriptors.

⁵ External Examiners have been phased out since the implementation of the Visiting Committee System from 2009. However, external examiners are still appointed for professional programmes on a need-basis or for new taught postgraduate programmes in their first three years of implementation.

⁶ These may have been called Examinations Panels in the past, but the nomenclature of "assessment panel" is recommended, since examination is only one possible mode of assessment.

Marking

18. The following procedures should be followed to ensure that marking is fair and that the assessment scheme in each programme is transparent.
19. The teacher or course coordinator (who is listed in the time-table) has ultimate responsibility for the *marking scheme* for each assessment task, even where the initial draft may be delegated to Teaching Assistants (TAs). More importantly, there is a need to ensure uniformity: for courses offered in multiple sections and/ or where scripts are marked by more than one individual, the same detailed marking schemes should be used by all markers, including TAs and part-time teachers. There should not be separate individual marking schemes. Where scripts are marked by a single individual, a skeleton marking scheme would suffice, simply to provide a record in the event of future scrutiny.
20. The design of the marking scheme for each assessment task should make reference to the expected learning outcomes and the grade descriptors. An example of an internationally accepted marking framework is posted on the University's assessment website⁷. It should be noted that A grades should be reserved for truly excellent work that exceeds the level expected for the majority of students.
21. When courses undergo periodic reviews, prescribed by the *IF*, a sample of grade descriptors and marking schemes for a variety of assessment types should be made available for peer scrutiny.

Student anonymity

22. Except for certain types of assessment tasks e.g. group discussion/ oral presentation, guided projects, and formative/ continuous assessment tasks where student anonymity is impossible, all examination scripts should not display student names and should be graded without using student names.

Moderation of marks and grading criteria

23. Moderation of marks offers a test for or an evidence of efficient application of grade descriptors and grading standards. It should be carried out at course level on a sampling basis and monitored by the assessment panel to ensure that the grading criteria is met. At least one course among all the courses offered in an academic term should be selected for this purpose and at least one of the following forms of moderation should be employed:
 - (a) *Internal moderation*:
 - i. blind double marking for courses with considerably skewed grade distribution or exceptionally high failure rates or in the case of projects supervised by only one teacher; or
 - ii. moderation of grades and grading criteria for more open-ended and less structured assessment tasks, or for courses involving new teachers or more than one marker, or occasional checking of the marking of TAs and part-time teachers.
 - (b) Programmes that retain External Examiners have *external moderation*; other

⁷ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment/SOLO-description.pdf>

programmes may decide to periodically engage an external peer to check on standards in general and marking in particular. Visiting Committees could also contribute to this role.

All documentation should be kept for possible future scrutiny by Visiting Committee or programme review panels and should be disposed of after the reviews have been conducted.

Group projects and peer assessment

24. Group projects are commonly used as a learning experience and a vehicle of assessment. The way of how group work should be assessed always attracts debates over en bloc grading versus rating of individual efforts. The former aims to provide an overall evaluation of the group performance as a whole by giving an equal rating applicable to all group members while the latter recognizes and assesses contributions made by individual members. In terms of fairness, individual rating tends to offer more genuine reflection on student work and prevent “freeloading” but it also raises difficulties in practice as to how individual work can be measured accurately and objectively.
25. For a fair judgment on student performance, courses should embrace a good mix of assessment types which can effectively and fully reflect the concerted efforts of group work as well as performance of individual students. Assessment of individual performance should constitute at least 15 percent of the assessment for the whole course, and approval by the respective Faculty Boards/ Graduate Divisions and the Senate Committee on General Education as appropriate is required for any exceptions, upon initial course approval or subsequently when the change is incurred.
26. Peer assessment may provide students with opportunities to learn more about teamwork and responsibility for shared learning. To ensure the effectiveness of peer assessment so that students can make good use of the opportunity to support and motivate learning, i.e. assessment as learning, the purposes and learning outcomes of peer assessment must be clearly communicated to students, and the assessment criteria should be articulated in the form of guidelines or rubrics with defined tasks for the student assessors. To ensure fairness, the process should be closely monitored by the course teachers (e.g., requesting student assessors to provide justification for their assessment). Peer assessment should contribute to no more than 25 percent of a specific assessment task and 15 percent of the assessment for the whole course, and approval by the respective Faculty Boards/ Graduate Divisions and the Senate Committee on General Education as appropriate is required for any exceptions, upon initial course approval or subsequently when the change is incurred. Examples of how group work and peer assessment are conducted at CUHK can be found on the assessment website⁸.

Academic honesty

27. The University places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students, and a set of policy *Honesty in Academic Work: A Guide for Students and Teachers*⁹ is in place as the University-wide guidelines against academic dishonesty at all levels of studies. The policy also applies to open-book examinations.

⁸ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment/>

⁹ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/>

28. Departments/ programmes should draw students' attention to the importance of academic honesty and the University's policy at the beginning of the term, and incorporate, either in full or in part, such policy into the programme/ course outlines. They should also ensure that reasonable effort is taken to require that relevant written work (other than closed-book examinations and tests) is submitted through the University's proprietary plagiarism detection tool, *VeriGuide*, and that any possible cases flagged are properly attended to.
29. Course examinations should be scheduled, invigilated and monitored by panels of examiners set up by the departments concerned or centrally. Guidelines on examination and invigilation procedures can be found on the assessment website¹⁰. For examinations that are not centrally scheduled, Departments/ programmes should draw up structured procedures on invigilation to ensure objectivity and fairness.
30. The University adopts a policy of zero tolerance on plagiarism and cheating in examinations. Teachers should report all cases of suspected plagiarism or cheating to their respective Faculties, and those cases will then be dealt with by the disciplinary committee concerned and/ or the Senate Committee on Student Discipline for possible disciplinary actions in accordance with the University regulations. The penalties include deduction of marks, demerits, suspension of study and termination of studies.

Combining marks

31. When marks from different assessment tasks are combined to obtain the total marks, the *spread of the scores* for each component should be taken into consideration with the intention to influence the setting of assignments in the future and not to permit the adjustment of grades already achieved and awarded. In the spirit of an OBA, very narrow spreads in any tasks should prompt a reconsideration of the expected outcomes to accommodate a broader range of levels of challenges and attainments¹¹.

Awarding grades

32. The final grades awarded to students in a course should reflect their individual achievements pegged or *criterion-referenced* to the course learning outcomes, in the spirit of OBA, as defined in the grade descriptors (see paragraphs 16-17).
33. To ensure the utilization of grade descriptors as a reliable benchmarking for marking/ grading and to avoid grade inflation/ deflation, grade descriptors are subject to regular review against the actual allocation of grades, and fine-tuning adjustments should be made as appropriate to validate the effectiveness of grade descriptors in capturing students' levels of achievement.
34. To facilitate monitoring by individual programmes and Faculties, statistics on grade distribution at individual course-, programme- and faculty-levels can be generated by individual programmes/ Faculties through CUSIS after the grade appeal period in each academic term. Faculties should monitor the statistics on grade distribution and report to the UEB for courses/ programmes with consistently deviating grade distribution for

¹⁰ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment/Guidelines-on-Examination-and-Invigilation-Procedures-for-Public-Access.pdf>

¹¹ For example, if one component is a multiple-choice (MC) test and scores are tightly bunched at the top end, then this may indicate that only relatively low-level tasks such as recall are tested, whereas synthesis and innovation may also be possible in an MC mode.

four years, which will initiate review and if necessary, re-writing of the respective grade descriptors.

35. The use of *pass/fail* grade is permitted, but only if it is part of the course design approved at the time of course introduction, in the overall context of the whole programme (including any impact on the calculation of Major GPA, for example). Existing courses at undergraduate level which switch to the use of *pass/fail* grade will be subject to Senate's approval while those at postgraduate level will be subject to approval by the Graduate Council Executive Committee. Such *pass/fail* grading should *not* be adopted on an ad hoc basis with particular offerings of the course; nor should it be applied to a subgroup of students taking the course.

Grade point average

36. The *Grade Point Average* (GPA) is just the grade (on a scale of $A = 4$, $B = 3$, $C = 2$, $D = 1$, $F = 0$) averaged over all courses taken and weighted by the number of units. Sometimes a separate Major GPA is also calculated by including only courses specified by the Major programme. Any non-standard weights adopted in the study scheme of a particular programme must be academically justified as part of the programme approval and revision processes, and clearly spelt out in advance in the programme documentation. The Registry/ Graduate School computes and records the GPA(s) for each student, and the maximum score of 4.0 will be specified against the actual GPA scores obtained by students on the academic transcripts.

Honours classification

37. A student who has satisfied the conditions for graduation shall be awarded a Bachelor's degree in one of the following classifications: First Class Honours, Second Class Honours Upper Division, Second Class Honours Lower Division, Third Class Honours, and Pass.
38. The honours classification of an undergraduate degree awarded by the University is determined at the time of graduation, as recommended by the Major programme concerned for endorsement at Faculty level, subject to certain conditions primarily on Major GPA and Overall GPA, and as stipulated in the University's guidelines and regulations for determining honours classifications. The UEB is delegated with the authority to consider/ approve cases submitted by Faculties with valid academic justifications but deviating from the stipulated guidelines and regulations. The procedures for calculating these measures and the processes for ratification are on the assessment website¹².

Feedback to students

39. For assignments to be completed within an academic term, a "turn-around" time of two to four weeks from the submission deadline is recommended, taking into account the nature and complexity of work involved. This "turn-around" time for each assignment/ assessment task should be included in course outlines for students' information, and feedback on assignments provided to all students by various means.
40. It can be a valuable experience for students to review their examination scripts. Teachers/ Programmes should arrange a defined period of time when all students can

¹² <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment/New-Honour-Guidelines-for-Public-Access.pdf>

look at (but not take away) their scripts and consider their own performance, to highlight the educational benefits rather than the opportunity to appeal. This scrutiny can be in the form of some general feedback e.g. students' work provided by a teacher or a panel of teachers, either face-to-face or online.

41. Departments and programmes should archive a sample of examination scripts and other student work that substantially contribute to final grades for possible future scrutiny by Visiting Committee or programme review panels. Both the original or electronically-scanned sample examination scripts and copies of student work should be kept at the department/ programme office for onsite review by Visiting Committee and programme review panels, and be disposed of after the reviews have been conducted.

Appeals

42. Students who have a query on the grade given for any courses should consult the teacher(s)/ assessment panel concerned within two weeks upon the release of academic results for the relevant term by the Registry/ Graduate School. To lodge a grade appeal, students should present their case with evidence to avoid abuse of the system.
43. In the event that a student, after consulting the teacher(s)/ assessment panel concerned within the specified period, has reasonable grounds to believe that there is procedural impropriety in determining grades or other academic issues resulting in her/ his having been directly affected, s/he can lodge a complaint with the University, in accordance with the Procedures for Handling Student Complaints¹³, for an independent investigation into the matter.

Summary of the Assessment Policy

44. **Appendix 4** provides a summary of the Assessment Policy for implementation by Faculties/ Departments/ Graduate Divisions/ Programmes.

MONITORING OF QUALITY AND IMPACT

45. The actual practice on assessment should be reviewed in the first instance by each department or programme committee, with overall supervision by the Dean of the Faculty, and in the case of TPg programmes/ courses, also by the Dean of the Graduate School.
46. Assessment practice will also be monitored in the regular programme reviews. The monitoring will include, inter alia:
 - (a) the existence and appropriateness of a programme assessment scheme;
 - (b) especially the adoption of grade descriptors with clearly stated standards for different grades;
 - (c) evidence of external benchmarking;
 - (d) good practice in marking;

¹³ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/qm/A8-1.pdf>

- (e) appropriate effort to ensure academic honesty;
 - (f) regular review of grade descriptors against the actual allocation of grades to avoid grade inflation/ deflation, and serious efforts to deal with deviations through scrutiny of adopted standards and the actual application of those standards and re-writing of descriptors if necessary; and
 - (g) the appropriateness of the policy and practice in feedback and appeals.
47. Assessment practice should also receive attention from Visiting Committee and programme review panels.

[Approved by the Senate at its Fourth Meeting (2017-18) held on 6 June 2018 for implementation with effect from 2018-19.

Amendment concerning honours classification of students admitted in 2019-20 and thereafter approved by the Senate at its Fourth Meeting (2018-19) held on 12 June 2019 and noted by the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning at its First Meeting (2019-20) held on 25 October 2019.]

LIST OF APPENDICES

- Appendix 1: Guiding questions in developing a good course assessment scheme
- Appendix 2: Terms of reference for assessment panels
- Appendix 3: Sample grade descriptors
- Appendix 4: Summary of the Assessment Policy for implementation at programme level

Appendix 1

Guiding questions in developing a good course assessment scheme

1. Is this assessment task mainly *formative* (i.e. designed mostly as a learning activity) or is it *summative* (i.e. designed to grade students on final attainment)? If it is formative, what proportion of marks should be allocated?
2. Are the assessment tasks pitched at *appropriate levels of difficulty*?
Where students from differing year levels and from different programmes are attending the same course, this question is particularly pertinent. In extreme cases with wide diversity and consciously different expected outcomes, it may be wise to design more than one course with shared learning activities across courses, as detailed in the paper 'Course Sharing between Undergraduates and Postgraduates and Guidelines for Assignment of Level of Course Code' that is available at A3-8 of the Quality Manual.
3. What *flexibility* is there in the *design of the assessment tasks*? Do students with particular interests and/or learning styles have opportunities to maximize their learning opportunities? For example, are there choices in assignment topics or formats? Is there any opportunity for students to suggest alternative assessments? Any flexibility that is built into the assessment design must not undermine the overall rigour and standards of assessment.
4. Are there some important assessment tasks that would be very hard to grade? If so, the use of a *pass/fail basis* could be useful. In essence the task becomes required but does not contribute to the overall course grade.
5. Is the number of assessment tasks consistent with an appropriate *workload* for students? Is the marking load appropriate for the teaching staff?
6. Has the course assessment scheme undergone any *peer review* within the programme? An example of how an assessment review process might be conducted is on the assessment website¹⁴. Periodic feedback from former students and alumni can also enrich an assessment review process.

¹⁴ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment/>

Appendix 2

Terms of reference for assessment panels¹⁵

1. To propose policies on the matters contained in this policy paper (e.g. peer assessment) for approval by the Department/ Programme Committee.
2. To monitor and ensure fairness and honesty in all assessment work.
3. To review comments provided by Visiting Committee and programme review panels.
4. To review and define grade descriptors as and when necessary.
5. To endorse course assessment schemes.
6. Be responsible for the quality of examination/ test papers. For example, for each course, a colleague within the department/ programme could be appointed as an internal reviewer to independently check the paper and model answer/ marking scheme.
7. To approve grade boundaries and the assignment of grades recommended by teachers.
8. To arrange make-up examination/ assessment for students who have been given approval to be absent from examination/ assessment.
9. To endorse requests submitted by teachers for change of marks or grades upon appeal by students, and to help resolve any informal complaints thereon.
10. To ensure that reasonable effort is undertaken to monitor and uphold academic honesty in all assessments.
11. Any other duties as determined by individual Departments/ Divisions/ programmes.

¹⁵ Each programme (or Department or Graduate Division) should establish an assessment panel which is chaired by the Department Chairman/ Head of the Graduate Division/ Dean of the Faculty (or his/ her representative) and comprises at least two other members.

Appendix 3

Sample grade descriptors

It is expected that grade descriptors are formulated not every year, but only at programme/course introduction, approval and major revision (i.e. once every few years). Moreover, broadly the same set of descriptors can apply to many similar courses in each programme, so that it is possible that for the whole programme only a few sets of descriptors have to be formulated/ revised every few years.

It is also recognized that there will be considerable diversity across programmes, depending on their nature and the stage of development of criterion referencing. For this reason, a range of different examples are presented for illustration purposes, without suggesting that any particular version is either exemplary or appropriate for any particular discipline, and no particular framework is mandatory. What is needed is a logical and coherent set of descriptors that provides students with clearly stated standards for different grade levels.

Additional examples of descriptors for different forms of assessment (essays, projects, presentations, quantitative problems, laboratory/ field work, tests/ examinations, etc.) are provided on the assessment website¹⁶.

¹⁶ <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/assessment/>

Example 1: A hypothetical set of very simple descriptors

Grade	Overall course
A	Outstanding performance on all learning outcomes.
A-	Generally outstanding performance on all (or almost all) learning outcomes.
B	Substantial performance on all learning outcomes, OR high performance on some learning outcomes which compensates for less satisfactory performance on others, resulting in overall substantial performance.
C	Satisfactory performance on the majority of learning outcomes, possibly with a few weaknesses.
D	Barely satisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes
F	Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Example 2: A hypothetical set possibly applicable to science subjects

Grade	Overall course
A	Demonstrates the ability to synthesize and apply the principles or subject matter learnt in the course, to novel situations and/or in novel ways, in a manner that would surpass the normal expectation at this level, and typical of standards that may be common at higher levels of study or research. Has the ability to express the synthesis of ideas or application in a clear and cogent manner.
A-	Demonstrates the ability to state and apply the principles or subject matter learnt in the course to familiar and standard situations in a manner that is logical and comprehensive. Has the ability to express the knowledge or application with clarity.
B	Demonstrates the ability to state and partially apply the principles or subject matter learnt in the course to most (but not all) familiar and standard situations in a manner that is usually logically persuasive. Has the ability to express the knowledge or application in a satisfactory and unambiguous way.
C	Demonstrates the ability to state and apply the principles or subject matter learnt in the course to most (but not all) familiar and standard situations in a manner that is not incorrect but is somewhat fragmented. Has the ability to express the separate pieces of knowledge in an unambiguous way.
D	Demonstrates the ability to state and sometimes apply the principles or subject matter learnt in the course to some simple and familiar situations in a manner that is broadly correct in its essentials Has the ability to state the knowledge or application in simple terms.
F	Unsatisfactory performance on a number of learning outcomes, OR failure to meet specified assessment requirements.

Example 3: Actual descriptors used for essays in Nursing courses (slightly simplified)

A/A-	Use of Material – Well-structured essay with clear introduction and conclusion. Issues clearly identified, clear framework for organizing discussion, appropriate material selected.
	Knowledge and Understanding – Logical flow of content, clear expression of ideas and arguments and differing views with evidence of new ideas based on knowledge gained. Knowledge well integrated and supported by evidence from the literature. Uses abstract principles and concepts, with applications to nursing when appropriate. Evidence of critical analysis of material and conclusions drawn.
	Presentation and References – Grammatically correct, full and accurate references in text and list.
B	Use of Material – Well-structured essay with a clear introduction and conclusion. Some issues identified, framework attempted for organizing discussion but not well developed, some material selected but not all appropriate.
	Knowledge and Understanding – Content has logical flow, with ideas clearly expressed, some structure to the argument with differing views in parts and some new ideas based on knowledge gained. Some integration of material with support from the literature. Uses some abstract principles and concepts with limited applications to nursing when appropriate. Some evidence of critical analysis with conclusions drawn.
	Presentation and References – Some grammatical errors but does not affect understanding. References in text, well selected and used, generally well presented.
C	Use of Material – Fairly well structured with introduction and conclusion attempted. Some issues identified, little attempt at a framework for organizing discussion, material selected but not all appropriate.
	Knowledge and Understanding – Logical presentation attempted but not always successful. Some structure to the argument but only limited number of differing views and no new ideas. Limited integration of material with some support from the literature. Uses concrete ideas with limited use of abstract principle and concepts. Little critical analysis, with ideas expressed at a descriptive level and little use of appropriate practice examples to demonstrate understanding.
	Presentation and References – Some grammatical errors which affect clarity and understanding. Limited references in text with some not completed or missing from the list.
D	Use of Material – Poorly structured essay with a weak introduction and conclusion. Some issues identified, no framework for organizing discussion. Little relevant materials selected.
	Knowledge and Understanding – Some confusion in the presentation, difficult to follow the logic. Some structure to the arguments but some confusion to the discussion and few differing ideas with no new ideas based on knowledge gained. Poor integration of materials with little support from the literature. Uses concrete ideas but no discussion or appropriate use of abstract principles and concepts. No critical analysis, descriptive thinking with only few appropriate practice examples poorly related to the question.
	Presentation and Reference – Grammatical errors which substantially affect clarity and understanding. Limited and incomplete referencing with discrepancies between text and reference list.
F	Use of Material – Poorly structured essay with a very weak/ no introduction and conclusion. Inappropriate or few issues identified. No framework for discussion and little relevant material selected.
	Knowledge and Understanding – Confused and muddled presentation, lacks logical presentation. Unstructured and unsupported arguments with no discussion of differing views and no new ideas. Poor integration of material with little relevant support from the literature. Descriptive essay with no analysis and minimum interpretation. Irrelevant detail and some misinterpretation of the question. Very little/ no logical relationship to the topic and poor use of practice examples.
	Presentation and References – Grammatical errors distort the understanding of the essay. Inappropriate referencing in text and list.

Example 4: Actual descriptors developed for Fine Arts studio arts

Grades	Criteria
A Unanticipated extension	<p>Conceptual design – The work shows clear evidence of high level of independent thinking, insightful observation; bold and creative exploration of artistic ideas. Original interpretation of the theme of the piece; generation of new expressions, perspectives and extension of ideas on visual arrangement.</p>
	<p>Technique – Excellent quality craftsmanship; meticulous application of skills showing perceptive understanding and sensitivity to the nature of and relationship between application of technique, the treatment of material and the theme of the piece. Inventive ways of utilizing material combined with attentive workmanship that leads to extensions of artistic concepts and visual vocabulary.</p>
	<p>Overall presentation – Vivid and effective presentation that reflects excellent understanding of the interrelationship between conceptual content and form; perceptive arrangement of visual elements such as color, dimension, line, mass and space; creating strong sensational impact such as balance, coherence, harmony, tension, richness and variety.</p>
B Well-rounded presentation	<p>Conceptual design – The work shows evidence of good observation, independent thinking; creative exploration of artistic concepts and ideas that makes interesting interpretation of the theme of the piece.</p>
	<p>Technique – Good quality craftsmanship; good evidence of thoughtful and attentive application of skills; careful consideration of the connection between technique, the treatment of material and the theme of the piece achieving and well-balanced and coherent presentation.</p>
	<p>Overall presentation – Attractive presentation, good understanding of the interrelationship between content and form, well-balanced treatment of visual elements such as color, dimension, line, mass and space, reflecting effort in creating aesthetic sensation such as balance, coherence, harmony, tension, richness and variety.</p>
C Inconsistent quality	<p>Conceptual design – Some evidence of reference to observations, artistic concepts and ideas which are relevant to the theme of the piece. Little evidence of personal or original approach to interpretation of theme of the piece. Limited effort in exploring ideas and artistic expressions seem dull and uninspired.</p>
	<p>Technique – Average quality craftsmanship, some evidence of care in application of skills. Limited connection in the use of technique, choice of material and the theme of the piece.</p>
	<p>Overall presentation – Presentation reflects limited concern for the interrelationship between form and content, Limited success in effective treatment of visual elements such as color, dimension, line, mass and space to achieve aesthetic objectives.</p>
D Undeveloped work	<p>Conceptual design – The piece of work shows little evidence of effort in developing ideas on the theme or making of reference to artistic concepts.</p>
	<p>Technique – Little evidence of effort in applying required skills, the quality of craftsmanship is low; limited degree of care shown in treatment of material; little consideration to the general theme of the piece.</p>
	<p>Overall presentation – Poor overall presentation; poor quality treatment of visual elements and very little evidence of consideration to aesthetic objectives.</p>
F Misses the point	<p>Conceptual design – Work showing no consideration of artistic ideas and concepts. Design of work is irrelevant to the theme.</p>
	<p>Technique – Slack workmanship; failure to display skills or care in treatment of material.</p>
	<p>Overall presentation – No evidence of care or consideration in visual presentation. Poor use of material and lack of aesthetic sensitivity.</p>

Appendix 4

Summary of the Assessment Policy for implementation at programme level

	Item	Ref Para
1	Programmes should devise their own programme assessment schemes which are in alignment with the University's Assessment Policy and unique to the nature of their disciplines, and such assessment schemes should be posted on the designated webpages of the respective programmes and included in the programme handbooks/ outlines.	12-13
2	Efforts should be made to benchmark the assessment methods and standards.	14
3	Assessment panels with clearly stated terms of reference should be established for all programmes.	15
4	Grade descriptors should be clearly defined in terms of criteria or standards of students' performance expected for each grade, to align with the learning outcomes and means of assessment of each course for inclusion in course outlines for students' reference.	16-17
5	For courses that involve multiple teachers/ markers, marking schemes should be given to all markers including TAs.	19
6	Except for certain types of assessment tasks e.g. group discussion/ oral presentation, guided projects, and formative/ continuous assessment tasks where student anonymity is impossible, all examination scripts should not display student names and should be graded without using student names.	22
7	Moderation should be carried out by all programmes at course level to ensure that the standard of the grading criteria is met. At least one course in an academic term should be selected for this purpose.	23
8	Courses that involve group projects should embrace a good mix of assessment types to fairly and effectively evaluate the performance of individual students.	24-25
9	The purposes and learning outcomes of peer assessment, together with assessment guidelines and rubrics, must be clearly communicated to students, and the assessment criteria should be articulated.	26
10	All text-based assignments should be submitted to the University's plagiarism detection engine <i>VeriGuide</i> , and all cases flagged should be well attended to.	27-28
11	There should be structured procedures for invigilation in examinations other than those that are centrally scheduled.	29
12	All cases of academic dishonesty among students should be properly dealt with according to the University's established procedures.	30
13	For courses that comprise different assessment tasks, marks are combined to obtain the total marks, and the spread of the scores for each component should be taken into consideration with the intention to influence the setting of assignments in the future and not to permit the adjustment of grades already achieved and awarded.	31
14	Grade descriptors should be regularly reviewed against the actual grade distribution in all courses to avoid grade inflation/ deflation, and fine-tuning adjustments should be made to the grade descriptors as appropriate.	33-34
15	The 'turn-around' time for each assignment to be completed within an academic term should be included in course outlines.	39
16	All students should be given access to their examination scripts.	40