



Assessment and Feedback

1.0	POLICY OBJECTIVE
1.1	The key driver for the formulation of an Assessment and Feedback Policy is the facilitation and enhancement of student learning. Research shows that assessment shapes the experience of students and influences their behaviour more than the teaching they receive (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007). This policy provides structure for assessment and feedback processes which aids both the teacher and the learner. As a core teaching and learning activity, assessment is an important consideration of the College as it fulfils its teaching mission and implements its statutory function in awarding degrees of learning. Assessment is the main mechanism the College uses to obtain evidence to determine whether students have achieved the learning outcomes of a module and programme. Ensuring the quality, validity, reliability and fairness of assessments is thus key to guaranteeing the quality of awards given ¹ .
1.2	Assessment leading to university awards is governed by the marks and standards as set out in the <u>University of Limerick Academic Regulations</u> . Accordingly, academic staff members who are responsible for assessment functions play a pivotal role in the setting and grading of appropriate assessments that accord with internationally established academic practice and reflect internationally acceptable academic standards. However, students also have an important role to play in actively engaging with assessment and feedback processes (Bovill & Bulley 2011; Cook et al, 2014). Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggest that students can be empowered through formative assessment and feedback, which can assist in the development of their self-regulation skills. Feedback/feedforward (see Appendix B for examples) should encourage teacher-student dialogue around learning and provide an opportunity to close the gap between current and desired performance (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006, p.205).
1.3	This policy supports Mary Immaculate College's commitment to championing good practice in teaching and learning, assessment and feedback. The policy has been developed through open consultation with staff (academic and administrative) and students engaged in the process of learning, teaching, assessment and administration at Mary Immaculate College. The policy also takes cognisance of the National Forum for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning's (2016) theme of enhancing teaching and learning through <i>assessment off/for/as learning</i> and domain 4, Professional Knowledge and Skills in Teaching and Learning within the <i>National Professional Development Framework for all those whom Teach in Higher Education</i> (2016). It also notes the QQI core statutory guidelines (2016) which direct that assessment is 'fair and consistent' and that the policies and procedures related to assessment address: 1) learner responsibility for demonstrating learning achievement, 2) that assessment promotes and supports effective learning and teaching, and 3) that learners are informed about how and why they are assessed and provided with feedback in a timely and appropriate manner (p.15).
2.0	SCOPE OF APPLICATION
2.1	This policy applies to all assessments which formally contribute to an award, whether undertaken by students on campus or under other conditions (e.g., distance learning, placement, exchange). Departments/Faculties must ensure that their assessment and feedback practices and

¹ See Glossary of Terms (Appendix A)

	procedures comply with the principles set out in this Assessment and Feedback Policy and the academic regulations. This assessment and feedback policy should be applied across programmes, departments, faculties, and not just modules. Whilst the form of assessment and feedback may vary across disciplines and subject areas, there should be an adherence to the principles underlying effective assessment and feedback set out in this document and in the rules contained in the University of Limerick's Academic Regulations.
2.2	This policy should be read in conjunction with the <u>University of Limerick Academic Regulations</u> , MIC Academic Integrity Policy, <u>MIC Data Protection Policy</u> and other policies, as appropriate.
2.3	Departments/faculties are responsible for implementing this policy. Where additional departmental/programme policies exist, they must be published in a durable format (e.g., PDF). See detailed stakeholder responsibilities in section 4.0.
3.0	PRINCIPLES
	The following key principles underpin assessment and feedback practices at MIC: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessment should be accessible, fair and transparent 2. Assessment should be valid, reliable and consistent 3. Assessment should be guided by a programme-level/departmental approach 4. Feedback/feedforward is an integral part of assessment and learning 5. Good practice in assessment and feedback should be supported
Principle 1 Assessment should be accessible, fair and transparent	
3.1	Implementation
3.1.1	Module outlines, associated assessment tasks, supplemental assessment tasks, grading criteria and feedback will be accessible and consistently documented vis-à-vis MIC module outline templates, published on the College's Virtual Learning Environment and provided to students, staff and external examiners.
3.1.2	Learning outcomes and assessment tasks will be clearly explained to students at the commencement of a module.
3.1.3	Assessment tasks will generate clear evidence that the student being examined has produced the work.
3.1.4	Reference to the offences and penalties in module handbooks along with details of the procedures aligning with the MIC Academic Integrity Policy will be communicated to students.
3.1.5	Students will receive consistent treatment for late submission of summative assessments, where appropriate.
3.1.6	As far as possible and without compromising academic standards, assessment will ensure that tasks and procedures do not disadvantage any group or individual.

Principle 2 Assessment should be valid, reliable and consistent	
3.2	Implementation 3.2.1 Assessment tasks (summative and formative, where appropriate) will align with the intended module learning outcomes. 3.2.2 Assessment design will incorporate the use of assessment criteria, grade descriptors and nuanced rubrics, where appropriate. 3.2.3 Internal and external moderation procedures will be applied where appropriate; to ensure that marking and grading of assessments is consistent across markers. 3.2.4 The volume of summative assessment tasks will be commensurate with workload per unit of credit across programmes in terms of level of study and hours of work. 3.2.5 Written coursework will be checked for originality using Originality Checking Software (e.g., Turnitin) where this is appropriate to the learning outcomes and assessment design. This includes written dissertations and major projects with a written component.
Principle 3 Assessment should be guided by a programme-level/departmental approach	
3.3	Implementation 3.3.1 Assessment forms an integral part of programme design and will relate to module and programme learning outcomes. 3.3.2 A range of assessment methods across a programme will be employed in order to: a) avoid unnecessary duplication, b) ensure that the diverse abilities of students can be both developed and demonstrated, c) assess a wide range of knowledge and skills, and d) ensure that programme learning outcomes can be achieved. 3.3.3 The volume of summative assessments and associated word count (where written coursework applies), will be commensurate with the credit weighting of modules and consistently applied at programme level. 3.3.4 Information about module assessments including the assignment topic, weighting, task description, submission date and feedback/feedforward will be published, as appropriate. 3.3.5 Programme teams/departments should plan the scheduling of assessment and feedback to ensure that marking and feedback/feedforward is manageable.
Principle 4 Feedback/feedforward is an integral part of assessment and learning	
3.4	Implementation 3.4.1 Assessment design will ensure students have opportunities to receive feedback/feedforward, thereby allowing for reflection on learning. 3.4.2 Feedback/feedforward will be appropriate to the level of the student, to the learning outcomes, the nature of the learning activity, and the numbers of students in a module/programme (see Appendix B for multiple modes of feedback/feedforward). 3.4.3 Constructive alignment between learning outcome/s and assessment/s will inform and aid feedback, helping to ensure its relevance and appropriateness.

3.4.4	Feedback/feedforward will make reference to transparent marking criteria, where appropriate.																
3.4.5	Students will make themselves aware of when, where and how feedback is provided; develop their understanding and appreciation of assessment criteria and performance expectations; use the provided feedback to reflect on their learning and avail of opportunities afforded to them to improve their performance.																
3.4.6	Faculty will clearly communicate how and what feedback/feedforward is to be expected, as well as a reasonable timeframe within which the feedback/feedforward will be provided and alert the students to the role they need to take in the learning process.																
3.4.7	Feedback/feedforward will take into account the time and resources available to staff and students.																
Principle 5 Good practice in assessment and feedback should be supported																	
3.5	Implementation																
3.5.1	All involved in assessing student work and associated administrative processes will engage in professional development/training/mentoring, where appropriate, in order to meet their roles and responsibilities.																
3.5.2	Staff will be encouraged to attend and contribute to professional development opportunities provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning that inform teaching, learning and assessment.																
3.5.3	Research and practice on teaching, learning, assessment and feedback will be disseminated and promoted by the Centre for Teaching and Learning.																
3.5.4	College systems, logistics, and operations should facilitate time and space for professional development, planning and implementation of quality assessment and feedback practices.																
4.0	RESPONSIBILITIES																
The successful implementation of the Assessment and Feedback policy depends on a variety of stakeholders with the following responsibilities:																	
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**Review of assessment and feedback practices																	

	With a view to ensuring its effectiveness, the implementation of the policy and the application of feedback practices shall be subject to Departmental and Faculty monitoring and review by the Deans and Vice President Academic Affairs.																		
5.0	POLICY REVIEW																		
	This policy will be reviewed at 3-year intervals, except where statutory provisions or other regulatory measures introduced by the College require review and amendment to take place sooner.																		
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6.0	EQUALITY STATEMENT																		
	All policies, guidelines and protocols of Mary Immaculate College, will reflect the College's commitment to the promotion of equality and will be fully compliant with the provisions of prevailing equality legislation.																		
7.0	REFERENCES																		
	<p>Bloxham, S. & Boyd, P. (2007). <i>Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: a Practical Guide</i>. Maidenhead: Open University Press.</p> <p>Bovill, C., & Bulley, C.J. (2011). A model of active student participation in curriculum design: exploring desirability and possibility. In C. Rust (Ed.), <i>Improving Student Learning. Global Theories and Local Practices: Institutional, Disciplinary and Cultural Variations</i> (pp. 176-188). Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Educational Development.</p> <p>Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C., & Felten, P. (2014). <i>Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty</i>. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons.</p> <p>Nicol, DJ & Macfarlane-Dick, D (2006), 'Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice' <i>Studies in Higher Education</i>, vol 31, no. 2, pp. 199-218.</p> <p>National Forum (2016) National Forum's Enhancement Theme (Assessment) https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/enhancement-themes/assessment-resource-portal/</p> <p>National Forum (2016) National Professional Development Framework for all Staff who Teach in Higher Education https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/PD-Framework-FINAL.pdf</p> <p>QQI (2016) Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines. April 2016. QQI.</p>																		

APPENDIX A: GLOSSARY OF TERMS	
	<p>Assessment The process through which the progress and achievements of a learner or learners is measured or judged in compliance with specific quality criteria.</p>
	<p>Assessment criteria Specific criteria against which pieces of work are assessed. An understanding of the criteria must be shared by markers and students. Feedback should relate to these criteria.</p>
	<p>Assessment <i>as</i> learning Assessment that actively involves learners and encourages them to think about the way they learn. It occurs when learners reflect on, regulate, and monitor their learning progress. It comprises learner reflection, peer, and self-assessment.</p>
	<p>Assessment <i>for</i> learning Assessment of learner's progress and achievement, the primary purpose of which is to support and enhance learning by adapting the educational process to meet the learner's needs. Learners are made aware of their strengths and weaknesses while being provided with adequate support to overcome learning difficulties.</p>
	<p>Assessment <i>of</i> learning Assessment of learner's achievement the primary purpose of which is to provide information about what has been learned at a particular point in time. This process often involves the use of standardised tests or examinations.</p>
	<p>Assessment of learning outcomes Assessment of an individual's achievement of stated learning outcomes, using a variety of methods (written, oral and practical tests/examinations, projects and portfolios) during or at the end of an education programme or a defined part of that programme.</p>
	<p>Constructive alignment A process aimed at ensuring coherence and consistency between the intended outcomes as specified in the formal curriculum and teaching methods, assessment tasks, and learning activities in the classroom.</p>
	<p>E-assessment/ICT-based assessment Assessment involving the use of information and communication technologies (ICT). ICT can be used (a) to deliver traditional assessment formats more effectively and efficiently, and (b) to change the way competences are assessed and develop formats that facilitate the assessment of competences that have been difficult to capture with traditional assessment formats.</p>
	<p>Fairness (in assessment) Refers to the consideration of learner's needs and characteristics, and any reasonable adjustments that need to be applied to take account of them. It is important to ensure that the learner is informed about, understands and is able to participate in the assessment process. It</p>

	also includes an opportunity for the person being assessed to challenge the result of the assessment and that appropriate appeals mechanisms are in place. An assessment should not discriminate between learners except on grounds of the ability being assessed.
	<p>Feedback</p> <p>Feedback is an essential element of the learning process. In its many forms, feedback allows students to reflect on their learning; clarifies areas where students can improve; and provides students the opportunity to self-assess their skills and capabilities.</p>
	<p>Feedforward</p> <p>Feedback focuses on current performance (and may simply justify the grade awarded); <i>feed forward</i> looks ahead to the next assignment.</p>
	<p>Formative assessment</p> <p>Assessment conducted throughout the educational process with a view to enhancing student learning; eliciting evidence about learning to close the gap between current and desired performance (so that action can be taken to close the gap); providing feedback/feedforward to students; and involving students in the assessment and learning process.</p>
	<p>Learning objectives</p> <p>Specification of learning to be achieved upon completion of an educational programme or an activity. Learning objectives can also be specified for a lesson, a theme, a year, or an entire course.</p>
	<p>Learning outcomes</p> <p>The totality of information, knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values, skills, competencies or behaviours a learner has mastered upon the successful completion of an education programme.</p>
	<p>Moderation</p> <p>Moderation is the review of the marks awarded to a particular assessment by internal and external examiners. It is conducted in order to assure the institution and its external examiners that there is consistency of marking against the University's generic mark descriptors. The process involves an evaluation of the distribution of marks and a discussion of the marks awarded to an appropriate sample of work. Moderation is a quality enhancement tool to help ensure that grading practices and assessment outcomes are valid, consistent and reliable. Moderation may be used in a Department/Faculty for the assessment of large modules where a number of Internal Examiners are grading components of assessment that contribute to the overall module grade for review by the Module Coordinator.</p>
	<p>Reliability is the degree to which an assessment generates comparable grades across, time, across graders and across methods to ensure academic standards.</p>

	<p>Rubrics (in assessment)</p> <p>Scoring tools containing performance criteria and a performance scale with all score points described and defined. Rubrics are specific guidelines with criteria to evaluate the quality of learner work. Learners may use rubrics to judge their own work, and to edit and improve it. Rubrics may be part of the national curriculum or syllabi, or be provided in a separate document. A rubric is normally comprised of two components – criteria and levels of performance. For each criterion, the evaluator applying the rubric can determine to what degree the learner has met the criterion, i.e., the level of performance. Sometimes rubrics can include descriptors that spell out what is expected of learners at each level of performance for each criterion.</p>
	<p>Summative Assessment</p> <p>Assessment is summative when the grading of an assessment contributes to the final grade for a class or programme of study. The aim of summative assessment is to evaluate students' attainment of the intended learning outcomes within a unit of study.</p>
	<p>Validity (in assessment)</p> <p>Validity is defined as the extent to which an assessment accurately measures what it is intended to measure and aligns with the programme and module learning outcomes.</p>

APPENDIX B: FORMS OF FEEDBACK

Feedback and feedforward can be both informal and formal, and can be provided individually and/or in groups. Feedback/feedforward can take many different forms depending on the requirements of the discipline and programme.

Some examples might be:

- Providing **generic feedback** in lectures, tutorials or workshops: feedback is given on what the majority of students seem to be struggling with, without reference to an individual's assessment.
- **Class marking:** collate parts of actual student work, to let students themselves mark and provide feedback on an assessment they have in fact, all handed in. Question by question, the collated work could for instance consist of an example of a great answer, and an example of a problematic answer to the same question.
- **Self-assessment:** provides students with an opportunity to self-assess at the end of their assessment work. This can be achieved when gauged against a set grid or checklist of assessment criteria.
- **Student steered feedback:** the student is asked at the end of their assessment to put forward a request for feedback on a particular part of their learning. This is one of the strongest means to make a student evaluate their own progress, and allows the assessor to target a student's concerns most precisely.

Other examples:

- Discussions in class about assignments or presentations
- Reviewing assignment exemplars
- Practice assignments
- A practice session in marking and commenting on a sample assignment
- 'Drop-in' advice
- Guidance given on previous assignments about what to change in future
- Comments from staff or other students
- Reflective writing and action planning
- Discussions in supervision meetings
- Anonymised previous assignments
- Handwritten notes in the margins of an assignment
- Ratings on a marking grid
- Verbal or emailed comments from staff or other students
- 'Clicker' responses in a lecture