

## Union Theological College Assessment Policy and Procedures

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## Introduction: The Purpose of Assessment

At Union Theological College assessment is an integrated and integral part of learning and teaching. It is the principal instrument by which we:

- recognise, reward and monitor levels of achievement;
- identify areas for development in both teaching and student learning;
- maintain academic standards; and
- help to prepare students for life beyond the College, particularly in Christian ministry.

This policy document provides the principles and expectations that define and safeguard the management of assessment according to QAA expectations. It is intended to be explicit, transparent and accessible to all relevant audiences.

The principles in this policy have been formulated in accordance with the following documents:

- the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, specifically:
  - Part A: Setting and Maintaining Academic Standards;
  - Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (QAA, 2013);
- The soon-to-be implemented UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance: Assessment (2018);
- the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications; and
- the QAA Subject Benchmark Statement: Theology and Religious Studies.

There are many different forms of assessment, serving a variety of purposes. These include:

- promoting student learning by providing the student with appropriate feedback;

- evaluating student knowledge, understanding, abilities, skills or competencies;
- providing a mark or grade that enables a student's performance to be established, and may also be used to make progress decisions; and
- enabling the public (including employers) and higher education providers, to know that an individual has attained an appropriate level of achievement that reflects the academic standards set by the awarding institution and agreed UK norms, including the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications. This may include meeting the requirements of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Council for Training in Ministry.

In addition, as a higher education institution with responsibility for the academic standards of awards made in its name, the College is required to have effective procedures for:

- designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing the assessment strategies for programmes and awards;
- implementing rigorous assessment policies and practices that ensure the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this; and
- evaluating how academic standards are maintained through assessment practice, which also serves to encourage effective learning.

## 1. General Principles of Assessment

These principles draw on published guidance on best practice in assessment in higher education and reflect the UK Quality Code for Higher Education Chapter B6: Assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (QAA, 2013).

### 1) Assessment will be reliable

In order for assessment to be accurate and repeatable there will be clear and consistent processes for the setting, marking, grading and moderation of assignments.

### 2) Assessment will be valid

Assessment tasks will be aligned with and will measure student attainment of the intended learning outcomes in an effective way (intended learning outcomes are devised at both programme and module level).

### 3) Information about assessment will be explicit and accessible

Assessment tasks will be clear and will be communicated to students, staff and external examiners in a timely manner.

### 4) Assessment will be inclusive and equitable

The College will endeavour to ensure that all assigned tasks do not disadvantage any group or individual, e.g. students with disabilities.

5) Assessment will address all of the programme/level aims and outcomes  
Module assessment will be drawn up with the programme skills and capabilities in view.

6) The amount of assessed work required will be manageable  
Assessment should be timed appropriately and should not overload either staff or students and the scheduling of summative assessment will ensure that students have sufficient time to develop the intended learning outcomes.

7) Formative and summative assessment will be included in each module  
There will be an appropriate mix of formative and summative assessment within each module. This ensures that students are given appropriate support to develop the competencies required to meet the learning outcomes.

8) Feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process  
Students are entitled to receive feedback on all assessment tasks in a timely manner.

9) Each programme/level will include a variety of assessment types  
A variety of assessment tasks will be used so that the whole range of learning outcomes may be appropriately assessed.

10) Assessment will encourage academic integrity  
The College will seek to prevent academic misconduct through prior guidance and the design of assessment tasks. Assessment tasks will be designed so as to minimise opportunities for plagiarism.

## 2. Quality Assurance Requirements

### 1) Definition of Assessment

A programme must include both formative and summative assessments:

- Formative assessment provides students with opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding of assessment so that they understand how to improve the quality of work. It may or may not include a mark and for purely formative assessment the mark does not contribute to the final module grade.
- Summative assessment is the formal assessment of how students demonstrate that they have fulfilled the outcomes of the programme of study and that they have achieved the standard required for progression towards an award.
- While some assessment may be entirely formative (for instance, classroom or seminar activities) summative assessment often includes a formative element.

## 2) Assessment Strategies

In order for the College's assessment to be consistent with the national standard of awards it should be carried out by competent and impartial examiners with the involvement of external examiners (see the College's Externality Policy).

The College's processes for staff recruitment and development ensure that everyone involved in student assessment is competent to undertake their roles and fulfil their responsibilities.

Assessment is designed in a 'top down' manner i.e. design begins with the programme and then goes down into modules.

Assessment should be designed in such a way that, where appropriate, it meets the requirements of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland's Council for Training in Ministry.

Assessments will be marked according to published marking criteria. Details of how degree classifications are calculated will be transparent.

Each module will provide formative feedback (oral, written, or electronic) to individuals or a group of students.

## 3) Assessment Tasks and Learning Outcomes

All assessment elements will be aligned with the relevant learning outcomes.

All specified programme learning outcomes will be appropriately tested through the summative assessments of the programme's modules.

Modular assessment tasks will be designed to test the achievement of all the specified module learning outcomes.

The award of any credit and or degree is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

## 4) Verification of Assessment

The Faculty should ensure that there is consistency across departments in the form of assessed work (e.g. length, complexity and volume) and the components of the assessment (intended learning outcomes should be assessed through the minimum of discrete tasks).

Departments are responsible for the internal scrutiny of all assessment tasks prior to submission to external examiners.

External Examiners provide interim assessment approval. It is the responsibility of Heads of Department to report these interim approvals to the UTC Faculty constituted as the Exam Board.

Module review provides a significant opportunity to review how effective assessment has been in measuring course learning outcomes.

#### 5) Communication to Students

The module documents should include details of all approved assessment, the marking criteria, the method of submission and the date of submission or other assessment arrangements.

Faculty and students engage in a dialogue designed to promote a shared understanding of the nature and basis of assessment. This begins in the orientation process and continues through a student's programme, particularly through use of feedback. The aim is to develop assessment literacy i.e. to help students to develop the ability to understand the process of assessment and to help students develop the confidence and ability to evaluate, and improve on, their own performance.

Whilst the College will ensure that all assessment information is available it is a student's responsibility to make themselves aware of all assessment details.

#### 6) Word Count

A minimum and/or maximum word count may be specified as part of the assessment criteria for a component or module. The word count must specify whether footnotes, bibliographies, and appendices etc. are to be included. Where a word count is included, the module information for students must provide clear details of any penalties that will apply.

#### 7) Academic Integrity

Students must maintain the highest standards of academic integrity whilst studying at the College. All work submitted for assessment must be the student's own, unless authorisation has been given for collaboration, and all work must be appropriately cited and referenced.

The College will investigate and, where necessary, penalise any conduct which is likely to give an unfair advantage to the candidate, affect the security of assessment, and/or affect the standards of the degrees awarded by College including, *inter alia* plagiarism, self-plagiarism, impersonation, collusion, falsification, exam misconduct, or contract cheating.

#### 8) Reasonable Adjustments

The College will make reasonable adjustments to assessment to support students with a disability or other ongoing medical or mental health condition. The aim of reasonable adjustment is to ensure that all students are able to demonstrate the full extent of their academic abilities, irrespective of a disability or long-term condition.

Students should notify the College of any such condition at the time of enrolment or as soon as possible thereafter so that appropriate support measures may be put in place.

Alternative assessment is one way to ensure that assessment tasks are sufficiently inclusive and give all students fair opportunities to demonstrate the course learning outcomes.

#### 9) Exceptional Circumstances

Students must notify the College of any circumstances which are sudden, unexpected, significantly disruptive, and beyond the student's control and which may affect their performance at assessment, such as a serious illness or the death of a close relative. The College will ensure that alternative arrangements are put in place for such students, such as an extension or deferral of assessment to a later date.

#### 10) Submission of Written Assessment Elements

Students are expected to submit all written elements by the published deadline. Module documents will explain any penalties that may be incurred for late submission. A student who is unable to submit coursework without good cause may be deemed by the Exam Board to have failed the assessment concerned.

#### 11) Attendance at Scheduled Assessments

Students are expected to attend all scheduled assessments e.g. presentations, workshops or class tests. A student who is unable to attend a scheduled assessment without good cause may be deemed by the Exam Board to have failed the assessment concerned.

#### 12) Examinations

It is the responsibility of candidates to attend at the prescribed place and time. A student absent without good cause from an examination will be deemed by the Exam Board to have failed the examination.

### 13) Marking and Grading Criteria

A student's performance will be marked according to clear assessment criteria as set out in the module assessment document. Assessment criteria will:

- examine the extent to which the published learning outcomes have been achieved;
- be set at the required standard and level of the module; and
- be of a comparable standard to equivalent awards elsewhere in the UK, and in keeping with appropriate subject benchmark statements.

All dissertations/research projects must be subject to full, independent, second marking. This may be blind or open second marking. The 60 CATS point PGT dissertation should be double blind marked with the markers determining an agreed draft mark.

Any marks which are provided to students prior to completion of moderation and approval by the Exam Board are provisional, and subject to change by moderation, and the decision of the Exam Board.

The pass mark at levels 4, 5 and 6 is 40% and at level 7 it is 50%.

A student must be awarded a mark of 0 for an assessment component and must be deemed to have made an attempt where they:

- Are absent from an examination, presentation or class test, OR
- Do not attempt a paper or task, OR
- Do not submit coursework.

### 14) Feedback

Students will be provided with feedback which will:

- relate to the learning outcomes and marking criteria;
- be clear, constructive and motivating;
- be sufficiently detailed;
- be critical with the intention of enabling student development;
- place ownership of learning in the student's hands; and
- be returned within the specified timeframe (usually within three weeks following the date of submission).

Formative feedback is often delivered in the classroom or in seminar activities. Students may also receive formative feedback through digital learning resources e.g. responsive learning apps like Cerego or in the feedback provided in discussion boards in the VLE.

This feedback may be both individual (relating to a specific student's work) or generic, referring to issues arising from the work produced by a cohort of students (this is particularly useful with exam feedback).



Formative feedback at an early stage in a module can help to identify those students who may need additional support.

Feedback should, wherever possible, be tailored so that it may be used by the students in future assignments.

At the start of each programme, and then periodically thereafter, students should be reminded about the importance of feedback to their learning. As part of the annual monitoring process, the views of students on the methods, content and timing of feedback is gathered.

Module review will consider if the feedback offered to students was timely, constructive and developmental.

#### 15) Academic Integrity

The College operates effective processes for promoting academic integrity and identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice by practical measures such as:

- minimising the availability of opportunities for plagiarism, self-plagiarism and contract cheating by utilising a variety of assessment methods and by regularly refreshing assessment topics;
- actively highlighting matters of academic integrity and making students aware of the consequences of academic offences; and
- investigating, and where necessary, penalising unacceptable academic practice relating to assessment.

#### 16) Moderation

The College understands moderation to be a particular form of second marking based on a representative sample of student work to verify the consistent application of assessment criteria and marking schemes.

Moderation is required for all components of summative assessment, irrespective of the level of the work or the credit weighting of the assessments.

The departmental head has overall responsibility for overseeing the planning and implementation of appropriate internal moderation processes on a programme or module. The grades generated by the first marker(s) are scrutinised to verify the consistent application of assessment criteria and marking schemes. This process of second marking may involve the sampling of work across the range of marks. In this case the sample must include the following:

- all fails;

- examples from all bands; and
- several of the highest marks.

If the second markers agree with the marks for the sampled students, it can be assumed that marking is accurate for the population. However, if the second markers disagree with one or more marks, the sample must be extended to give confidence in the accuracy of marks for all students in the assessment. Any amendment to the marks of the sample must be applied to the rest of the cohort in order to ensure equity and consistency.

The process of internal moderations should also ensure the consistency of marking across all modules within the department.

Examples of moderated assessment will be provided, via the most secure means possible, to the external examiner for approval prior to the meeting of the exam board. Moderator's comments should be included with each sample of work. External examiners shall be informed of the identity of all internal markers and moderators for each module.

## 17) Examination Board

Assessment within all PTFI programmes is conducted under the supervision and control of the Board of Examiners.

The marks of all summative assessment are subject to appropriate Exam Board approval and until that time they remain provisional.

The Principal shall normally be the Chairperson of the Board of Examiners except in circumstances when this authority is delegated to another senior member of faculty. The board is comprised of all UTC Faculty and associated teaching staff and will include the external examiners. In cases where external examiners are not present in person, they must be fully consulted via appropriate media in order to ensure that the views of all external examiners are presented to the Board.

The quorum for the Board of Examiners is five members or one fifth of the membership, whichever is the higher number. This must include the Chair and the participation of at least one external examiner.

The Board should receive the following information:

- Results profiles for all students (including information on missing assessment elements)
- Recommendations from the faculty regarding exceptional circumstances
- Information of all reasonable adjustments for student support.

The Board has the following responsibilities for all programmes and modules:

- Setting, safeguarding and monitoring academic standards
- Ensuring that appropriate marking, second-marking and moderation systems are in place (outlined in section 16)
- Ensuring the fair and equitable treatment of students, taking into consideration any exceptional circumstances (outlined in section 9)
- Determining a student's progression through the programme and for making recommendations for the award of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions to the PTFI (outlined in section 18)
- Agreeing actions in the event of failure (outlined in section 19)

The Board may delegate authority to a sub-group to implement decisions on its behalf on out-of-cycle matters. External examiners do not need to attend the sub-group but should be copied into its communications. The minutes of all sub-groups must be reported to the next full Board via the receipt of adequate minutes.

All board members also are responsible to:

- Declare any potential conflicts of interest
- Preserve confidentiality in respect of the proceedings of the board

The Faculty Secretary is responsible for keeping an adequate record of all decisions and the rationale behind them, especially when extenuating and mitigating circumstances are considered.

Following the Exam Board, results are recorded on an official transcript and released to students.

The College has a policy of refusal to hear appeals against awarded marks as this calls into question the academic judgment of examiners and the integrity and efficiency of the assessment policies and procedures (both internal and external).

Summative assessment results are recorded on the official transcript and aggregated using a set formula to determine the student's classification at the end of the programme.

#### 18) Progression, Continuation and Award

The postgraduate PTFI programmes offered by the College do not include progression requirements but may include continuation requirements if the programme is taken over more than one year.

A student must meet or exceed certain standards in order to progress through a programme and be recommended for an award.

The following number of credits are required to gain the following PTFI awards:

- Graduate certificate - a minimum of 40 credits
- Graduate diploma - a minimum of 80 credits
- Postgraduate certificate - a minimum of 60 credits
- Postgraduate diploma - a minimum of 120 credits
- Master's - a minimum of 180 credits

#### Graduate Certificate

In order to be awarded a graduate certificate a student should pass all modules.

However, a student who does not pass all modules will nonetheless be considered to have met the award requirements if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Fail no more than 20 credits, AND
- Pass the remaining credits, AND
- Achieve a credit-weighted mean of at least 40% across all modules.

#### Graduate Diploma

In order to be awarded a graduate diploma a student should pass all modules.

However, a student who does not pass all modules will nonetheless be considered to have met the award requirements if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Fail no more than 20 credits, AND
- Pass the remaining credits, AND
- Achieve a credit-weighted mean of at least 40% across all modules.

#### Postgraduate Certificate

In order to be awarded a postgraduate certificate a student should pass all modules.

However, a student who does not pass all modules will nonetheless be considered to have met the award requirements if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Fail no more than 30 credits, AND
- Pass the remaining credits, AND
- Achieve a credit-weighted mean of at least 50% across all modules.

#### Postgraduate Diploma

In order to be awarded a postgraduate diploma a student should pass all modules.

However, a student who does not pass all modules will nonetheless be considered to have met the award requirements if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Fail no more than 30 credits, AND

- Pass the remaining credits, AND
- Achieve a credit-weighted mean of at least 50% across all modules.

#### Master's Degree

In order to be awarded a master's degree a student should pass all modules (a minimum of 150 credits at level 7).

However, a student who does not pass all modules will nonetheless be considered to have met the award requirements if they meet all of the following criteria:

- Fail no more than 30 credits, AND
- Pass the remaining credits, AND
- Achieve a credit-weighted mean of at least 50% across all modules.

#### 19) Consequence of Failure

When a student does not meet the progression and award requirements at the first attempt they should be reassessed in the failed module(s) unless they:

- Are eligible for the award, OR
- Have been excluded from the College as a result of academic or personal misconduct.

Where a student has failed up to and including 60 credits in any academic year this reassessment takes the form of a resit. Where student fails more than 60 taught credits in an academic year reassessment should take the form of a repeat. Where a repeat is considered to be impossible, the Exam Board may offer the student the opportunity to take the failed assessments as a resit. Where a student fails a dissertation, reassessment should take the form of a resit unless the extent of failure is such that additional supervision would be required in which case a student may be required to repeat the dissertation.

#### Resitting Assessment

Where resitting is required and permitted a student will be provided with timely academic feedback and guidance prior to re-assessment. They may be offered, but are not automatically entitled to, additional tutoring and supervision.

There is no fee for a resit.

Resitting should be by the same method of assessment. Where such a method is difficult or impossible (e.g. a group project) then the Board of Examiners may set a different assessment that allows the student to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

The maximum mark when resitting reassessment is capped at the pass mark i.e. levels 4, 5 and 6 a maximum of 40% and at level 7 a maximum of 50%.

Should a student obtain a lower mark in the second attempt the higher mark will stand.

#### Repeating Assessment

Where a repeat of assessment is required a student is given a second attempt at assessment in the following academic year. The student must re-enrol in the modules and further fees will be required.

The maximum mark when repeating assessment is capped at the pass mark i.e. levels 4, 5 and 6 a maximum of 40% and at level 7 a maximum of 50%.

#### Eligibility for Other Awards

Students who do not pass the required credits for an award may be eligible for consideration for a lower award e.g. those who cannot be recommended for the award of a master's degree may be eligible for the award of either a postgraduate diploma or certificate. This is provided that the student has met or surpassed the standard for such an interim qualification.

#### 20) Assessment Review

The programme and module review policy and processes will consider how the assessment may continue to be developed and enhanced.