Guide to the Code of Assessment – Introduction

Location of the Code

The Code of Assessment is published as Regulation 16 of the ‘University Fees and General Information’ chapter of the University Regulations (formerly known as the University Calendar). It contains most but not all of the regulations relating to assessment.

If in any case an explanation or illustration in this guide appears to contradict the terms of the Code itself, the Code takes precedence.

Key changes for 2020-21

No significant changes have been made to the Code for the 2020-21 session.

A reminder of areas where there were changes for 2019-20:

1. Expression of Grade Point Average (GPA) in degree regulations

Degree regulations refer to various grade point averages as required for progress and for award. In previous versions of regulations GPAs were stated as an integer (e.g. ‘the candidate must have obtained 240 credits at a GPA of 9’) and sometimes an equivalent alphanumeric grade was also referred to (e.g. ‘the candidate must have achieved a GPA of 15 (equivalent to B3) in the 180 credits completed on the programme’).

The Code of Assessment requires that GPA is calculated to one decimal place (§16.34(a) of the Code) and therefore it has been agreed that greater clarity is achieved by expressing the GPA to one decimal place throughout. The reference to equivalent alphanumeric grades was also potentially confusing given that such grades reflect grade points being rounded to an integer. Such references have therefore been removed.

The examples cited now appear in the following form:

‘The candidate must have obtained 240 credits at a GPA of 9.0.’
‘The candidate must have achieved a GPA of 15.0 in the 180 credits completed on the programme.’

2. Generic Regulations for Postgraduate Programmes delivered by Online Distance Learning

A set of generic degree regulations has been introduced to cover programmes delivered by Online Distance Learning. The requirements for progress and award largely mirror the requirements incorporated in the existing generic regulations for Taught Masters Degrees and Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas, but there are some differences reflecting the distinctive features of ODL delivery. It is therefore important to refer to the correct set of regulations for the programme of study in question.

Other assessment regulations

The ‘University Fees and General Information’ chapter of the University Regulations contains further Regulations relevant to assessment which are not part of the Code and are therefore not included in this Guide. These Regulations are:
• Instructions to candidates on their conduct in written examinations (Regulation 17)
• Use of a computer in an examination (Regulation 18)
• Use of dictionaries by students in examinations (Regulation 19)
• Use of electronic calculators by students in examinations (Regulation 20)
• Invigilation (Regulation 21)
• Rules of invigilation (Regulation 22)
• Appointment of external examiners for taught courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level (Regulation 23)
• Examination and other assessment arrangements for disabled students (Regulation 24)
• Code of practice for exceptional international examination arrangements (Regulation 25)

The essence of the Code

Assessment is an integral part of the process by which the University makes awards to students who have completed their programmes. The regulations which comprise the Code of Assessment are intended to deliver transparently fair and consistent outcomes in all student assessment. It is the pursuit of transparency which has imposed most demands on the design of the Code and on examiners.

Consider the case of an able and hard working student who received a mark of 67% for a very good essay. We may take for granted that this mark was fair and reflective of consistent standards. We therefore assume that students who had performed as well in previous years might also have got 67%, and, within this student’s own cohort, those students whose essays were less good were awarded less than 67% and those (very few) who had written better essays achieved marks (only a little) higher than 67%. But this model of fairness and academic rigour has two weaknesses:

• Its range of consistency is very limited – students in other subjects who had demonstrated as thorough a grasp of their course content might have scored 87% or even more.
• It is meaningless beyond the function of ranking students – the essay was a very good one and yet it scored only two thirds of the way up the implied scale of 0 to 100.

The object of the Code of Assessment is to make assessment outcomes as consistent as possible across all taught disciplines within this University, and to provide a clear statement of the learning that each student has demonstrated.

Chapter 1 of this Guide discusses intended learning outcomes (ILOs). ILOs tell students what they are expected to learn, and all universities are required to publish these. One of the things the Code of Assessment does is make an explicit connection between ILOs and the assessment of each student’s performance. Thus employers (and anyone else) may determine what the grades reported in a student’s transcript actually mean.

Chapter 2 explains how this connection is made by a set of grade descriptors, in which each grade is described in terms of a student’s achievement of ILOs. What the examiner has to do is determine which grade descriptor best matches the student’s performance. The University’s main assessment schedule (Schedule A) uses eight grades, A to H, and the bands into which these grades are divided allow the marker 23 discrete scores from A1 to H. The chance awkwardness of this number confirms that a student’s performance is being assessed against grade descriptors, not as a ratio of right answers to questions asked.

University awards are not made on the basis of a single assessment. The Code must, therefore, provide a way of aggregating grades from all summative components. The simplest
and most readily transparent method of combining grades is to convert them into numbers, and Chapter 2 explains how this should be done and how the final score should be translated to a course result or a classified degree. The Code acknowledges the danger that these calculations will suggest a precision which may be deceptive. For Honours and Taught Masters Degree classification it therefore requires that Examination Boards look afresh at the position of students for whom the aggregation process delivers a marginal result (the Code defines these ‘zones of discretion’).

**Other aspects of the Code**

As noted, it is an objective of the Code to deliver fair and consistent outcomes in all student assessment. Consistency across the University requires regulation; fairness calls for sensitivity, on the one hand, to the individual student – recognising when their circumstances justify special provision – and, on the other, to the integrity of the University’s awards. These issues are never far from the surface in the rules governing reassessment (**Chapter 3**) and incomplete assessment resulting from good cause (**Chapter 5**). Course credits represent a transferable currency – this University will recognise credits gained by students in other institutions just as other institutions will recognise the value of credits awarded here – and students must accumulate course credits in order to qualify for a certificate, diploma or degree. **Chapter 4** is concerned with setting minimum standards for the award of credits. **Chapter 6** is about making the whole thing work, and sets out the responsibilities of Heads of Schools and Research Institutes, assessment officers and examiners, both internal and external.