Assessment – a step-by-step guide for collaborative partners

Step 1: Agree essay titles and exam papers. It is good practice to have a mechanism (such as a sub-committee) to discuss assessments. This allows the team to avoid overlap of assessment (eg two essays about diabetes for different modules). It also allows for a check that the assessment does test the learning outcomes of the module and is at the right level (not too simple or too hard). The external examiner should be consulted about the design of assessments for modules which contribute to the final degree classification (Level 3 and 4 of an undergraduate degree, M level modules).

Step 2: Students undertake assessment. Most assessment will be anonymous, so students should identify themselves only by their matriculation number. (Make sure all your students have matriculated and have a number!) You will need a submission procedure which allows students to hand in their assignments securely and anonymously. Usually the best way is if students hand in their assignments to a central administrator. Some form of signature sheet to record when assignments have been handed in can be useful.

For unseen written exams, arrangements must be made to keep the exam paper secure before the exam so that students don't see the questions in advance. Student answer books should be identified only by matriculation number. See QM regulations for further advice on conduct of exams.

Step 3: The first marker marks the assessments using the marking criteria defined. A feedback sheet should be completed, explaining to the student the strengths and weaknesses of their work. The first marker completes a list of all the marks for the module.

Step 4: Internal moderation. Another member of staff should look over a sample of the assessments. The purpose of this is to confirm that the first marker has applied the marking criteria consistently and that the scale of marks is roughly appropriate. If the moderator doesn't agree with the first marker it may be necessary to second mark the entire cohort. This should be discussed with the programme leader. It is obviously very important that the marking team agree how they are marking and what standard of work is worth eg 60, 70 or 80%. Records must be kept of the internal moderation process to show how final marks are arrived at.

Step 5: QMU moderation (if applicable). For new partnerships, we normally ask for a sample of work to be sent to QMU for moderation. This allows us to confirm we have a shared understanding of the standard of student performance expected.

Step 6: At this stage you may want to return provisional marks to students with feedback (as they will be waiting anxiously to know how they have done). It is essential that students know these marks are only provisional until ratified by the Board of Examiners. Some people prefer only to give grades (A, B, C, D etc) at this point. Some people just give the feedback sheet. If a student has failed they will want to know what to do about retrieval. Note that retrieval arrangements are not normally decided until the exam board has met.

Step 7: External examiner moderation. Once the final marks are agreed, a sample of work for each module should be sent to the external examiner. The external examiner will need to have the following information:

- the assignment as set to students, with any guidelines provided;
- a sample of assessments*;
- copies of the first marker's feedback to students;
- copies of any comments from the second marker;
- marking criteria or model answers;
- a full module mark list

** When there are eight or fewer students all the assessments should be sent. When there are more, the following guidelines apply:*

- *The minimum sample is six scripts. For large cohorts, the minimum sample is the square root of the total number of students (rounded up).*
- *Send one script from each grade (70+%, 60-69%, etc)*
- *Send all borderline fails.*

Step 8: Send finalised marks to School Office. Include information on students who have withdrawn, students who have deferred and students who have been granted extensions. Identify any students who have simply failed to submit (they get 0).

Step 9: Pre-board. It is a good idea to hold a meeting the day before the exam board to look at the profiles of individual students and consider any issues that might arise. This will give you advance warning if there are any tricky cases on which you will need advice about your options under the regulations. It is also an opportunity to check whether there is further information you may need, such as details of a student's extenuating circumstances.

Step 10: Exam board. The board will normally be held at QMU. As many of the staff involved in marking as possible should attend, as should the external examiner. Only the exam board has the authority to confirm marks and – importantly – only the exam board can decided on whether and how a student should retrieve a failed module.

Step 11: Confirm retrieval arrangements with any students who have deferred or failed. It is your responsibility to notify students of what to do next and what the deadline is for resubmission.

Step 12: Transcripts. The Student Records Office will issue transcripts to students once a year.