

2023
V3

Grading, Academic Standards & Feedback Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to define and prescribe policy on assessment grading, criteria and marking and to provide outline guidance on their development and deployment.

This Policy includes a framework for effective, appropriate and fair assessment practice that promotes learning. The purposes of assessment and feedback are to:

- promote learning and motivate learners
- assess the extent to which learners have achieved learning outcomes
- assure standards by demonstrating achievement consistent with HABIA, NCFE and VTCT
- help learners to reflect on feedback to evaluate and enhance personal performance and development
- provide a basis for decisions regarding progression and award

Scope

This policy applies to all learners undertaking taught components and programmes.

Key Definitions

Assessment

The process of evidencing and evaluating the extent to which a learner has met the learning outcomes.

Formative Work/Assessment

Learning tasks or "trial" assessments that are used to provide developmental feedback to a learner so that they can improve their future combined performance. As such, they usually take place during the module(s) rather than at the end.

Formal Assessment

Assessment undertaken in order that a learner's achievement of learning outcomes can be measured and the level of performance judged, graded and recorded.

End Point Assessment

This is the final stage of an apprenticeship. It is an impartial assessment to determine whether an apprentice has developed the skills, knowledge and behaviours outlined in the apprenticeship standard.

Feedback

Information given to learners about the quality of their performance in an assessment.

Final Overall Assessment

This is awarded on completion of all qualification work. Learner performance grading is quantified and their overall grading outcome is determined on average grades achieved, ie., if a learner mostly achieves merit throughout their learning journey they will be awarded 'merit' overall and receive certification as such.

Core Concepts

Debut recognises that timely and effective feedback to learners and constructive use of assessment grades are integral to the learning process and have a considerable influence upon what and how they learn. In addition to this underpinning philosophy that assessment is for learning and not just of learning, this policy is also based on the following concepts:

- validity – a valid assessment is one that assesses the stated learning outcomes of the relevant module, be set at the right academic level and be consistent with subject benchmarks and HABIA standards.
- reliability – a reliable assessment is one in which the grade awarded would not vary significantly with different markers. The starting point for reliability is the development and communication of clear and understandable assessment criteria to learners.
- efficiency – this relates to ensuring that assessment workloads for learners and staff are manageable and timed appropriately to support learning and minimise non-completion.
- transparency – this relates to ensuring that assessment processes and systems are clear and understandable for learners, staff and external examiners. Debut's Grading Performance Criteria outlines standards of work applicable to each grading criterion.
- diversity – this relates to the use of an appropriate range of assessment strategies that meet the requirements of the discipline and the learning needs of learners. Moderation of grading ensures that standardisation of grading by staff is achieved and no learner is marked incorrectly.

Grading Process

The grading criteria has been developed in consultation with:

- Input from Debut's Director of Tuition
- Input from All Assessors and Lead IQA
- Debut's Teaching & Learning Policy
- HABIA Standards
- VTCT and or NCFE Standards
- VTCT and or NCFE EQA Recommendations

Grading Standards

Debut has clear and defined standards of grading for the following elements:

- Grading Expectations for each Unit
- Grading Expectations for Overall Qualification
- Grading Expectations for Assignments
- Grading Expectations for Assessments

The grading criteria is defined as:

- Distinction
- Merit
- Pass
- Ungraded

Guidance within the Grading Standards provides learners with clear information on how to work towards and include specific minimum criteria to achieve each grade.

Learners are openly encouraged to strive towards higher grading standards with the following:

- Positive and constructive feedback by Assessors on in class work or practical assessments
- Learners given opportunity to self-assess their own standard of work and summarise areas where improvements can be made to reach a higher grade.
- Assignments are marked with feedback that also encourages learners to strive to improve their written work and knowledge.
- Learners are given opportunity to improve on 1st submission assignments and encourage them to bring it up to a higher grade.
- Learners who have achieved high standards of work are praised openly to encourage their peers to mimic their achievement and strive for continuous improvement.
- Awarding of grading certificates per module and for overall qualification so learners have an additional sense of achievement and further certificates to add to their portfolio of learning.

Assessment Strategy

Assessments are appropriately and explicitly matched to learning outcomes and set at the appropriate academic level.

- Each learning outcome will be assessed.
- Assessment tasks will be appropriate to the academic level of the module
- Assessment will be conducted in a timely manner in order to provide learners with appropriate feedback as soon as possible so the advice and improvement recommendations can swiftly be addressed and feed into forthcoming graded work.

Programme assessment strategies include a range of summative methods that encourage learning and counter possible bias associated with individual assessment methods.

- Each module/programme assessment strategy will be developed taking account of how assessment/tasks integrate with each other, both within and across modules, pathways and programmes.
- Assessment tasks will be designed on the basis that they are appropriate to assess the type of learning outcomes.
- Where appropriate, assessment tasks will be work-related to ensure that Teesside graduates exit with appropriate employability skills.

Assessment practices are inclusive, ensuring all learners have equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement.

- Learners will be given equal opportunity to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes and competence standards as appropriate.
- Where learners have a confirmed disability, reasonable adjustments to assessments will be made where possible.

Programme assessment strategies include a range of formative methods/processes that encourage learning.

- Each programme will incorporate a range of formative processes including oral, written, and where feasible, peer assessment and feedback.
- Where appropriate, some assessment tasks will be designed to encourage learners to apply formative feedback (from staff or peers) to improve their performance in the next assessment.

Where less familiar types of assessment are used, timely opportunities will be made available for a learner to practise and to receive constructive feedback.

Assessment strategies and tasks promote good academic practice.

- Assessments will be designed with due regard to preventing academic misconduct.
- Learners will be informed about academic misconduct and its consequences using standard information.
- Appropriate support for the development of good academic practice will be provided for learners.

Assessment workloads are realistic and not over-burdensome for learners and staff and are timed to support learning.

- Assessment deadlines will be spread across an appropriate time period to avoid assessment bunching and minimise non-completion.
- The volume of assessment will not exceed that required to assess the learning outcomes.

Assessment strategies are regularly reviewed and, where appropriate, revised.

- Module Leaders will reflect annually on the appropriateness of the assessment strategy in light of learner feedback, performance and external examiner comments, and implement enhancements as appropriate.
- Module statistics will be reviewed at the Assessor Year End Review and where issues related to learner performance, module delivery or teaching methods are identified, an action plan will be implemented.
- Detailed analysis of learner performance data should be undertaken as part of annual programme monitoring and periodic programme review, and assessment strategies adjusted where necessary.

Marking and Moderation Practices

To ensure consistency and promote reliability and objectivity in marking and appointing grades to learners, Debut's Assessment staff is committed to:

- Use the Grading Definitions criteria as a standardised marking guide.
- To openly listen and react to feedback from external moderation processes and react accordingly to self-improve or share good practice.
- All assessed work will normally be retained by Debut for the current Academic Year plus advise learners to keep work for a further year.

All work be set and marked appropriately by qualified staff.

- Deep dive sampling moderation will be undertaken from each cohort class to ensure consistency in marking to grading criteria, with any Assessors who are found to be marking to severely or strictly to undertake additional training.
- To be proactive in motivating learners to set realistic but achievable targets for themselves to strive to gain higher grades.
- To be clear, supportive and encouraging to learners whose work is below standards required of the qualification, in order that they revisit the task with renewed enthusiasm and confidence in their ability.
- To ensure learners of all abilities understand fully why they have been awarded a specific grade and if they seek further clarification, to provide such.
- To ensure that all learners are graded equally, that no preference is given to any learner by awarding them higher grades than their work warrants and, additionally, no learners are discriminated against by being marked at a lower grade than they have achieved.

Plagiarism Prevention

All members of staff must explain to their learners at the start of NVQ course that plagiarism and other kinds of academic dishonesty are unacceptable forms of cheating which will be penalised severely. Such warnings should be repeated during the session and are especially necessary where dissertations, projects or coursework are substantial elements of the curriculum. In addition, the use of AI writing programs is not recommended, however, if used, learners should still put any suggested text in their own words and indicate if they have used such programs. Please refer to Debut's Academic Work Completion & Plagiarism Policy for further guidance.

Linked Policies

Please refer to Debut's linked policies below for additional information regarding Grading Academic Standards & Feedback Policy:

- Learner Charter Policy
- Skills for Life/Transferrable Skills Policy
- Access to Fair Assessment Policy
- Academic & Vocational Appeals Policy
- Anti-Bribery & Fraud Policy
- Code of Conduct – Staff Policy
- Code of Conduct – Learners Policy
- Academic Work Completion & Plagiarism Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Equal Opportunities & Inclusion Policy
- Grading, Academic Standards & Feedback Policy
- Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) Policy
- Guidance Policy

- IAG Policy
- Learner Support & Super Group Policy
- Quality Assurance Policy
- Resource Loan Policy
- Moderation Policy
- Testing & Invigilation Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy

Policy Revision

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