QA277 Assessment Policy

1. Purpose
Policy on Approaches to Assessment

2. Scope
All assessments which contribute or lead to an NUI Galway award (undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses) and which are provided by NUI Galway schools, Colleges, and units (i.e. exceptions may apply to programme-approved 'study abroad' and similar modules, including those provided by partner institutions).

2. Introduction

"..assessment has three purposes. Firstly, assessment is designed to support and thus enhance learning. Secondly, it provides certification for progress or transfer, and thirdly, it is a form of accountability (quality assurance) for stakeholders."[1]

"Over the last decade many of us have seen our assessment workload grow dramatically, as we work with increasing numbers of students who are ever more diverse. Consequently, the time we have available to devote to assessing each student has fallen. Even those methods and approaches which used to work satisfactorily with relatively small numbers of students are now labouring as we try to extend them to a mass higher education context. It is therefore more important than ever to review the way we design and implement our assessment."[2]

Assessment should be valid, reliable, fair, transparent and authentic. In the context of Learning Outcomes, assessment tasks (and marking criteria) should enable students to demonstrate their achievement of these outcomes and facilitate robust decisions. Within each programme, therefore, a range of assessment instruments should be used without over-reliance on a single approach (such as the traditional unseen written examination papers). Further, programmes need to avoid 'overassessment' of students and maximise the opportunity for students to learn from assessments (as is agreed to be one of the educational purposes of assessment).[3]

Research shows that *formative* assessment is educationally powerful.[4] Schools and Programme Boards will work to ensure that each programme provides students with sufficient opportunity for such formative feedback. Each programme will measure the degree to which students do engage

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[1] "Developing a variety of assessment methods, including self and peer assessment – an overview" D. Lines, Assessment Workshop 4, Enhancement Themes., 2004.
http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/documents/assessment/Assessment_Workshop_4FINAL.pdf

[2] "The Lecturer's Toolkit" P. Race, 2nd Edn, Kogan Page, London, 2002.

[3] Adapted from University of Manchester, Assessment Principles
http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/tlso/map/teachinglearningassessment/assessment/sectiona-principles/

[4] Nicol D and Macfarlane-Dick D (2006) "Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice", *Studies in Higher Education,* 31.2, pp 199-218

with such support when it is available. *Integrative assessment*[5] strategies can be developed which attempt to tackle this issue within the context of a range of academic disciplines and modular programmes.

NUI Galway is committed to the provision of an equitable learning environment that supports all students, including students with disabilities, to fulfil their academic potential. The University recognises the rights of students with disabilities to avail of reasonable accommodations to enable them to participate on equitable terms. Guidelines, legal requirements, recommended practice, and other aspects pertaining to 'alternative forms' of assessment for such cases are detailed in the separate *Alternative Assessment Policy*.

3. Principles

All programmes should adhere to the key principles arising from the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning, which recognises that assessment can be *of learning*, *for learning*, and act *as a form of learning*. These principles are stated as follows.

> "In addition to being valid, reliable and effective
> 1. Assessment and feedback should empower students to become *self-regulated learners*.
> 2. Assessment and feedback should *be clear and understandable* by staff and students.
> 3. Decisions on assessment and feedback should be guided by a *programme-level approach*.
> 4. Assessment and feedback approaches should foster *partnership between staff and students*.
> 5. Students should experience a *diverse range of assessment methods*, including, where relevant, *authentic and work-based assessments*.
> 6. Assessment and feedback should *be manageable* for staff and students.
> 7. Assessment and feedback should be enhanced through staff engaging in related *professional development*, including engagement in *scholarship* in this area.
> 8. Assessment and feedback should be supported by *enabling policies.*"[6]

4. Format and types of assessment

Programme Boards (see *QA008 Programme Boards for Taught Programmes*) and teams should ensure that:

4.1 Assessment tasks should be based upon the intended learning outcomes of modules and programmes, and should provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their level of achievement of these outcomes.

4.2 The amount, type and timing of assessment should be designed to facilitate student learning and intellectual engagement and students should acquire (over the course of their particular programme of study) experience of a range of assessment methods. There should be an appropriate (and coherent) mix of assessment tasks undertaken by students on each programme and the overall amount of assessment should not be excessive.

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[5] Enhancement Themes: Integrative Assessment
http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/themes/IntegrativeAssessment/themes.asp Approaches include using 'feedforward', cumulative and progressive assessments, for example.

[6] https://www.teachingandlearning.ie/principles-assessment-offoras-learning/

4.3 Students will be provided (where possible and appropriate) with opportunities for formative assessment, and a strategy for balancing formative and summative assessment may be built around a process of *integrative* assessment.

4.4 Opportunities for peer-assessment and self-assessment (to enable students to make judgements about their own level of progress) will be made available where possible and appropriate.

4.5 Assignments submitted for credit should be designed to ensure that the principles of academic integrity (e.g. proper referencing of source materials, the avoidance of plagiarism) are maintained and that students are fully aware of appropriate practice in this regard.

4.6 Care is taken to ensure that any forms of *online assessment* are sufficiently secure, robust and reliable to maintain confidence in the grading of individual students and the integrity of the module/programme.

4.7 Alternative forms of assessment should be made available as a reasonable accommodation for some students with disabilities in accordance with the Alternative Assessment Policy (QA YYY) and other requirements to support such students.

5. Management of assessment
Programme Boards have oversight and responsibility for a number of key aspects of the assessment process and should ensure that the following requirements are in place, facilitated as appropriate within the management structures/processes of their College and School.

5.1 Students will be notified in good time of the nature, format and grading criteria of assessment tasks.

5.2 Marking and feedback to students will be timely and when used formatively should include pointers for future improvement.

5.3 Processing, uploading, and management of marks and grades will be undertaken according to the requirements of the University's Examination processes and academic regulations. Any specific requirements or changes to these processes will be communicated by the Office of the Registrar and/or the Academic Secretary to all academic and administrative staff.

5.4 Over-assessment and similar coursework deadlines for multiple modules can be counter-productive in promoting learner engagement and student success in their programmes of study. Coordination of assessment tasks should be carried out at the programme (or year) level to facilitate an appropriate assessment schedule.

5.5 Programme Boards will monitor grading of assessments and the level of consistency or variation of performance across modules and may make recommendations to address any such issues as may arise.

5.6 External examiners play an important role in quality assurance and enhancement as described in *QA005 External Examiners – Taught Programmes* and their observations and recommendations must be considered by the Programme Director/Board.

5.7 Suspected breaches of the disciplinary code, examination security, plagiarism or other aspects related to academic honesty will be formally pursued following the relevant regulatory framework.

5.8 The workload associated with grading and assessing students will also be addressed by managing alternative, efficient approaches (in some cases, for example, through the use of technology, or increased use of self and peer assessment). Workload models for academic staff planning will take account of marking and grading of student assignments and examinations, and seek to ensure that there is a realistic and sustainable distribution of activity and responsibility.

5.9 Programme Boards (through the Programme Director/Leader) will periodically review the assessment methods used to ensure their level of validity and reliability, and to determine the extent to which they are effective at demonstrating achievement of the learning outcomes.

5. Related Policies

QA271 Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy
QA228 Undergraduate Marks and Standards
QA236 Postgraduate Marks and Standards
QA299 Exam Regulations
QA005 External Examiners – Taught Programmes
QA008 Programme Boards for Taught Programmes
QAXXX Alternative Assessment Policy

6. Responsibilities

Students	Meet the academic requirements of their modules and programmes, satisfying rules and regulations regarding assessment and progression.
Individual Academic Staff	Ensure that modules, programmes, and assessment methods adhere to this policy.
Programme Director and Board	Devise, evaluate and oversee approaches to evaluation across the programme, ensuring adherence to this policy and the underlying principles of assessment.
Head of School	Ensure appropriate policies and procedures are implemented across the programmes for which the School is responsible and report any appropriate issues to the Dean.
Dean/Colleges	Colleges may develop their own assessment policies and procedures, but should ensure that these augment, rather than replace the requirements in this policy.
External Examiners	Carry out such duties as described in *QA005 External Examiners – Taught Programmes*
Quality Office	Ensure that Quality Reviews of Programmes incorporate reviews of the extent to which methods and approaches used conform to this policy.
Registrar	Policy Owner