

DN COLLEGES GROUP

Higher Education Assessment Policy

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to make clear to staff and students DN College Group (DNCG)'s expectations in relation to the setting of assessment tasks, assessment completion, and the marking of and feeding back on assessment tasks.
- 1.2 This policy aims to ensure that DNCG meets its obligation for continued registration with the Office for Students (OfS). This policy contains sector-recognised standards that relate to OfS conditions B1, B2, B4, B5 and B8.

2 Scope

- 2.1 The HE Assessment Policy applies to all student enrolled on Higher Education programmes of study, including the main qualification on higher apprenticeships and sets out a range of processes relating to assessment, including:
 - The information that will be provided to students at the beginning and during a module
 - How reasonable adjustments to examination and assessment arrangements may be made to enable students with disabilities to demonstrate their abilities in accordance with the Equality Act (2010).
 - What students need to do to meet the assessment requirements and the consequences/implications if these are not met.
 - How DNCG ensure academic standards are maintained through assessment practices, ensuring assessment is carried out by competent and impartial markers, using methods that enable rigor, integrity and fairness.

3 Responsibilities

- 3.1 DNCG has taken responsibility to fully consider the regulations specified by its partner Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) or other awarding bodies.
- 3.2 It is the responsibility of the Programme Leader and all programme team members to access, refer to and abide by validating university or awarding body guidance, in respect of assessment practices.

4 Definitions and/or Relevant Legislation

- 4.1 **Module:** A self-contained, formally structured unit of study, with a coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. For Pearson qualifications, these are often referred to as units.
- 4.2 **Module Learning Outcome:** A learning outcome is the specification of what a student should learn and be able to demonstrate as the result of a period of specified and supported study. Learning outcomes are concerned with the achievements of the learner rather than the intentions of the teacher (expressed in the aims of a module).
- 4.3 **Module Competencies:** Used by the University of Hull as an alternative to module learning outcomes, focusing on what students can do, as well as what they know.
- 4.4 **Programme Outcomes:** A programme outcome is the specification of what a student should learn and be able to demonstrate by the end of their studies to be successful.

4.5 **Programme Competencies:** Used by the University of Hull as an alternative to programme outcomes and are assessed through various activities which demonstrate the students' knowledge, skills and achievements.

4.6 **Validation Document:** The approved validation document sets out all elements of the programme of study including all details of learning outcomes and assessments.

4.7 **Module Handbook:** The module handbook publishes all details about a module at the point that teaching starts for that module, including Module Leader contact information, module outcomes or competencies, module content, module assessment and recommended readings.

4.8 **Programme Handbook:** The programme handbook summarises all of the key information associated to the programme including information about the Programme Leader and the teaching team, important locations, key dates, regulations which will be followed during study, assessment expectations and how students will be supported in their study.

4.9 **Formative assessment:** Assessment with a developmental purpose, designed to give students feedback on their performance and how it can be improved. Formative assessment tasks do not count towards final marks for the programme/module/unit.

4.10 **Summative assessment:** Used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria the intended learning outcomes of a module or programme. Typically, within summative assessment, the marks awarded contribute towards the final mark of the programme/module/award.

4.11 **Feedforward:** Guidance provided to inform the student's future work. Feedforward should be provided on both formative and summative tasks

4.12 **Double Marking** – also known as Blind Double Marking, means the marking of work independently by two tutors where they are unaware of each other's mark or comments. Final grading is determined through subsequent discussion between markers and this process requires markers to note how the final grade was determined. For live assessments this is defined as the independent but simultaneous marking of work by two tutors followed by the formulation of a jointly agreed mark. Averaging of two marks is not moderation and should not be used as a resolution strategy.

4.13 **Second Marking** – also referred to as informed Double Marking, is the marking of work by two tutors where the second tutor is aware of the mark given by the first tutor. For live assessments this is defined as the checking of marked work against assessment criteria by an independent tutor either present during the live assessment or who reviews a recording.

4.14 **Cross-moderation** - applies to modules with large teaching teams and ensures standards are applied consistently by individual markers; usually this involves multiple tutors in second marking across the marking team.

4.15 **Moderation** - is a quality assurance process that ensures consistency and fairness in assessment decisions across assessors and programmes. It involves reviewing and comparing assessment outcomes to confirm that national standards have been applied accurately and reliably.

4.16 **Internal Verification** - Internal verification is a college-led quality control mechanism used to confirm that assessment instruments and decisions meet national standards. It includes the review of assignment briefs before they are issued and the sampling of assessed student work to ensure grading is accurate, consistent, and aligned with module/unit criteria. Internal verification must be carried out by trained staff who are not the original assessors of the work

4.17 **Standardisation** - checking that assessment processes and criteria are being applied consistently by the marking team. This should occur where multiple staff members mark on the same programme and modules/units.

5 The Policy

5.1 This policy sets out to provide guidance on the creation, marking, grading and management of students assessed working taught programmes.

All formal assessments which contribute to a student's progression through, or attainment of an award are formally marked or graded. The marks or grades awarded will be influenced by any relevant QAA guidance. This document outlines the DNCG HE policy on the marking and grading of students' work, as a framework within which all assessors must work.

This policy relates to taught programmes, that is, undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. While this policy covers all forms of assessment, the main focus is on assessment types which involve grading the quality of the work relative to the standards set out in section 6.

5.2 Management of Assessments

Documentation related to assessment must be completed prior to commencement of teaching, using approved proformas and must align with the relevant module descriptor and programme specification. Please see appendix 1 for checklist.

All summative assessments (including exam papers and mark schemes) must be agreed with the relevant HEI, awarding body and the External Examiner, as appropriate (see university regulations for University of Hull, University of Huddersfield, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Lincoln, and Pearson). Agreed coursework assessments should normally be accessible to students on the first day of teaching. All assessment deadlines should be published in advance of teaching commencing, usually during induction.

The nature and submission dates of formative assessments should be published in the module/unit handbook with the summative assessment, ensuring all students are aware of this opportunity. Feedback must be documented to ensure there is no reference to a potential grade.

Documentation for summative assessments should clearly identify the learning outcomes that are required to be met and, where appropriate, the relative weighting of the assessment within the module.

Students must be made aware of how to submit work and any coversheet required.

Once delivery commences on a module it is not usually possible for deadlines to be moved without the prior approval of the Curriculum Leader. To ensure that the student experience and student skill development is not compromised, the Programme Leader must provide a rationale for moving the deadline, which will be considered by the Curriculum Leader.

Where required by the validating university or awarding body, the marking for written assessments should be conducted using anonymous marking.

All assessments will be marked either as pass/fail, fail/pass/merit/distinction and/or as a numerical value in the range 0 to 100.

Where a module is graded as pass/fail, "pass" indicates that the student has achieved the threshold for that assessment.

Where students fail to submit, assessments are late or exceed the published length or word counts; the appropriate HEI/Awarding Body regulations apply.

Markers are expected to appropriately apply the full range of marks and/or grades available to them (0-100; pass, merit, distinction) when marking and follow grade descriptors provided by their validating university partner or awarding body.

Where an assessment is marked in the 0 to 100 range, a pass mark of 40 (50 for Post Graduate Taught (PGT) programmes) indicates threshold achievement of those of the module's learning outcomes being assessed, measured against the assessment's criteria. Marks over 40 (50 for PGT) indicate the extent to which the threshold has been exceeded.

Students must adhere to all deadlines set by DNCG staff. Similarly, word counts or word guidance associated to any given assessment item must also be adhered to. Penalties for late submission or exceeding word counts or word guidance will be determined by validating universities or awarding body.

Students must adhere to all deadlines set out in the module handbooks and must submit their work via the appropriate VLE. If students have technical issues with Turnitin, they must email a copy of their work to QualityHE@dncolleges.ac.uk and copy in their module tutor. The student must then continue to try and upload their work via the VLE. The VLE submission will then be compared to the original submission to ensure no advantage has been gained.

Assessment feedback should usually be returned to students within 20 working days, unless the assessment is through the University of Lincoln, when feedback should usually be returned in 15 working days. Feedback is usually returned via the VLE, and all student feedback is released at the same time. Students submitting late, with extensions or mitigating circumstances will usually receive their feedback at a later date, but this should be made clear to them when the extension or mitigating circumstances is approved. If this deadline cannot be met for some reason, for example illness of the module tutor, students should be informed of the revised timeframe.

Where learning outcomes have not been achieved, the written feedback must provide a clear explanation and provide guidance on how they could meet them when submitting a resit.

Language used in feedback must align with the rubrics and the classification descriptors provided to the students. Written feedback must focus on strengths and areas for development and include appropriate feedforward guidance. Actions for future development should take into account:

- Presentation, style and structure
- General academic features such as study skills and referencing
- Level of criticality
- How effectively the assessment answered the question/task posed
- Whether it meets professional standards set by a professional body (where relevant)

5.3

Verifying Marks

Partner HEI regulations which define the number of scripts to be moderated must be followed, alternatively where this is not specified, the number for moderation is decided using the following principles:

- All fails, borderlines and firsts must be moderated.
- 10 scripts/ assessments or 10% of the whole group (whichever is the largest) must be moderated

- At the time of moderation, the second assessor should have access to the full list of results for the student group i.e., it is not sufficient for a first marker to merely give the second assessor a sample of work without the second assessor seeing the list of marks awarded for all students in the group.
- There must be documentation evidencing the moderation and it should demonstrate that there has been discussion between the first and second markers if there has been any disagreement. It is not appropriate to opt for a grade in the middle of the two unless there is a rationale to support.

Moderation activity should not usually result in the adjustment of grades for an individual student, or those sampled. If an adjustment is required it must apply to the entire cohort and the adjustment must be by a specific number, not a percentage of the grade given.

5.4 Assessment of Students with a Disability

Reasonable adjustments are made for learners with an identified special educational need and/or disability who require them. These are ratified by Student Support Teams.

Adjustments will be evidenced-based and informed by multi-agency student support assessments.

Students with a disability do not have an automatic right to extensions on their assessments. As within the policy, student should apply, in writing, demonstrating how their learning need/disability/difficulty impacts their normal way of working and what adjustments have been accessed in the past, including (where applicable) evidence of a formal diagnosis. Extensions can be given for a maximum of 10 working days only.

When marking assessments completed by students with a disability, marking must consider punctuation, spelling and grammar where it is part of the competence standards.

5.5 The Role of the External Examiner

External Examiners must be sent adequate samples of students' work. The samples will cover all modules under the External Examiner's remit and must reflect the requirements of the HEI or Awarding Body. Where this is not specified the sample must reflect:

- a representative range of work, sufficient to make a judgement. The sample sent must include evidence of second and double marking as appropriate. Representative samples may inevitably include work which has been single marked and samples for External Examiners are likely to vary from those extracted for initial double marking
- all summative assessment elements within each module
- all campuses where students have taken the module
- all cohorts where modules are taught on programmes with multiple intakes in a given academic year.

External Examiners can call for additional samples of student work to assist their deliberations. They are encouraged to have a dialogue with internal assessors to understand assessment strategy and marks/grades awarded. To assist this process, complete marks lists and copies of the documentation for all assessments should accompany the samples of work together with appropriate evidence associated with the moderation process.

External Examiners may present any comments they have on the work and marking they have sampled to the Board of Examiners, and in their annual report.

5.6 Qualification Level Descriptors

Qualification level descriptors, as defined by the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) set out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification (for example a bachelors' degree with honours). They describe the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an award. They are 'generic' because they describe the outcomes and attributes expected from any subject of study, rather than from any particular subject, and so are applicable across subjects and modes of study.

The qualification descriptors set out below describe the threshold academic standard for those qualification types in terms of the levels of knowledge and understanding and the types of abilities that holders of the relevant qualification are expected to have and should be considered when assessing a piece of student work.

5.7 **Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 4: Certificate of Higher Education/Higher National Certificate**

The descriptor provided for this level is for any Certificate of Higher Education, which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications aligned with Level 4.

Certificates of Higher Education are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with their area(s) of study, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these within the context of that area of study
- an ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative and quantitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts of their subject(s) of study.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems related to their area(s) of study and/or work
- communicate the results of their study/work accurately and reliably, and with structured and coherent arguments
- undertake further training and develop new skills within a structured and managed environment.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility.

Holders of a Certificate of Higher Education will have a sound knowledge of the basic concepts of a subject and will have learned how to take different approaches to solving problems. They will be able to communicate accurately and will have the qualities needed for employment requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility. The Certificate of Higher Education may be a first step towards obtaining higher level qualifications.

5.8 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 5: Foundation degree/Higher National Diploma

The descriptor provided for this level is for any foundation degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 5, including Diplomas of Higher Education and Higher National Diplomas.

Foundation degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed
- ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context
- knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study
- an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis
- effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively
- undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

The foundation degree is an example of a qualification that meets, in full, the expectations of the qualification descriptor.

Holders of qualifications at this level will have developed a sound understanding of the principles in their field of study and will have learned to apply those principles more widely. Through this, they will have learned to evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems. Their studies may well have had a vocational orientation, for example HNDs, enabling them to perform effectively in their chosen field. Holders of qualifications at this level will have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

5.9 Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 6: Bachelors' degree with honours

The descriptor provided for this level is for any bachelors' degree with honours which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 6, including bachelors' degrees, and graduate diplomas.

Bachelors' degrees with honours are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of key aspects of their field of study, including acquisition of coherent and detailed knowledge, at least some of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of defined aspects of a discipline
- an ability to deploy accurately established techniques of analysis and enquiry within a discipline

- conceptual understanding that enables the student: – to devise and sustain arguments, and/or to solve problems, using ideas and techniques, some of which are at the forefront of a discipline – to describe and comment upon particular aspects of current research, or equivalent advanced scholarship, in the discipline
- an appreciation of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge
- the ability to manage their own learning, and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (for example, refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline).

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- apply the methods and techniques that they have learned to review, consolidate, extend and apply their knowledge and understanding, and to initiate and carry out projects
- critically evaluate arguments, assumptions, abstract concepts and data (that may be incomplete), to make judgements, and to frame appropriate questions to achieve a solution – or identify a range of solutions – to a problem
- communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: – the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility – decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts – the learning ability needed to undertake appropriate further training of a professional or equivalent nature.

Holders of a bachelor's degree with honours will have developed an understanding of a complex body of knowledge, some of it at the current boundaries of an academic discipline. Through this, the holder will have developed analytical techniques and problem-solving skills that can be applied in many types of employment. The holder of such a qualification will be able to evaluate evidence, arguments and assumptions, to reach sound judgements and to communicate them effectively.

5.10 **Descriptor for a higher education qualification at Level 7: Masters' degree**

The descriptor provided for this level is for any masters' degree which should meet the descriptor in full. This qualification descriptor should also be used as a reference point for other qualifications at Level 7, including postgraduate certificates and postgraduate diplomas.

Masters' degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student: – to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline – to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses. 32. Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:
- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level

- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

And holders will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
 - the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
 - decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
 - the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Much of the study undertaken for masters' degrees is at, or informed by, the forefront of an academic or professional discipline. Successful students show originality in the application of knowledge, and they understand how the boundaries of knowledge are advanced through research. They are able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, and they show originality in tackling and solving problems. They have the qualities needed for employment in circumstances requiring sound judgement, personal responsibility and initiative in complex and unpredictable professional environments.

5.11 Student Support

DNCG's Academic Services consists of friendly and experienced staff who can provide guidance and support students' studies. The team provide a space where students can confidently ask questions, receive feedback, and help you unlock their full academic potential by facilitating workshops, drop-in sessions, and personalised advice to enhance your writing skills, study strategies, time management techniques, critical thinking skills, information literacy, and research skills. 1-1 appointments are available and can be booked at a time to suit students via the LRC Guide or via Help.Academicservices@dncolleges.ac.uk

6 Relevant Policies and Procedures

- 6.1 Please see assessment policy for University of Hull, University of Huddersfield, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Lincoln
- 6.2 OfS General Ongoing Conditions of Registration B1, B2, B4, B5 and B8.

7 Who to Contact with Queries

- 7.1 Dan Bown, Vice Principal Curriculum - Higher Education, dan.bown@dncolleges.ac.uk

8 Communication

- 8.1 The policy will be made available electronically and hard copies will be made available on request.

9 Authorisation

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| Policy Holder: | Vice Principal Curriculum – Higher Education |
| Union Approval & Date: | N/A |
| SLT Approval & Date: | 14 January 2026 |
| Governor Committee/ Board Approval: | N/A |
| Next Review Date: | January 2029 |

*Policies will be reviewed every 3 years unless there is a specific requirement to undertake a review more frequently. If for any reason a review does not take place in the planned period, the policy will remain current until a review takes place.

The Equality Impact has been considered on this policy and procedure.