

# Generic Assessment Criteria Policy

## Purpose

This document outlines the role and intended use of the University's generic assessment criteria. It is applicable to all courses, including those delivered via an Educational Partnership arrangement.

## 1. Introduction and principles

- 1.1 The generic assessment criteria are part of the cycle of learning, teaching and assessment. Learning outcomes are set out in unit specifications and identify the knowledge, skills and understanding that learners need to demonstrate over the course of the unit, as related to the relevant level on the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)<sup>1</sup> and Sector-Recognised Standards published by the Office for Students<sup>2</sup>. The design of content and learning and teaching activities ensures that these learning outcomes are not only addressed and can be met at a threshold level but that opportunities are provided to enable their achievement at a high standard. Assessment tasks measure the extent to which learners have achieved the learning outcomes, and assessment criteria assist markers in formulating their academic and professional judgment regarding the extent of learner attainment of those outcomes.
- 1.2 The University's generic assessment criteria are intended as a framework/guide, rather than specific restrictions designed to impose uniformity. They provide a frame of reference to:
  - give broad comparability of standards of study by level across all courses;
  - enable markers to translate their academic judgements into numerical marks, according to the approved Step Marking bands, and express them in consistent language;
  - enable markers to calibrate their judgements against those of other markers;
  - provide a framework for the provision of feedback and feed forward to indicate how learners can improve their performance (see the Assessment Feedback policy);
  - improve learner's understanding of what is required of them to gain a mark.
- 1.3 The generic assessment criteria have been aligned with the undergraduate and postgraduate qualification descriptors for levels 4-7 within FHEQ (2024) and, for Level 3, the SEEC Credit Level Descriptors for Higher Education<sup>3</sup> and the Sector recognised standards in England as defined by the Office for Students.
- 1.4 The generic assessment criteria describe key features and general characteristics of assessed work associated with each mark boundary, for each FHEQ level. The categories indicate what is typically expected of a learner in each boundary, at each FHEQ level. However, academic judgement is always required to determine how learners' work best fits within each category.
- 1.5 The inclusion of greater detail in the bands from 70% (or equivalent) and above is designed to support markers in using the full range of marks available to them, by ensuring there is clear justification for the award of higher marks, thus helping to avoid possible 'grade inflation'.
- 1.6 The generic assessment criteria may be found on the Staff Information Portal (SIP) [here](#).
- 1.7 Alternative assessment criteria may be used where these are required by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs); however wherever possible within the provisions of the relevant body the criteria used should align with the University's generic assessment criteria.

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<sup>1</sup> [Qualifications Frameworks, Feb 2024 \(qaa.ac.uk\)](https://www.qaa.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [Securing student success: Regulatory framework for higher education in England - Office for Students](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-higher-education-england)

<sup>3</sup> SEEC (2021) credit level descriptors for Higher Education available at <https://seec.org.uk/>

## 2. Using and customising the generic assessment criteria

- 2.1 The Head of School is responsible for determining in detail how this policy will be implemented within their School, consistent with the needs of each course; and for ensuring that all staff (particularly staff new to the institution and all new Unit Leaders) receive appropriate advice, guidance and training regarding its implementation.
- 2.2 The generic assessment criteria may be used as they are, where appropriate, but it is best practice for Unit Leaders to produce **specific assessment criteria** that are customised versions of the generic assessment criteria, made directly relevant to their specific disciplines/assessment types. **Where specific assessment criteria are used these must clearly link back to the generic assessment criteria and to the University's Step Marking bands.**
- 2.3 Good practice suggests that within a course where assessments are of the same type and at the same level, it would be beneficial, for clarity for both markers and learners, that the assessment criteria be the same, and Unit Leaders are therefore encouraged to collaborate in their production.
- 2.4 It is neither a requirement nor an expectation that all criteria will be used for all forms of assessment. Similarly, the emphasis given to various aspects of the criteria will vary depending on the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs), the nature of the assessment task and discipline, and should be decided by the Unit Leader in developing specific assessment criteria from the generic assessment criteria. For written work appropriate attention should be paid to the assessment of the use of written English language.
- 2.5 Specific assessment criteria must be precise enough to ensure consistency of marking across candidates and markers, compatible with a proper exercise of academic judgement on the part of individual markers.
- 2.6 Where the design of an assessment task means that it is not appropriate to use these criteria, for example competency-based tasks which are pass/fail, more specific criteria should be created and made available to markers and to learners. See also the [Setting and Scrutiny of Assessments Policy](#), available for staff on the SIP.
- 2.7 Where appropriate to the discipline and the form of assessment, unit leaders are strongly encouraged to develop marking grids based on the relevant assessment criteria, to assist with marking/moderation and to show how they have arrived at their decisions. The use of marking grids can also provide a way of feeding back to learners a more detailed profile of their performance, reducing the burden on markers by avoiding repetitious comments; thus facilitating more timely and effective feedback.
- 2.8 Where there is more than one marker for an assessment appropriate moderation should be undertaken. See the [Marking and Moderating Policy](#) on the SIP.
- 2.9 Those requiring further advice or assistance in developing specific assessment criteria or in creating marking grids should consult the relevant Course Leader in the first instance.

### Guidance for markers

- 2.10 Assessment criteria, even when specifically developed for a particular assessment type, are not designed to be used mechanically. For any assessment submitted by a learner a marker may find that the learner's performance is different for different criteria, and that several different descriptions for some criteria could reasonably be applied. No guidelines can cover every eventuality, and no grid system for combining these factors into a single mark is intended to replace sound academic judgement in the light of the learning outcomes for the unit, the nature of the task being assessed, and the details given to learners in the assessment brief and more broadly within the unit.
- 2.11 To identify a particular mark the key principle to apply is 'to what extent has the learner achieved the learning outcomes of the assessment?' The final judgement should be informed by the predominant character of the work. If, for the most part, the learner has met the identified outcomes, albeit at a threshold level, then they should pass the assessment.

## 3. Using assessment criteria with learners

- 3.1 Learners should be informed, and periodically reminded, of the generic assessment criteria, as these provide the overarching frame of reference for the institution's approach. The generic assessment criteria will be referenced from the VLE and in the University Student Handbook and Apprentice Handbook.
- 3.2 It is important that learners are clearly informed of the criteria against which their work will be marked (whether these are the generic assessment criteria or specific assessment criteria for the particular piece of work). Criteria must be provided alongside the assessment brief, and at the same time the brief is provided.
- 3.3 Assessment Feedback should normally be provided with reference to the relevant assessment criteria – for example by using a template that includes the relevant criteria. This enables learners to be informed about expectations and standards and to have a full understanding of assessment feedback. (See the [Assessment Feedback policy](#) on the SIP.)
- 3.4 Although the criteria are couched in terms of summative judgements they may also be used for formative assessment purposes. Learners gaining a mark in a particular band will be aware of the expectations of the band immediately above. This can aid formative assessment.

Version:	V2.2
Approved by	Academic Board
Originator/Author	Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance)
Owner	Head of Learning and Teaching
Reference source	Internally devised; benchmarking of arrangements at other HEIs, in particular University of Exeter, University of Suffolk, University of Winchester, Bournemouth University
Date approved	26 July 2024
Effective from	September 2024
Review date	2025/26
Target	All academic staff, all students and apprentices
Policy location	
Equality analysis	The assessment criteria apply to all students to demonstrate attainment of specific levels of relevant knowledge, understanding and/or competencies. Any reasonable adjustments required should be made to the form of assessment rather than to the assessment criteria applied. The exception is where it is appropriate to use the SpLD/Dyslexia marking guidelines: