

# UNIVERSITY COLLEGE ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on designing the assessment of courses for University College. Its purpose is not prescriptive but rather indicative of a number of considerations that are particularly pertinent to the pedagogic challenges in the design and delivery of assessment for the College. Excellent teaching and learning resources in each Faculty can help you meet these challenges and their staff welcome being involved in the design of your College course and its assessment.<sup>1</sup>

## CONTEXT

The University College arose from discussions arising from the 2007/08 Review of Undergraduate Education as a cross-University approach to the articulation and integration of the *Purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education (The Manchester Matrix)*. The College's remit is to contribute to the University's strategic vision of a broad-based curriculum allowing all undergraduate students to develop non-discipline specific skills. As such, designing and assessing courses delivered by the College provides a number of specific but rewarding challenges.

## COURSE DESIGN CHALLENGES

At the heart of the College lies a commitment to providing a space for students from all Faculties in the University to broaden their intellectual and cultural interests beyond the specificities of their degree programme, to enhance opportunities for their preparation for professional and vocational work, to offer opportunities for questioning and challenging their personal values and ethical judgements as well as to prepare them for citizenship and leadership in a global environment. These commitments and values of the purposes of a Manchester undergraduate education are expressed by the Manchester Matrix (Appendix B). As such, we expect that College courses will typically be designed at **level 2** and include elements of:

- Delivery of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of the Manchester Matrix
- Inter, cross or multi-disciplinarity
- Innovative teaching, learning and assessment
- Enriched delivery of employability and transferable skills

### *Assessment challenges*

We are familiar with designing assessments within our disciplines that cater for our cohort of students. Indeed, discipline conventions and values are often highlighted through our assessment criteria. For some disciplines there is little or no room for interpretation and students are trained to provide correct answers. In other disciplines, learning hinges on developing new insights into existing interpretations of phenomena. When designing a course for the College differences of disciplinary norms across Faculties present very real but fascinating pedagogic challenges.

In an interdisciplinary context then, the assessment of the degree to which students have achieved a course's intended learning outcomes, including the attainment of employability and transferable skills, requires some deliberation. In particular, further attention can be paid to students' ability to drawn connections across different disciplines, between different parts of the course and their ability

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<sup>1</sup> See section "Resources" for contacts in your Faculty.

to synthesise and analyze those connections. Indeed, it has been argued that “what sets an interdisciplinary program apart from other programs is often an emphasis on integration” (Field et al 1994).

Research in this area yields a number of varied assessment options which course designers might find useful to consider:

- the development of assessment that measures student development rather than a fixed body of information (Field, Lee & Lee Field 1994);
- mid-course testing (some self-assessed, some group assessed) as a way of tracking student progression through a portfolio (Field et al 1994);
- the use of group work and self and peer-evaluation as processes that are common in the workplace to develop transferable skills (Humphreys et al, 1997),
- assessment targeted at eliciting/characterising/informing students’ *interdisciplinary* understanding with 3 core dimensions a) work grounded in carefully selected and adequately employed disciplinary insights (showing critical awareness especially of integrating separate disciplines); b) disciplinary insights clearly integrated to advance student understanding in each subject addressed and c) work exhibits a clear sense of purpose and is well grounded (Mansilla et al, 2007);
- that it can potentially be unfair to expect mastery of a subject rather, students should demonstrate *synthesis* (Mansilla et al, 2007),
- ensuring that there is a common understanding and interpretation of language and assessment criteria across disciplinary norms
- consideration of offering students a form of assessment method they are familiar with in their ‘home’ discipline.

Further research by Mansilla et al (2009) has developed an evidence-based way of including judgments of student assessment around 4 categories of purposefulness, disciplinary grounding, integration and critical awareness. These are actualised in Appendix F (Interdisciplinary rubrics) and a helpful checklist of interdisciplinary assessment considerations included in Appendix D.

Due consideration of what precisely is being assessed, as well as how, should provide a well-designed assessment task that will typically be valid, reliable, consistent, transparent, diverse and manageable. This will ensure transparency, equivalence and equity across all College courses.

## **CHOOSING AND DESIGNING ASSESSMENT: THE MANCHESTER MATRIX & ILOs <sup>2</sup>**

Given that any assessment’s primary function is to determine the degree to which a student has succeeded in obtaining specific intended learning outcomes, it is vital that the ILOs which contribute to the delivery of the Manchester Matrix are clearly articulated and that assessments are chosen which are appropriate to assessing them. The Manchester Matrix and its ILOs are found in Appendix A. University guidance on writing ILOs is included as Appendix B and, an assessment “toolbox” is also attached as Appendix C. The “toolbox” is purely indicative (neither prescriptive nor exhaustive) of the multiple ways in which the ILOs of the Manchester Matrix and its interdisciplinary commitments might be assessed. We can take heart and inspiration from the wide range of forms of assessment approved across the University and use them to help us incorporate innovation and appropriateness into College course assessment. Each of the 34 forms of assessment have been mapped onto the

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<sup>2</sup> The College Assessment Sub-group would like to acknowledge the work and help of Rosemary Tomkinson (EPS), Grant Campbell (EPS), Emma Rose (Hum), Emma Sanders (Hum), Sue Knight (MHS) and Geoff Carter (MHS) in the compiling of the assessment toolbox.

specific aims and outcomes of the Manchester Matrix, an indication of numbers of students it can be suitable for is given, as well as some brief commentary. The assessment toolbox should prove to be a helpful resource and further information on how to design each can be obtained from the Faculty contacts listed below.

## **FEEDBACK**

The role feedback plays in promoting student learning, in identifying areas of high performance and where improvements can be made is well recognised. We all recognise the importance of timely feedback and work hard to ensure feedback is provided within the guidelines of the current policy (15 working days). The additional challenge for College courses is delivering feedback when students are taking units outside of their core discipline. The College aspires to challenge students with new ways of thinking and learning and it is important that the feedback they receive helps them to develop these new skills. *Formative* feedback should be provided early in the unit to enable students to check how well they are developing as learners and to highlight disciplinary cultural norms. You may discover a need to provide explicit feedback to students who are not familiar with this culture. Also, due care should be taken with the language that we use when providing feedback. Feedback should be detailed, allowing students to improve their work, and clear to enable the diverse cohort of students to interpret meaning.

## **MARKING, QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE UNIVERSITY'S ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK**

College courses are subject to the same standards of quality assurance and rigour as all other assessed courses across the University. They are also subject to the same standards of professionalism in marking, the checking of marks, the explaining of marks, and the scrutiny of marks (see Appendix E, "Policy on Marking" from the *Assessment Framework*).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the University requires that forms of assessment should satisfy the following three sets of principles.

### **Educational principles**

The processes of assessment should help students learn and/or reinforce previous learning.

- Assessment tasks should form an integral part of the curriculum and the teaching and learning process
- There should be an appropriate mix of formative and summative assessment throughout the programme, with summative assessments being used formatively, where possible
- Excessive and unnecessary assessment should be avoided (an intended learning outcome should not normally be assessed repeatedly)
- The timing and amount of assessment should be organised to facilitate deep learning (too many similar deadlines for submission may produce surface learning for tasks which singly would encourage deep learning)
- Feedback to students should be rapid, and should contain positive, encouraging comments where possible as well as pointers for future improvement
- All staff contact with students is a potential mechanism for feedback to and from students
- Peer assessment (assessment of student's work by other students) should be used, especially formatively, to provide rapid feedback and promote understanding of the assessment criteria and marking scales
- Innovation in online assessment, marking and submission of assessed work is encouraged.

### **Ethical principles**

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<sup>3</sup> The University's Assessment Framework can be accessed in full here:

<http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/map/teachinglearningassessment/assessment/assessmentframework>

The processes of assessment should be fair and transparent, and must not discriminate according to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, class or disability.

- Assessment tasks and marking criteria should focus on the intended learning outcomes for the programme or unit
- The assessment scheme should allow students to demonstrate their achievement of all the intended learning outcomes by the end of the programme
- Students should be informed in advance about the assessment tasks, marking scheme and marking criteria for their programme units
- Students should be helped to understand the requirements of assessment, e.g. through guidance, discussion with tutors, "model answers" or peer assessment
- Students should be made aware of the procedure to follow if they wish to query or appeal against an assessment decision
- The assessment process should not be biased according to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion or belief, age, class or disability
- Students and staff should evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment scheme (e.g. during periodic programme reviews)
- Where assessment takes place online, clear protocols and instructions should be given to the students in advance of the assessment taking place.

### **Regulatory principles**

The processes of assessment should conform to University expectations, as detailed in its regulations, policies, procedures and guidance.

- The assessment scheme should provide enough evidence of students' achievement to enable robust decisions to be made about their progression through the programme and the award of the intended academic qualification
- Assessment tasks should allow students to demonstrate achievement appropriate to the level of the intended award in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
- Assessment tasks should be managed across the programme, to achieve appropriate variety in assessment tasks, avoid unnecessary concentrations of assessment at particular times and reflect intellectual progression through the programme
- Assessment should be conducted in accordance with University regulations, policies, procedures and guidance, as set out in this Assessment Framework and elsewhere.

(Source: University of Manchester Teaching and Learning Support Office)<sup>4</sup>

## **RESOURCES & SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO YOU**

For general advice and guidance on eLearning and eAssessment please use your standard Faculty eLearning support. For more specialised advice please contact your Faculty eLearning Manager (contact details below).

### ***Faculty of Engineering and Physical Sciences Contacts***

Sarah Lister, Senior Project Officer, Academic Services, Tel: 0161 306 64594, Email: [Sarah.lister@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Sarah.lister@manchester.ac.uk)

Alison Hamilton, eLearning Manager, Tel: 0161 275 1608, Email: [Alison.hamilton@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Alison.hamilton@manchester.ac.uk)

### ***Faculty of Humanities Contacts***

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<sup>4</sup> [www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/map/teachinglearningassessment/assessment/sectiona-principles/](http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/map/teachinglearningassessment/assessment/sectiona-principles/)

Emma Rose, Senior QAE Administrator, Devonshire House, Teaching and Learning Office, Tel: 0161-275 0286, Email [Emma.Rose@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Emma.Rose@manchester.ac.uk) Web: [www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/)

Cath Dyson, E-learning manager, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Tel: 0161-275-7171, Email [Cath.Dyson@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Cath.Dyson@manchester.ac.uk), Web: [www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/team/](http://www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/tandl/elearning/team/)

### ***Faculty of Life Sciences Contacts***

Carol Rowlinson, Head of Education Services, Tel: 0161 275 3788, Email: [Carol.l.rowlinson@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Carol.l.rowlinson@manchester.ac.uk)

Ian Miller, eLearning Service Manager, Tel: 0161 275 5083, Email: [ian.miller@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:ian.miller@manchester.ac.uk)

### ***Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences***

Geoff Carter, Teaching and Learning Manager, Tel: 0161- 275-1431, Email [Geoff.Carter@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Geoff.Carter@manchester.ac.uk)  
Web: [www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/admingroups/teachingandlearning/](http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/intranet/admingroups/teachingandlearning/)

Diane Bennett, E-learning manager, Simon Building, Tel: 0161-306 0535, Email [Diane.Bennett@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:Diane.Bennett@manchester.ac.uk), Web: <http://www.mhs.manchester.ac.uk/staff/DianeBennett>

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS - APPENDICES**

1. Appendix A: Elaborating the purposes of a Manchester Undergraduate Education (The Manchester Matrix.
2. Appendix B: A Guide to Writing Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes
3. Appendix C: Toolbox - Forms of assessment and The Manchester Matrix
4. Appendix D: Checklist for Assessment of Interdisciplinary units
5. Appendix E: Policy on Marking
6. Appendix F: Interdisciplinary rubrics

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