

Faculty of Humanities - Attendance and Participation Marks Policy

1. Context

The University Disability Advisory Service has raised concerns about the use of marks for attendance and participation. The anticipatory reasonable adjustment duty in the Equality Act 2010 requires providers of services to continually identify any possible disability-related disadvantage, and to take reasonable steps to avoid or remove it – failure to do so constituting unlawful discrimination. So, although students with a learning support plan or with valid reasons for not attending or not participating might not be penalised, this individualised approach is not inclusive and anticipatory, as the University can reasonably be expected to know that disabled students requiring these adjustments will be in active study.

In addition, there are students who may not be able to attend for reasons other than disability related ones, such as caring responsibilities, and these students do not have access to a support plan but are also at risk of being unfairly penalised if they cannot attend and participate.

The University's Disability Advisory Services have requested some practices be discontinued and others reviewed. In response, the Faculty of Humanities requires adjustments to course unit assessment practices where marks are given for attendance or for participation.

These adjustments apply to all (including online, on-campus, validated) programmes and all forms of teaching (small group teaching/lectures etc) unless approval has been given for an exception (see section 4).

2. Marks for attendance

General expectations for attendance and expectations for attendance at specific sessions must be made clear to students in advance as outlined in the University's [Policy on Recording and Monitoring Attendance and Engagement](#), [Guidelines for monitoring student attendance and engagement](#) and [Regulation XX](#). Where attendance at specific sessions is compulsory because mandatory attendance is a robust [competence standard](#), then this should be made clear to students.

Students must not be awarded marks for attendance alone.

3. Participation

There are many benefits to classroom participation: it engages students, offers them feedback, helps clarify what they understand and what needs further explanation, it encourages active learning etc. Course units should be designed to encourage participation. However, awarding marks for ad-hoc contributions to teaching sessions (e.g. spontaneous oral contributions in seminars/lectures) is not inclusive for students who have a disability that prevents them from participating in such

discussions, who are less articulate, for whom English is a second language etc. Students must not be awarded marks for ad-hoc participation in teaching sessions.

Marks for participation can only be awarded on the following basis:

- There must be a record of the assessment that can be reviewed by a course unit moderator (for example, written participation in a discussion board, an oral presentation).
- Course unit directors must make the marking criteria available to students in advance.
- Clear, timely feedback should be made available to students
- Any mark for participation must be granular. Where the participation mark is a significant component of the final assessment, it should be marked using our normal [step-scale marking scheme](#). Where the participation mark is for a small component (less than 20%), then the mark awarded must at least reflect the mid-point of the step marking scheme (45%/55%/75% etc or equivalent).
- Reasonable Adjustments must be made for students with disabilities unless the specific form of participation is robust competence standard, and it is not possible to make an adjustment to the form of assessment.

4. Exceptions

There are expected to be very few exceptions to this policy. Any exceptions to these requirements (i.e. where a programme team want to award marks for attendance or for ad-hoc oral contributions) must be approved by the Vice Dean for Teaching, Learning and Students via the Students Service, Support and Development Manager ([Lisa Mcaleese](#)), on the dispensation proforma.

In presenting these cases, programme teams would have to demonstrate that marks were being awarded for elements that were robust competence standards of the programme. Exceptions might include languages where an ability to converse in a specific language is a competent standard of a programme, and it is the language ability that is being assessed rather than the frequency or style of the contribution. Oral contributions in English to seminars in languages would not be accepted as an exception to the policy.

Even in cases where exceptions are allowed, programme teams will be expected to make reasonable adjustments to the mode of assessment where this is possible.

5. Implementation

Course unit assessments that currently include marks for attendance and participation must be amended in light of the above for the 2023/24 academic year. Where programmes do not follow the standard academic year, changes must be implemented for the next new intake of students. All amendments must be reported to the Faculty (via your Faculty Teaching and Learning Officer - TLO); you should speak to your Faculty TLO in advance about the timing, reporting requirements etc.

Document control box

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