

CADQ Resource

Course Assessment Strategies

Suggestions for discussion and development

This guide may be useful to any colleagues writing or updating a Course Assessment Strategy (for example, for approval or course review).

Course Assessment Strategies: overview

The Course Assessment Strategy reflects the assessment decisions that have been made by the course team in order that the principles and purposes of assessment are addressed. (Quality Handbook, section 15: 4.2)

Three key parts of a course's contextual document contain information about assessment, which, combined, should give an overall picture of assessment on the course:

- a. The Curriculum Map
- b. The Course Assessment Strategy
- c. The Assessment and Feedback Plan (AFP)

The Course Assessment Strategy will probably make reference to information in the Curriculum Map, the AFP, and elsewhere in a course's contextual document. (To find out more about a Curriculum Map and an AFP, see Quality Handbook, section 15: 7.3 and section 15: 12.5-8, [supplement 5E](#) and [supplement 15D](#)).

The Course Assessment Strategy is a living document and should be kept up-to-date. Some points in it will reflect current practice; some may be aspirational and will indicate how the course team intends to shape plans in the year ahead.

Using this guide

The first part offers suggestions to frame thinking about assessment holistically across a course, and to consider how various aspects of assessment might be explained in a Course Assessment Strategy. It can be used to prompt discussion; however, it is not intended to be a definitive step-by-step guide to writing a Course Assessment Strategy – other approaches and structures are equally valid.

The second part contains sample excerpts from Course Assessment Strategies at NTU. Each has been chosen because it illustrates how the aspect of assessment under consideration is realised in relation to the specific course. (Please note: examples from SSS were selected as these were available at the time of writing.)

Tip: When writing your Course Assessment Strategy, it can be helpful to imagine you are explaining assessment on your course to a colleague from a different discipline.

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Part 1: Prompts to frame thinking about assessment across the course

Space for your notes is provided on the left.

<p>1. What is the team's rationale for the chosen tasks/types of summative assessment?</p>	<p>Elements that might affect the choice of assessment types:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• assessment methods intrinsic to the subject (example: a moot in Law subjects)• the learning outcomes to be assessed• PRSB (Professional Regulatory Statutory Bodies) requirements which shape your assessment design• particular teaching approaches (example: problem based learning)• NTU strategic aims https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/strategy/• particular task types that might be useful for students in their likely careers• cohort size• progression through levels of study
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<p>2. “The NTU model of assessment is holistic and integrative across the course, rather than piecemeal across modules” (Quality Handbook section 15).</p> <p>Explain how assessment on the course is holistic and integrative.</p>	<p>You could summarise and/or give an example of each of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment is planned from a course-wide perspective • Assessments from different modules connect transparently to one another • Opportunities for integrating assessments across modules are considered • Assessment builds from one level to the next to support progression • Assessment tasks are explicitly related to Learning Outcomes • There is a balance of summative and formative assessment • There is an appropriate range and choice of assessment types • High standards for assessment are communicated to students • Submission deadlines are planned at course level to prevent bunching <p>N.B. consider coherence, integration, balance and progression</p>
<p>3. Describe how formative tasks and feedback work on the course</p>	<p>Some guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of feedback-generating formative tasks are used on the course and why? • Who produces feedback (tutor, peer, self, etc.) on formative and summative work? • When and how frequently is feedback provided, including opportunities for feedback

	<p>prior to summative assessment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do formative tasks on modules support learning on the course as a whole, and how is this made transparent to students? • How are students supported to recognise and value feedback? • What strategies support students to apply feedback to improve work in progress/future work?
<p>4. How do you ensure that assessment on your course is valid, reliable and rigorous? Give examples (if not covered elsewhere in the contextual document).</p>	<p>See also Quality Handbook (section 15: 2)</p> <p>How do you ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessment enables students to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes (validity) • standards are maintained (validity) • different assessors marking the same assessment would reach the same judgement based on the criteria and marking scheme (reliability) • intended learning outcomes and criteria are made explicit to both students and markers (essential for reliability) • students are enabled to demonstrate learning at high levels (rigour)

<p>5. How do you ensure that assessment on your course is equitable and inclusive?</p>	<p>See also Quality Handbook (section 15: 2) and CADQ resource Assessment: Designing for inclusion</p> <p>How do you ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all students are given equivalent opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of intended learning outcomes (equitable assessment) • all students are provided with the support they need to enable them to demonstrate achievement regardless of difference or impairment (inclusivity) • students receive clear communication such that they understand how they should perform on assessment tasks to best demonstrate their abilities
<p>6. Outline your Marking and Moderation Procedures</p> <p>(Tip: the formal procedures will be laid out in your School's Assessment Strategy. Your Course Assessment strategy does not need to reproduce these, but should refer to them and highlight any course-specific practice which supports School policy)</p>	<p>Some guiding questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymity in marking: how do you identify and agree which of the assessed tasks will be marked anonymously? • How do you plan appropriate moderation and ensure clarity and explicitness of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the forms of moderation employed; ○ the marking arrangements; ○ the sample to be reviewed (size, range and threshold cases); ○ the nature of the sample to be referred to the external examiner(s).

<p>7. Additional considerations to include in the Course Assessment Strategy</p>	<p>If not included elsewhere in the document, briefly outline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How technology is/could be employed to enhance aspects of assessment, design of formative tasks, delivery of feedback, student engagement with feedback and so on.• How your chosen methods are manageable from a resourcing and staff workload perspective.• How assessment on your course is designed to reduce opportunities for plagiarism and collusion.
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Part 2: Example paragraphs from Course Assessment Strategy documents at NTU

These excerpts illustrate the kinds of thought processes and decision making which some course teams at NTU have undertaken when writing their course assessment strategies. Excerpts are not intended to provide suggested wording for course assessment strategies, nor could the practices they describe necessarily be integrated into your own courses (each practice is specific to the context of its course). For the purposes of this guide only, headings have been added to draw attention to certain aspects of assessment outlined in each excerpt.

Many thanks to colleagues who have provided the examples below.

Excerpt illustrating rationale for particular assessment types 1. (from Course Assessment Strategy BA Hons Sociology)

In Sociology levels 5 and 6 students have the opportunity to undertake both traditional assessments (e.g. essays, case studies) and non-traditional assessments (e.g. blog entries, book proposals, policy reviews, multimedia projects) to support both academic and professional practice.

[This range of assessment methods allows us] to develop the philosophy of our degree course, which is to offer rigorous sociological study in a real-world context. So, for example, students [...] write short pieces which demonstrate their understanding of a contemporary sociological issue, alongside their ability to write in a concise and professional manner relevant to graduate employment; and, students [...] undertake detailed project and dissertation work, informed by theoretical and methodological understanding, which will prepare them for postgraduate study.

Excerpt illustrating rationale for particular assessment types 2. (from Course Assessment Strategy MA Criminology)

The assessment tasks are challenging and are designed to enable students to demonstrate the full range of learning, skills and attributes and equip them with the skills they require to succeed after graduation in academic, policy oriented or practitioner service. Therefore, a range of assessment practices is employed across modules [...] Students are not only required to write essays but also to give oral presentations, defend their arguments and conclusions by way of interview, and to write employability relevant policy briefing documents and a written dissertation. The MA Criminology has no examinations.

Excerpt outlining holistic assessment strategy, and integration of feedback (from Course Assessment Strategy Single Hons Psychology)

The apparent imbalance of assessment between modules is consistent with the 'targeting of resources' principle of the psychology assessment strategy. Assessment load is determined in the first instance by learning and teaching considerations, rather than by credit weighting of modules. For this reason the course has an 'assessment and feedback heavy' strand of modules (comprising research methods and statistics at levels 4 and 5, and schools of thought/tutorials at level 4). These are the modules in which students practice the core skills of oral presentation and report and essay writing, with extensive and timely

feedback provided by tutors who supervise their work closely in tutorials and laboratory classes/workshops.

Excerpt explaining how assessment supports progression and ensures inclusivity (from Course Assessment Strategy Single Hons Psychology)

At level 6 there are fewer different assessment elements than at levels 4 and 5, because practice and scaffolding are less of a consideration at this stage in a student's journey through the course. At level 6 the assessment strategy principles of efficiency, variety and coherence come to the fore. There is a balance with regard to assessment type, and each student, irrespective of option choice, will experience the same profile of assessment tasks. This is important for many reasons, not least of which is that we know that presentations are graded systematically higher than coursework, which is graded systematically higher than examinations. Ensuring the same profile of assessment tasks for every student ensures that there is no systematic biasing of degree outcome, on the basis of final year option choice. The (capstone) research project is the most significant piece of 'coursework' that each student will undertake during the course of their studies.

Example elucidating rationale for assessment types, alignment with post-degree needs, and integration of feedback support (from Course Assessment Strategy BA Criminology)

The new assessment strategy releases the Criminology team from previously established incremental 'word length or equivalent' constraints. The new strategy will, for example, allow essays of varying lengths across the levels, recognising that writing articles to a short length can be more challenging and can develop different skills to those of the standard prescribed word lengths. The assessment tasks will be challenging, designed to enable the students to demonstrate the full range of learning, skills and attributes and equip the students with the skills they require to succeed in the work place or further study. As a guiding principle each 20 credit module will have at least one summative assessment supported by a number of formative tasks across the year. The assessment strategy will be closely aligned and supported by the student tutorial system. This will allow feedback from tutors who are more familiar with the student, consequently increasing the student's ability to incrementally develop and enhance their learning.

Example illustrating rationale for assessment types and consideration of inclusivity (from Course Assessment Strategy BA Hons Sociology)

Examinations [now take place only] in one core module in each year, and not in options [in order to ensure that all students] receive a similar experience. We feel that it is useful for students to learn how to deal with examinations – for instance because they may choose to progress to postgraduate courses which require exams to be passed (e.g. Law). All of our exams will be seen. 

Further support with integrated assessment

CADQ have been working in collaboration with course teams on integrating assessment across the course, and can offer support with the following:

- Working with course teams to help integrate assessments across modules
- Presenting to staff on aspects of integrated assessment
- Workshops on engaging students with formative assessment and feedback
- Resources and strategies for increasing clarification of standards and criteria
- Other bespoke sessions for your team
- Course Assessment Strategy writing workshops and support with drafts

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For discussion and support on inclusive learning, teaching and assessment, contact the Support for All Educational Develop assigned to your School:

https://www4.ntu.ac.uk/adq/cadq_services_and_staff/contact_us/index.html

Related resources

- Quality Handbook section 15: Assessment Principles and Policies
http://www.ntu.ac.uk/adq/quality_handbook/handbook_sections/index.html
- CADQ resources on topics including creating effective assessment, formative feedback, marking and moderation
http://ntu.ac.uk/adq/assessment_awards/index.html
- CADQ resource Assessment: Designing for inclusion.
www.ntu.ac.uk/adq/assessment_awards/creating_effective_assessment_feedback/index.html. A list of suggested alternative assessment types is also available on request.
- Teaching and Supporting Learning in HE. Find in NOW under 'Staff' role or go direct to <https://now.ntu.ac.uk/d2i/home/188839>