Hibernia College Quality Framework

Policy for Assessment, Grading and Certification

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

This policy sets out the College's approach to assessing students and the principles for assessing and grading student effort.

It also sets out the context for assessment in Hibernia College and for the maintenance of academic standards.

Lastly, it sets out policy for the certification of learning in Hibernia College.

1.2 Scope

a. *To whom does the policy apply?*

   i. This policy applies to all learners on Hibernia College programmes, including those leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) validated by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

   ii. This policy also applies to all staff, faculty and adjunct faculty with a role in assessing students on programmes where effort is formally assessed.

b. *Who is responsible for implementing the policy?*

   i. The Academic Board, as the ultimate academic decision-making body in the College, is responsible for approving this policy and delegating specific assessment responsibilities to the Boards of Examiners.

   ii. Directors of Programmes, with the help and collaboration of the Registrar, are responsible for ensuring that this policy is carried out in respect of academic programmes.

   iii. The maintenance of award standards, and any associated academic standards, is firstly the responsibility of the faculty member(s) assessing students.

   iv. The Registrar, as the person with overall responsibility for the implementation of the HCQF and academic administration, is responsible for ensuring that assessment is conducted in line with the approved policies and procedures.

1.3 Definitions

Assessment is a complex concept which includes many different types of activity and can have a number of purposes. It is regulated by a significant body of Higher Education policy and sectoral convention.

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Hibernia College adopts the interpretations set out in the QQI policy document *Assessment and Standards*[1] as applicable to assessment in the College.

a. *Assessment*

The assessment of a student's learning means inference (for example judgement or estimation or evaluation) of a student's knowledge, skill or competence by comparison with a standard and based on appropriate evidence. This includes self-assessment.

b. *Award Standards*

An award standard is a threshold award standard as constructed by the 2012 Act. '*They describe standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by a learner before an award may be made.*'[2]

c. *Professional Standards*

Some programmes may also lead to a 'professional standard' which can be defined as an '*ethical or legal duty of a professional to exercise [a] level of care, [competence], diligence, and skill prescribed in the code of practice of his or her profession, or as other professionals in the same discipline would in the same or similar circumstances*'[3].

2   Context

2.1   Legal or Regulatory Context

a. *Sectoral conventions — Assessment and Standards*

i.   Hibernia College, as a provider of programmes leading to QQI awards, adopts and is bound by the sectoral conventions for assessment, grading, certification and the maintenance of academic standards set out in *Assessment and Standards.*

ii. These sectoral conventions specify many of the rules for assessment of learners on programmes leading to awards in the National Framework of Qualifications, as well as for the maintenance of standards.

iii. In the unlikely event of an unintentional conflict between information provided by Hibernia College and *Assessment and Standards*, the sectoral convention prevails.

b. *QA guidelines*

This policy is designed with regard to the European Standards and Guidelines[4], QQI's Core Statutory QA Guidelines[5] and Sector Specific QA Guidelines for Independent/Private Providers[6] and the Topic specific QA Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes[7], all of which set

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[1] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016), *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines*, Section 5. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

[2] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2014), *Policy for Determining Awards Standards*, Section 3.1.c. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Policy%20for%20Determining%20Award%20Standards.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

[3] www.Businessdirectory.com

[4] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2013), *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, Section 4. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

[5] European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) et al., (2015), *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*, 2nd edn, p. 32, Sections 1.3, 1.4). Available at: http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf [Accessed: 28/08/2018].

[6] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016), *Core Statutory Quality Assurance (QA) Guidelines*, Section 6. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Core%20Statutory%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

[7] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016), *Topic Specific: Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended Learning Programmes*. Available at:

out expectations that providers will have suitable policy and procedure in place to support assessment, grading and certification.

c. *Policies for certification and validation*

As the policy applies to the grading and certification of assessment on QQI-validated programmes, it is also designed with regard to QQI policy and criteria for making awards[8] and validation[9].

2.2   Other Accreditation Contexts

a. *Competent authorities*

Where there are regulations or rules for assessment specified by a competent authority for a programme leading to registration as a member of a profession, these regulations will be specified in the relevant programme document and complied with in respect of that programme.

b. *Joint awards*

Where a programme is designed to lead to a joint award of QQI and another awarding body, the specific assessment and awarding requirements will be established in a formal legal agreement.

c. *Other awarding bodies*

Where a programme is designed to lead to an award of an awarding body other than QQI, the principles and concepts of QQI's *Assessment and Standards* are used to inform the quality assurance context for that programme's assessment.

d. *Short courses*

Programmes designed to be of less than three months' duration or five ECTS may in some circumstances not be designed to lead to an award of any awarding body. Nevertheless, the principles and concepts of QQI's *Assessment and Standards* are used to inform the quality assurance context for that programmes assessment, and any ensuing certification is clear that no award is being made.

2.3   Other Hibernia College Policies and Procedures

It is important that this policy be read alongside other supporting policies, procedures and documents depending on the context of the relevant programme and piece of student effort being assessed. Specifically, this policy is supported by:

a. *Programme Documents*

Programme and module-specific assessment rules and strategies are set out in the relevant programme documents.

b. *Supporting Policies*

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https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Statutory%20QA%20Guidelines%20for%20Blended%20Learning%20Programmes.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

[8] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2016), *Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines*, Section 6. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Sector%20Specific%20Quality%20Assurance%20Guidelines%20V2.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

[9] Quality and Qualifications Ireland (2014), *Policy and Criteria for Making Awards*. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Downloads/Policy%20and%20Criteria%20for%20Making%20Awards.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

The Hibernia College Quality Framework also consists of a range of other policies and procedures and resources linked to assessment and student progression. These:

i. Support faculty and adjunct faculty in the development of programmes and their associated assessment instruments and assist in the maintenance of award standards and the principles underpinning assessment
ii. Support students in their undertaking of assessment on their programme and their journey through their programme

3 Policy Statements

3.1 Principles for Assessment

Assessment of student effort is underpinned by the following principles:

a. Fairness

i.   Students have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes.
ii. Assessment tasks reflect the type and level of the learning outcome(s) being assessed. This means that students are not assessed on knowledge, skill or competence they have not had an opportunity to acquire.
iii. Students normally have four fair attempts to complete any module. A fair attempt is one in which no factor beyond the student's immediate control prevents them from demonstrating their knowledge, skill and/or competence in the assessment tasks for the module, unless this is prohibited by the relevant programme document.
iv. Students may expect assessment to be administered in line with this policy.

b. Consistency

i. Assessment outcomes are comparable from student to student, cohort to cohort and programme to programme. This does not mean assessment is done in the same way but that assessments are equally fair and outcomes are broadly comparable.
ii. Student effort is always judged based on the achievement of learning outcomes and no other criteria.

c. Reliability

i.   Assessments are a genuine evaluation of achievement of learning outcomes incorporating an academic judgement.
ii. Students are assessed by competent faculty. Assessment outcomes are internally verified and externally reviewed.
iii. Assessment procedure and administrative processes are reviewed regularly to ensure these regulations are applied and that administrative processes remain sound.
iv. A variety of appropriate assessment techniques and methodologies are used across programmes and cohorts.
v.   Assessment strategies, types and methodologies are regularly reviewed and improved.

d. Validity

i. The outcomes of assessment decisions are a valid means to enable student progression, certification and, where relevant, professional registration.

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    ii.   Assessment outcomes are accompanied by qualitative feedback[10] on the student's effort which correlates with the marks awarded.

    iii.   Assessment supports effective teaching and learning.

    iv.   Assessment tasks are authentic and resemble the kinds of professional tasks that arise in the relevant community of practice.

e. *Student responsibilities*

Students are responsible for:

i.   Demonstrating their achievement of the learning outcomes

ii.   Familiarising themselves with these regulations (and associated procedures) and any other policies and procedures that apply to their programmes

iii.   Complying with all rules and regulations relating to the assessment of their efforts

iv.   Undertaking assessment in a fair and honest manner

v.   Engaging authentically with all feedback, taking cognisance of the feedback provided

f. *Transparency*

Students are informed in advance of:

i.   Learning outcomes

ii.   Assessment schedule and strategy

iii.   Deadlines

iv.   Marking criteria

v.   Decision-making and appeals processes

This means that students are aware of why, how and when they will be assessed.

g. *Feedback for Students*

Students are entitled to receive qualitative feedback on their assessment effort.

i.   Feedback types include:
- Formative feedback — this is provided throughout the programme on student performance. This type of feedback is an aid to learning and designed to support student development.
- Informal — this is the normal kind of day-to-day student/teacher interaction that can help a student through the programme.
- Formal feedback accompanying summative assessment outcomes — this is the feedback that is formally given alongside grades. This policy and procedure primarily relates to this kind of feedback.

ii.   Feedback should be:
- Timely — feedback accompanies the grade received and is received in sufficient time.
- Individualised — feedback is specific to the student and the work being assessed.
- Regular — qualitative feedback (in some form) accompanies all grades awarded, with the exception of the final grade approved by the Board of Examiners.
- Related to the work presented. The language used should be consistent with the descriptors associated with the grade awarded.
- An aid to learning — feedback supports the teaching, learning and assessment process. Feedback provides, for instance, guidance on areas for improvement.

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[10] Quality and Qualifications Ireland, *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, Section 5. Available at:
https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

3.2 Principles for the Grading of and Certification of Student Work

QQI's sectoral conventions on the grading and certification of student work apply in full to all programmes. Conventions on grading bands, attainment of learning outcomes, and award classifications are established in *Assessment and Standards*[11].

a. *Grading conventions*

    i. Grading of work shall always be criterion-based and not norm-based.

    ii. Programmes and modules can be graded using either 'Pass/Fail', or a percentage grading system.

    iii. Programme and module grades are provisional until agreed at a formal meeting of the Board of Examiners.

    iv. Where an exemption is granted for graded work, the Board of Examiners may choose whether to allow the grade to contribute to the overall classification or not.

    v. The College avoids issuing borderline grades (e.g. 39%) where possible. Instead, a clear decision is made about the grade band into which the student's effort falls.

    vi. Matters relating to individual students and examiners during the assessment procedure must be treated as strictly confidential by all assessors.

b. *Grades*

    i. Grades indicate the extent to which a student has met or exceeded the minimum intended learning outcomes for the relevant assessment.

    ii. A grade of 40% indicates that the student's effort meets the minimum intended learning outcomes for the relevant assessment.

    iii. A grade of greater than 40% indicates that the student's effort exceeds the minimum intended learning outcomes. Higher grades indicate and differentiate the extent to which they have been exceeded.

    iv. A grade of less than 40% indicates that the minimum intended learning outcomes were not met.

    v. A marginal fail of 35-39% indicates that the student's effort either almost meets the minimum intended learning outcomes or that some but not all of the learning outcomes were met. Students with a marginal fail grade for a module may be eligible to pass by compensation.

    vi. An outright fail of less than 35% indicates that the minimum intended learning outcomes have not been met to any acceptable extent.

    vii. As specified in *Assessment and Standards*, an "honours classification, or any classification higher than 'Pass', shall be made based on first attempt grades".

c. *Pass by compensation*

    i. Pass by compensation means that a student who has achieved a *marginal fail (35-39%)* can, at the discretion of the Board of Examiners, pass the module by compensation.

    ii. Compensation can only be applied to a full set of marks approved by the Board of Examiners.

    iii. Compensation can only be applied to modules where programme rules allow it.

    iv. Compensation can only be applied to first attempts at assessments. It cannot be applied to results of repeat assessments.

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[11] Quality and Qualifications Ireland, *Assessment and Standards, Revised 2013*, Section 3. Available at: https://www.qqi.ie/Publications/Publications/Assessment_and_Standards%20Revised%202013.pdf [Accessed 28/08/2018].

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v. Students must pass overall at the assessment stage in order to pass by compensation in specific modules; that is, their average mark must be 40% or higher.

vi. Students can only compensate for a certain number of modules. This is to ensure that, where a student fails a string of modules in the same stage, the results are reinforced. To allow for pass by compensation in such instances, the following criteria applies:

- The aggregate of excesses of percentage marks over 40% must be greater than or equal to twice the aggregate of deficits under 40%.
- The total of potentially compensable results account for no more than one-third of the total credit for the stage; that is, 20 credits in a 60 credit stage, or 10 credits in a 30 credit stage.

d. Moderation

i. As indicated to obtain reliable results, assessment outcomes are internally verified and externally reviewed. Moderation is a form of internal verification.

ii. Moderation is where a second examiner who has access to the grades and comments of the first marker will consider a sample of assessments to assure that the appropriate mark has been awarded, thus ensuring the quality and reliability of marking standards. Variation in grading between the first examiner and second examiner, i.e. the grade moderator, is discussed between the two in order to reach agreement.

iii. The moderated sample will include work from all grade bands, all borderline grades and all fails.

iv. At a minimum, a sample of all grades awarded at each band of award are subject to internal moderation.

v. All fail grades are subject to internal moderation.

e. External examining

i. The external examining process is a quality assurance mechanism that supports the maintenance of academic standards, including the fair and consistent assessment of students.

ii. External examiners act as independent and impartial advisers providing the College with informed feedback on the standards set and student attainment in relation to those standards, i.e. intended learning outcomes and actual student attainment.

iii. An external examiner's functions can be discharged by an individual or by a team of external examiners.

iv. External examiners are often drawn from the Higher Education community. They can be drawn from other communities of practice provided they have the necessary competencies.

v. For each stage of each cohort, a sample of all assessment instruments are considered by an external examiner to ensure they are comparable with assessment instruments in other Higher Education Institutions and appropriate for the intended learning outcomes.

vi. At a minimum, a sample of grades awarded at each band, including fails and borderline grades, are subject to consideration by external examiner.

f. Certification

i. Students are entitled to certification for completed programmes.

ii. Students who do not complete programmes on which they have been registered are entitled to accurate transcripts indicating their learning attainments.

iii. Certification of programmes leading to NFQ awards is conducted by QQI.

iv. Certification of programmes not leading to awards is undertaken with care to ensure that learners are clear about the nature of the programme and its certification status.

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4   Document Control

Document Title	Policy for Assessment, Grading and Certification	
Author	Registrar	
Version Control	Version	Adoption Date
	V.1.0	20/06/2018
	V.1.1	29/11/2018
Expected Review Date	December 2018	
Related Policies	Policy for Extenuating Circumstances Policy for Reasonable Accommodation Policy for Academic Good Practice Policy for Appeals Policy for Development and Approval of Programmes for a Blended or Online Learning Environment Policy for On-going Monitoring of Online or Blended Learning Programmes Policy for Periodic Review of Academic Programmes	
Related Procedures	Procedure for Appealing a College Decision Procedure for Discussion of Examination Scripts (or Equivalent) with Assessors Procedure for External Examining Procedure for Applying for Mitigation of Extenuating Circumstances Procedure to Apply for Reasonable Accommodation Procedure for Grading Student Effort Procedure for Grade Moderation	
Related Resources	Hibernia College Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy	