Assessment, Grading and Certification Policy

Section 1 - INTRODUCTION

Purpose

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

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

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

Scope

To whom does the policy apply?

(4) 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).

(5) This policy also applies to all Staff, Faculty and Adjunct Faculty with a role in assessing students on programmes where effort is formally assessed.

Who is responsible for implementing the Policy?

(6) 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 Board of Examiners.

(7) The Programme Directors, with the help and collaboration of the Registrar, are responsible for ensuring that this policy is carried out in respect of academic programmes.

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

(9) The Registrar, as the person with overall responsibility for the implementation of the Hibernia College Quality Framework and academic administration, is responsible for ensuring that assessment is conducted in line with the approved policies and procedures.

Definitions

(10) Assessment is a complex concept which includes many different types of activity and can have a number of purposes. A primary purpose of assessment is to enable a judgement to be made as to whether the learner has reached the required standards, knowledge, skills and competencies level for the award and has met the specified learning outcomes for that programme of study. It is regulated by a significant body of Higher Education policy and sectoral convention. Hibernia College adopts the interpretations set out in the QQI policy document [Assessment and Standards](#) (2022) as applicable to assessment in the College.

(11) Award Standards – An award standard is a threshold award standard as constructed by the 2012 Act. 'They

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describe standards of knowledge, skill or competence to be acquired, and where appropriate, demonstrated, by a learner before an award may be made.' (Quality and Qualifications Ireland, 2014)

(12) 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'.

Section 2 - CONTEXT

Legal or Regulatory Context

Sectoral Conventions — Assessment and Standards

(13) 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.

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

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

QA Guidelines

(16) This policy is designed with regard to the European Standards and Guidelines, QQI's Core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and Sector Specific Independent/Private Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines and the Topic Specific Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Blended and Fully Online Programmes, all of which set out expectations that providers will have suitable policy and procedure in place to support assessment, grading and certification.

Policies for Certification and Validation

(17) As the policy applies to the grading and certification of assessment on QQI-validated programmes, it is also designed with regard to QQI's Policy and Criteria for Making Awards and Policies and criteria for the validation of programmes of education and training.

Other Accreditation Contexts

Competent Authorities

(18) 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 relevant programme documentation and complied with in respect of that programme.

Joint Awards

(19) 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.

Other Awarding Bodies

(20) Where a programme is designed to lead to an award of an awarding body other than QQI, the principles and

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concepts of QQI's [Assessment and Standards](#) (2022) are used to inform the quality assurance context for that programme's assessment.

Short Courses

(21) 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](#) (2022) are used to inform the quality assurance context for that programme's assessment, and any ensuing certification is clear that no award is being made.

Other Hibernia College Policies and Procedures

(22) 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:

Programme documents

(23) Programme and module-specific assessment rules and strategies are set out in the relevant programme documentation which is brought to Academic Board for approval.

Supporting policies

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

a. 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
b. Support students in their undertaking of assessment on their programme and their journey through their programme

Section 3 - Policy STATEMENTS

Part A - Principles for Assessment

(25) Assessment of student effort is underpinned by the following principles:

Fairness

a. Students have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes.
b. 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.
c. The number of fair attempts a student has for a module is clearly outlined in programme documentation. 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.
d. Students may expect assessment to be administered in line with this policy.

Consistency

a. 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

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outcomes are broadly comparable.

b. Student effort is always judged based on the achievement of learning outcomes and no other criteria.

Reliability

a. Assessments are a genuine evaluation of achievement of learning outcomes incorporating an academic judgement.

b. Students are assessed by competent Faculty. Assessment outcomes are internally verified and externally reviewed.

c. Assessment procedure and administrative processes are reviewed regularly to ensure these regulations are applied and that administrative processes remain sound.

d. A variety of appropriate assessment techniques and methodologies are used across programmes and cohorts.

e. Assessment strategies, types and methodologies are regularly reviewed and improved.

Validity

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

b. Assessment outcomes are accompanied by [qualitative feedback](#) on the student's effort which correlates with the marks awarded.

c. Assessment supports effective teaching and learning.

d. Assessment tasks are authentic and resemble the kinds of professional tasks that arise in the relevant community of practice as and when appropriate.

Student Responsibilities.

(26) Students are responsible for:

a. Demonstrating their achievement of the learning outcomes

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

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

d. Undertaking assessment in a fair and honest manner and in line with best academic integrity practices. Academic misconduct is discouraged through appropriate instruction, positive example and the use of clearly communicated deterrents and sanctions

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

Transparency

(27) Students are informed in advance of:

a. Learning outcomes

b. Assessment schedule and strategy

c. Due Dates

d. Marking criteria and any rubrics used

e. Assessment specific requirements or conventions

f. Decision-making and appeals processes

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

Feedback for Students

(29) Students are entitled to receive [qualitative feedback](#) on their assessment effort.

(30) Feedback types include:

a. Informal — This is the normal kind of day-to-day student/teacher interaction that can help a student engage in best practice through the programme.
b. Formal feedback accompanying summative assessment outcomes — This is the feedback that is formally given alongside grades. This policy and procedure primarily relates to this type of feedback.

(31) Feedback should be:

a. Timely — feedback accompanies the grade received and is received in sufficient time to enable the student to take account of the feedback as part of their learning.
b. Individualised — Feedback is specific to the student and the work being assessed.
c. Regular — [Qualitative feedback](#) (in some form) accompanies all grades awarded, with the exception of the final grade approved by the Board of Examiners.
d. Related to the work presented — The language used should be consistent with the descriptors associated with the grade awarded.
e. An aid to learning — Feedback supports the teaching, learning and assessment process. Feedback provides, for instance, guidance on areas for improvement and is cognisant of cultural diversity and sensitivities.
f. Plain English: The feedback should be communicated clearly and with the purpose of being understood by the student

Part B - Principles for the Grading of and Certification of Student Work

(32) 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](#).

Grading Conventions

(33) Grading of work shall always be criterion-based and not norm-based.

(34) Programmes and modules can be graded using either 'Pass/Fail' or a percentage grading system.

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

(36) 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.

(37) The College avoids issuing borderline grades (e.g. 39%) where possible. Instead, a clear decision is made, using established procedures agreed and reviewed by Academic Leadership about the grade band into which the student's effort falls. A pre-Board of Examiners meeting is held at programme level to provide an opportunity to review any borderline grades in a transparent manner.

(38) Matters relating to individual students and Examiners during the assessment procedure must be treated as strictly confidential by all Assessors.

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Grades

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

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

(41) 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.

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

(43) 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, subject to programme specific rules.

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

(45) Sectoral Convention 3 in relation to grade capping for repeat assessment of modules has been modified. This means that from April 2022, the cap will apply to the module grade only and not to the award classification.

Capping of Repeat Grade

(46) The overall award classification will be based on the weighted average of final modules results, including modules that have been capped following a repeat of an assessment. As per the revised Assessment and Standards (2022) and subsequent ratification by Academic Board, Sectoral Convention 3 in relation to grade capping for repeat assessment of modules has been modified and the cap subsequently applies to the module grade and not to the award classification.

Pass by Compensation

(47) 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.

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

(49) Compensation can only be applied to modules where programme rules allow it.

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

(51) 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.

(52) 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:

   a. The aggregate of excesses of percentage marks over 40% must be greater than or equal to twice the aggregate of deficits under 40%.
   b. 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.

Moderation

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

(54) Moderation is a process to ensure consistency of standards and fairness across assessments within a programme. It concerns providing fair assessment (quality assurance) and adjusting outcomes of an assessment where necessary to ensure fairness of marking (quality control).

(55) Moderation is undertaken by an academic nominated by the Programme Director and at programme level. It is not regarded as double marking as the moderator acts as a review of standards and consistency specific to assessment criteria.

(56) The moderated sample will include work from all grade bands, all borderline grades and all provisional fails plus any script for which the original marker or Programme Director has identified concerns.

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

(58) Where more than one Assessor is responsible for grading, a sample from all Assessors will be included in the moderation sample. Sampling should concentrate on boundaries of classification and should normally be 10% to 15% of assessed work.

External Examining

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

(60) 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.

(61) An External Examiner's functions can be discharged by an individual or by a team of External Examiners.

(62) 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.

(63) 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.

(64) At a minimum, a sample of grades awarded at each band, including fails and borderline grades, are subject to consideration by an External Examiner.

Certification

(65) Students are entitled to certification for completed programmes.

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

(67) Certification of programmes leading to National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) awards is conducted by QQI. Where relevant and where students are engaged in fully online programmes, the College will ensure that any information related to recognition or equivalency is provided in advance of enrolment.

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(68) 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 recognition, equivalence and certification status.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	5th March 2025
Review Date	5th March 2028
Approval Authority	Quality Assurance Officer
Approval Date	5th March 2025
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Enquiries Contact	Quality Assurance

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"Appeal" - An appeal is where a learner formally requests that the decision or judgement of a lower authority is referred to a higher authority (i.e., the Appeals Committee) for the reconsideration of the decision or judgement in the light of concerns expressed by the appellant under one or more of the three grounds of appeal.

"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.

"Policy" - Policies are principled statements adopted by the College at a high level to enable decisions about actions and desired outcomes to which the College is committed. They clearly articulate the formal position of the College on specific issues in order to guide internal decision-making. Policies set out 'what to do' on a given issue. They have a medium- to long-term review cycle.

"Procedure" - Procedures are the broad actions that must be carried out to implement a policy. They set out 'how to do' what the policy specifies must be done.

"Programme" - A programme of education and training refers to any process by which learners may acquire knowledge, skill or competence. It includes courses of study or instruction, apprenticeships, training and employment. A programme offers learners the learning opportunities by which they may attain educational goals (expressed as the intended programme learning outcome) by learning activities in a learning environment. A programme is normally comprised of modules. A programme leading to a major award will normally require a 'cohesion generating' process which integrates constituent modules so that the minimum intended programme learning outcomes are supported. The cohesion generating process should establish the epistemological and cultural identity of the programme. It should also coordinate alignment of activities with the minimum intended programme learning outcomes and introduce learners to the broader community of practice to which they aspire. (QQI (2013) Assessment and Standards Revised)

"Award" - The overall achievement/qualification that a student receives on completion of a programme

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