

# Glossary of Terms

## **Alternative assessment**

Alternative assessments test the same learning outcomes as the original assessment but may use a different assessment method, e.g. online assessment or take-home exam compared with an invigilated exam. They may be used for a whole course when the original assessment was disrupted or for individual students where special circumstances apply.

## **Anonymous marking**

Students' identities are not revealed to markers or to the Board of Examiners until near the end of the assessment process when anonymity ends and a check is made. The term does not mean that students do not know who marks their work.

## **Assessment**

Assessment is the set of processes which measure the outcomes of students' learning in terms of knowledge acquired, understanding developed and skills gained. These processes of measurement are necessarily diverse, in order to measure different aspects of learning in an appropriate manner, e.g. by examination in an exam hall, online, take-home, and with different specifications, e.g. open or closed book, specified time-frame, and by course-work, which include essays, tutorial participation, oral presentations etc. Assessment includes attendance and satisfactory completion, (where both result in a 'pass') as well as other diagnostic, formative and summative methods.

## **Blind marking**

Blind marking takes place when work is independently assessed by more than one marker and neither marker knows the other's comments or judgements when reaching their own marks, grades and judgments on the student's work.

## **Board of Examiners**

A Board of Examiners is a body with membership approved by the relevant College whose role is to take an overview of each student's academic performance on a relevant course or programme based primarily on assessment results, and to make a final academic judgement on the appropriate outcome, e.g. on progression or the award of degree, diploma or certificate.

## **Board of Studies**

A Board of Studies, and its equivalents, is the forum in Schools in which there is scrutiny of curriculum development proposals and where local decisions about courses, programmes and academic policy are made.

## **Capped marks**

Capped marks are those where a student cannot gain a mark on resit above a particular level, e.g. 40%. The University does not use capped marks. Generally for progression, classification and postgraduate distinction decisions the first attempt mark will be used even if a resit mark is available. An exception to this is when the first attempt is a null sit.

## **Checking**

Checking of marks is done at various stages to ensure that no errors have been made and in moderating the marks of different markers. Where spreadsheets are used in the processing of assessments, checks should be designed into the spreadsheet.

## **Compulsory**

Compulsory courses are those which a student must take as part of their degree programme, as specified in the Degree Programme Table in the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study [www.drps.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/)

## Course

A course is a unit of teaching and learning formally offered within the university which carries credit which may contribute to a university award (certificate, diploma or degree). A course will have: a course code (recorded on the University's Student Record system), one or more units of assessment, a specified credit value, a specified credit level, a named Course Organiser, and an identified host department/school/teaching organisation.

## Course Organiser

The Course Organiser's remit varies according to local School organisation, but in outline the Course Organiser is responsible for:

- general course management
- assessment-related activities
- advising and supporting students on course-related matters
- monitoring and reviewing courses
- [Outline of Course Organiser role \(PDF\)](#)

## Credits awarded on aggregate

Credit can be awarded for a limited number of failed courses where a student has met specific conditions. An example of this is when all the marks for the taught components of the relevant year of the programme (120 credits) are available, if the student has achieved pass marks (40%) in at least 80 credits and has an overall average of 40% or more over the full 120 credits, then they may be awarded credits on aggregate for the failed courses. Not all degree programmes permit the award of credit on aggregate.

## Diagnostic Assessment

Diagnostic assessment indicates a student's aptitude to learn and preparedness for a programme of study at the particular moment of testing. Incipient learning problems may be identified.

## Director of Studies

Every new undergraduate student is appointed a Director of Studies (DoS), a member of the teaching staff who provides the student with academic and pastoral support. Some postgraduate students also have a Director of Studies.

- [Pastoral Support Guiding Principles](#)

## Double marking

Double marking is where a student's work is assessed by more than one marker. If the second marker does not know the first marker's comments or judgement prior to marking this is blind double marking. Double marking does not need to be blind. Double marking is a form of moderation and may be done for a sample of the students taking a course, e.g. those who are borderline for progression decisions, or for the whole course.

## Examiners

External Examiners are appointed from outwith the University to help ensure that degrees awarded by the University are comparable in standard to those of other equivalent departments in appropriate universities, although their content may differ. They also ensure that the assessment system is operated equitably and fairly in respect of the treatment and classification of students.

The roles, powers and responsibilities of External Examiners are set out in the University's [Code of Practice for External Examiners of Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes](#)

Internal examiners are teaching and honorary staff of the University who teach Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework level 7 to 12 courses which are awarded for credit and are listed in the Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study [www.drps.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/)

Internal and External Examiners are members of the Board of Examiners.

**Feedback**

Feedback is information that is provided to students which can enable them to review what they know, understand and can do in their studies, and to identify areas for improvement.

[www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/assessment/feedback](http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/staff/assessment/feedback)

**Formative Assessment**

Formative assessment is designed to provide students with feedback on progress and to inform development. It does not usually contribute to the overall assessment.

**Grade**

The grade is the percentage range as defined by the common marking scheme.

**Learning Outcomes**

Learning Outcomes are the stated aims and objectives for a course or programme. They outline the understanding, the skills and the knowledge that students will attain through successful completion of the course or programme.

**Learning Profile**

A Learning Profile is compiled by the Student Disability Service following discussions with the student, and in some cases the student's Director of Studies. It presents the recommended reasonable adjustments to be implemented so that students are able to participate fully with their studies.

**Mark**

The mark is the overall percentage for a course, approved and awarded by a Board of Examiners and reported to Registry.

**Marker**

Markers are people who mark students' work for formative or summative purposes but who are not examiners and therefore do not have membership of the Board of Examiners. Markers do not have to be members of staff. Examples of markers are graduate tutors who mark tutorial, laboratory or examination work, who may be on hours to be notified contracts; and members of professions or guest speakers who contribute to student assessment. Examiners also mark students' work and may informally be referred to as markers but as they are examiners they have membership of the Board of Examiners.

**Moderation**

The *QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 6: Assessment of students - September 2006* notes that moderation is "A process intended to assure that an assessment outcome is fair and reliable and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently." Boards of Studies and Boards of Examiners establish in advance of the meeting of the Board of Examiners what forms of moderation are appropriate for their course to ensure adequate scrutiny and equity. Often moderation is coordinated by Course Organisers and Programme Directors. Moderation methods include sampling of marks, double marking, operation of marking schemes, checking marks against students' profiles of marks to ensure consistency. The University's Taught Assessment Regulations state that "All pieces of work must be double marked, checked or moderated in a way which is appropriate to the discipline and to the credit weighting of the piece of assessment".

**Named certificate and diploma**

Named certificates and diplomas are those with a specific title other than the Undergraduate Certificate of Higher Education or Undergraduate Diploma of Higher Education. Examples include the Postgraduate Certificate in Counselling Studies, the Diploma in Pain Management, and the Diploma in High Performance Computing.

**Null sit**

If an assessment is recorded as “null-sit” by a Board of Examiners then it does not count as an assessment attempt and therefore does not contribute to the maximum number of permitted assessment attempts.

**Online assessment**

Online assessment is an assessment which is delivered to students online, remotely or when they are on campus. Online assessments may be used for any type of courses, including distance education, on-campus and students on placements.

**Open book examination**

In open book examinations students are permitted to have access to specific material which is approved by the School.

**Oral assessment**

Oral assessment includes a variety of activities, such as:

- Students making presentations which are part of the assessment of a course
- Student participation in tutorials
- Specific skills which are assessed orally, e.g. in languages
- A viva exam that assesses the student’s general knowledge of the field of the research; establishes the extent of any collaboration; ascertains that the student can work independently and lead the work of others; and confirms that the work is the student’s own.

**Programme Director**

A Programme Director for taught postgraduate programmes can have a similar role to a Course Organiser for undergraduate courses, but across the whole programme (see Course Organiser definition). Programme Directors for taught postgraduate programmes may also have a similar role to a Director of Studies (see Director of Studies definition). Some undergraduate programmes also have Programme Directors.

**Programme of Study**

A Programme of Study is the aggregation of all taught elements leading to a defined graduating curriculum.

The MA (General Honours), the MA (Honours) in English Language and History, the BSc (Honours) in Chemistry, are all examples of programmes of study. The undergraduate Certificate and Diploma of Higher Education are not defined graduating curricula and therefore are not programmes of study.

**Reasonable adjustments**

Reasonable adjustments inform staff of what support is recommended for disabled students in lectures and in exams, e.g. permission to record lectures, extra time in exams etc.

**Regulations Expert**

The Regulations Expert’s remit is to act as an immediate source of knowledge and advice for Boards of Examiners about the relevant University Regulations and guidance and their academic application. Some Schools appoint a Regulations Expert to act for the whole School or across a number of Boards of Examiners.

**Result**

The result is the overall outcome for the course, expressed as ‘Pass’ (and type of pass), ‘Fail’ or ‘Absent’, taking into account the marks achieved for course work, class assessments etc where such marks count towards the overall programme result.

**Score**

Score is not a formal University term in the context of student administration.

### **Special circumstances**

Special circumstances are circumstances which are beyond a student's control and for which there is sufficient documentary evidence to show that these circumstances may have adversely affected a student's performance in an assessment. Examples may include:

- physical illness or injury
- depression or similar illness
- bereavement or serious illness of a person with whom the student has a close relationship

Special circumstances cases are considered by a [Special Circumstances Committee \(SCC\)](#).

### **Summative Assessment**

Summative assessment measures the level of attainment by a student in the programme of study.

### **Take home exams**

This is an examination which is given to students for them to complete and submit within a specified period of time. A take home exam does not need to be sat under invigilated conditions. The exam can be issued to students using a variety of methods, e.g. email, direction to an online webpage, handed out on paper.

### **Unit of assessment**

A unit of assessment is a component of a course which is considered by a Board of Examiners as a discrete entity in reaching its final mark for the course or its progression or award decision.

Examples include an essay, an exam paper, questions within an exam paper, etc.

### **Further explanations of assessment and related terms**

- *Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study* Glossary: [www.drps.ed.ac.uk/](http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/)
- Appendix 2 of the *QAA Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education, Section 6: Assessment of students - September 2006*  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section6/default.asp#p18](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section6/default.asp#p18)