



Organisation of
Qualifications & Awards

Approved Study Centre Handbook

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Introduction

This document has been produced by OQA to provide Approved Centres with suggestions and guidance for the effective operation of the OQA approved validated programmes of study

Approved Centres have their own operating policies and procedures which have been approved by OQA prior to awarding Approved Centre Status so the information in this Handbook concentrates on key areas of the operations and collaboration between OQA and the partner institution

All Approved Centres are encouraged to display the OQA Approved Centre certificate in a prominent location where it can easily be seen by students, parents, sponsors and other interested third parties

Approved Centres are also encouraged to ensure that their students are fully aware of all OQA procedures and that they follow them.

All Approved Centres are required to provide current details of the following:

- Details of the main contact person
- Postal address
- E-mail address
- Telephone number/s
- Fax number

Recommendations on Student Selection

OQA encourages Approved Centres to select students who are most likely to benefit from the courses offered, with aptitude for a particular course of study being the primary criterion for selection.

Approved Centres should use a student's previous academic qualifications and level of English in order to evaluate the student's suitability for the course and the possibility of completing the course successfully. It should also be noted that other evidence relating to the student's wider achievements may also be relevant because academic qualifications alone may not fully represent a student's ability, skills and potential

OQA recommends that in assessing academic aptitude, Approved Centres take into consideration the following:

- Formal qualifications in unrelated areas of study which include subjects or topics that meet the requirements for admission.

- The level of non-academic support, which a student will require

Wherever possible, explicit selection criteria will be established in order to eliminate subjectivity and to provide a framework for fair selection. Academic and other staff dealing with admissions should be aware of and conform to OQA Equal Opportunities Policies relating to students.

OQA encourages Approved Centres to take account of the needs of individual students and, wherever reasonably practicable within existing constraints, to give consideration to personal issues when lectures and examinations are timetabled.

Information for Students

Approved Centres are expected to inform all students at the beginning of the academic year, of the following:

- (i) methods of assessment to be used in their programmes of study including the weighting given to the assessment components of each subject
- (ii) information concerning the deadlines for submission of coursework
- (iii) the importance of regular attendance
- (iv) examination regulations approved by OQA
- (v) syllabi and recommended reading for each subject attended
- (vi) grade criteria for each subject
- (vii) award/s to be received upon successful completion of the course of study

Students should be made aware well in advance of the time and place of examinations. Wherever possible the examination schedule should provide for adequate breaks between examination papers. Account should be taken of religious holidays and special arrangements should be made, as necessary.

Tuition for OQA Courses or Validated Courses

It is the responsibility of Approved Centres to ensure that they are providing tuition to the syllabi approved by OQA or the actual OQA syllabi

Approved Centres are also responsible for ensuring that students are enrolled for the correct subjects for the course they are following.

Syllabi and Course Outlines can be downloaded from the OQA website and Approved Centres should download the relevant syllabi and incorporate them accordingly.

Course Handbooks

Detailed Course Handbooks are available for many of the courses and can be downloaded from the OQA website.

Recommended Reading

Each subject syllabus provides details of the required and recommended reading for each subject and it is essential that students have access to these materials.

OQA appreciates the fact that certain recommended texts may not be available in certain countries or are too expensive to recommend to students, so Approved Centres are encouraged to use alternative texts that provide effective coverage of the subject at the appropriate academic level. OQA will be in a position to offer advice on texts and other learning materials

Guidance on OQA Assessments

The purpose of assessment is to measure student knowledge, understanding or skills. Good assessment practice is designed to ensure that students can demonstrate that they have met the intended learning outcomes of the subject or programme of study and achieved the standard required at the point of assessment for the award to be confirmed.

Assessment Options

Assessments can diagnostic, formative or summative as explained below:

Diagnostic assessment is used to show a learner's preparedness for a particular subject or topic and identifies, for the learner and the teacher, any strengths and potential gaps in knowledge, understanding and skills

Formative assessment is designed to help learners learn more effectively by giving them feedback on their performance and on how it can be improved and/or maintained.

Summative assessment is used to indicate the extent of a learner's success in meeting the assessment criteria used to meet the learning outcomes of a subject or course of study.

An assessment process for a particular course can, and often does, involve more than one of these assessment purposes.

Accepted methods of assessment include:

- Essays
- Examination papers
- Objective tests (which may be conducted on-line)
- Oral tests
- Timed class tests
- Self-assessment (which may be conducted on-line)
- Mini projects or dissertations
- Reports on specific topics of study

Approval of examinations and coursework assessments

If the approved centre is involved in the setting of examination papers, a precise marking scheme for an examination will be submitted by the member of faculty responsible for setting an examination paper. The questions must relate directly to the official syllabus of the subject under examination and a detailed marking scheme will allow:

- (i) Any person marking the paper understands what answer(s) the person who sets the paper was seeking
- (ii) The Dean/Programme Advisor is able to check the questions for ambiguities
- (iii) OQA is able to make a full assessment of its accuracy and standard in relation to academic requirements.

a) Moderating the examination papers

Once the course instructor has completed the paper he/she must present it with the marking scheme to the Academic Registrar or Examinations Officer of

the approved study centre. The examination papers and marking schemes must be forwarded to OQA for moderation and approval. Any amendments will be communicated to the study centre for further consideration until all questions have been agreed.

Once the examination papers have been approved by OQA, the Study Centre will be advised so that the necessary amount of copies can be produced for the examinations. These will be placed in a safe place until the date of the examinations. A copy of each finalised paper and marking scheme will be kept in the approved centre's files.

On the day of the Examinations a sealed envelope containing the examination questions must only be opened in the presence of examinees in the places of the examination.

It is expected that any member of the faculty or any administrator who has seen the papers will treat them in the strictest confidence.

b) Marking the examination papers

The examinations scripts will be marked by the instructors who set the examination questions. Once the papers are marked, a sample of examination scripts must be sent to OQA for moderation. A representative sample of **5 Scripts** will be sufficient and it should represent the full range of marks. OQA will assess the accuracy, consistency and fairness of the marks awarded and will confirm the moderated marks and grades to the study centre

c) Specimen marking scheme

The faculty members will be free to determine the method of marking each answer and the marks that should be awarded in line with the marking schemes included when the proposed examination paper is submitted.

However certain rules must be observed when compiling a marking scheme, namely:

- (i) Questions that require an 'absolute answer' must be accompanied by a full answer to the question when the marking scheme is submitted. This may include certain statistics and accounting questions. It must be

proved that the question is capable of a correct answer in order to help establish that the question is correct in its setting.

Marks awarded to such questions would then be allocated to correct tabling, graphing, working, etc, and not simply to the correct end figure/conclusion.

- (ii) The major marks awarded for essay type questions should be for reasoning and supportive facts unless has specifically stated that only an understanding of the principles is necessary and not an in depth appreciation of the counter-arguments that may exist concerning the application of the principles.
- (iii) If it is intended that special materials such as 'log tables' are required for answering a question this must be noted under SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS at the top of the paper.
- (iv) Noiseless calculators may be used in final examinations but not programmable calculators.

The selection of a set of methods and the balance between the components will be shaped by the requirements of each particular programme of study, in particular the learning outcomes of the subject concerned – it is important that the methods of assessment are appropriate to testing the intended learning outcomes for a subject fairly and accurately. Assessment should also be at the appropriate level and should relate to the appropriate level descriptors

GRADES AND GRADE DESCRIPTIONS

GRADE	MARKS	GRADE DESCRIPTION
A	70%+	<p>Very high standard of critical analysis using appropriate conceptual frameworks</p> <p>Excellent understanding and exposition of relevant issues</p> <p>Clearly structured and logically developed arguments</p> <p>Good awareness of nuances and complexities</p> <p>Substantial evidence of well-executed independent research</p> <p>Excellent evaluation and synthesis of source material</p> <p>Excellent use of relevant data and examples, all properly referenced</p>
B	60-69%	<p>High standard of critical analysis using appropriate conceptual frameworks</p> <p>Clear awareness and exposition of relevant issues</p> <p>Clearly structured and logically developed argument</p> <p>Awareness of nuances and complexities</p> <p>Evidence of independent research</p> <p>Good evaluation and synthesis of source material</p> <p>Good use of relevant data and examples, all properly referenced</p>
C	45-59%	<p>Uses appropriate conceptual frameworks</p> <p>Attempts analysis but includes some errors and/or omissions</p> <p>Shows awareness of issues but no more than to be expected from attendance at classes</p> <p>Arguments reasonably clear but underdeveloped</p> <p>Insufficient evidence of independent research</p> <p>Insufficient evaluation of source material</p> <p>Some good use of relevant data and examples, but incompletely referenced</p>
D	40-44%	<p>Adequate understanding of appropriate conceptual frameworks</p> <p>Answer too descriptive and/or any attempt at analysis is superficial, containing errors and/or omissions</p> <p>Shows limited awareness of issues but also some confusion</p> <p>Arguments not particularly clear</p> <p>Limited evidence of independent research and reliance on a superficial repeat of class notes</p> <p>Relatively superficial use of relevant data, sources and examples and poorly referenced</p>

GRADE	MARKS	GRADE DESCRIPTION
F Fail	30-39%	Weak understanding of appropriate conceptual frameworks Weak analysis and several errors and omissions Establishes a few relevant points but superficial and confused exposition of issues No evidence of independent research and poor understanding of class notes Poor or no use of relevant data, sources and examples, and no references
F	29% and below	Very weak or no understanding of appropriate conceptual frameworks Very weak or no grasp of analysis and many errors and omissions Very little or no understanding of the issues raised by the question No appropriate references to data, sources, examples or even class notes

Plagiarism

Approved Centres should encourage learners to adopt good academic conduct in respect of assessment and has not engaged in plagiarism.

Plagiarism is the act of claiming the work of others as your own work. "Others" in this context can include fellow students and the authors of books, journals and internet material. Plagiarism is regarded as a form of cheating and is unacceptable. Students will be penalised for plagiarism, usually by the loss of marks

Students learn from the work of others and may quote from it without penalty, but students should receive guidance as to accepted forms of academic referencing and citation. Where direct quotation appears to a student to be appropriate s/he must ensure that quotation marks and reference to the original author is clear within the text. Essays, projects and reports will also show the referenced works in the bibliography.

It is essential that students and staff are made aware of the definitions of plagiarism and other unfair practices. If any form of cheating is suspected, Approved Centres should activate their internal academic disciplinary process

Disclosure of Marks and Feedback to Students

It is important to distinguish between unconfirmed marks and confirmed marks.

Unconfirmed marks are those that have not been confirmed by OQA while confirmed marks are those that have been moderated and approved by OQA. The arrangements for releasing confirmed marks to students need to be carefully considered – the practice of publishing results on noticeboards is no longer widespread, and even if this is done, students' anonymity should be protected by using ID numbers rather than students' names. Many institutions now release confirmed marks to students electronically.

It is good practice for students to be given individual feedback on their performance to date (e.g. coursework, semester one examinations) as this promotes learning and facilitates improvement. Any feedback should be constructive and timely, in order for a student to benefit from the feedback and to improve their performance. It is good practice to establish a clear timescale for providing feedback to students as well as establishing guidance on the level of feedback to be provided.

OQA would expect feedback to be provided **within 3 weeks** of submission of work. If unconfirmed marks (or indicative grades) are provided, students should be made aware that any marks are subject to final confirmation by OQA.

Examination resits and re-assessments

The pass mark for a subject is 40%, and there need to be clear rules on the criteria to pass a subject. Most programmes will allow candidates who have failed a subject to be re-assessed at the next available opportunity, once the failure has been confirmed by OQA.

There is no limit to the number of times learners can re-sit an examination but we suggest the following options to be considered by Approved Centres before they decide on student progression onto the next level of study:

In summary, the principal options for progression are:

- Progress with no subjects pending
- Progress with subjects pending with re-sits at the next available opportunity
- Re-assessment with progression dependent on passing a certain number of subjects
- Exclusion from the course if the number of failed subjects is so large as to require a student to withdraw from the programme

Institutions should also ensure that staff development opportunities are available for staff in respect of good assessment practice. This might range from induction of new staff to enabling staff to learn about new approaches to assessment and best practice in assessment. The Moderator can play a role in sharing good practice with colleagues at collaborative centres.

Health and Safety

Approved Centres are encouraged to provide details of policies and codes of practice in line with the prevailing laws of the land and to encourage students to familiarise themselves with and comply with the relevant requirements. The enforcement of reasonable health and safety requirements does not constitute discrimination.

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