SECTION 5: ASSESSMENT DESIGN

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5.1 GENERAL

5.1.1 The purpose of assessment is to support students' learning and to evaluate their achievement of learning outcomes. Assessment strategies for programmes and modules should fulfil the University's assessment principles, as set out in Assessment Handbook, Section 1:

- Teaching, learning and assessment (and criteria) are aligned to learning outcomes
- Assessment is valid, reliable, consistent and fair
- Assessment is carefully planned across a programme
- Assessment is inclusive
- Assessment is proportionate
- Assessment is explicit and transparent
- Students are supported and prepared for assessment
- Assessment encourages academic integrity.

5.1.2 The University's procedures for programme approval include consideration of the assessment strategy for the programme, and its effectiveness in measuring student attainment of intended learning outcomes and in promoting student learning, including how authentic, inclusive and engaging the assessments are (Programme Lifecycle Policy).

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5.1.3 The University's Centre for Quality Support and Development (CQSD) offers expertise and materials which support staff in reflecting on appropriate methods of assessment and feedback. A suite of materials on the design of assessment and feedback is available in the teaching resources on the CQSD website. CQSD offers sessions on assessment and feedback, and these matters are also addressed in the development programme for new lecturers

5.2 TYPES OF ASSESSMENT

The design of assessment in programmes and modules should align with Assessment for Learning principles. The types of assessment used and the assessment tasks set should be 'authentic', encouraging a meaningful and integrated application of the academic knowledge and skills associated with the programme/module. This is fundamental to developing the range of attributes expected of University of Reading graduates.

The University has approved the following types of assessment for use in modules and programmes. Assessments should correspond to one of these types.

Examinations

The term 'examination' is used to refer to hand-written or digital assessments that are normally centrally timetabled to take place in the University's end-of-semester Assessment (or Reassessment) Periods. Details of the type of examination should be stated in the Summative Assessment Information section of the relevant MDF. This assessment type includes the following:

In-person Written Examination (IWE)

An in-person hand-written examination that is held in a designated location on campus and under the supervision of invigilators.

Online written examination (OWE; 2025/26 only)

This includes centrally-timetabled take-home examinations to be completed during a specified timeframe and digital examinations with a fixed start-time. It may or may not be completed under the supervision of invigilators.

In-person Supervised Digital Examination (ISDE; from 2026/27)

An in-person examination that is conducted in a designated room on campus, using institution provided computers under the supervision of invigilators. The software used may either be provided by the University or by an external organisation (such as a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body) following any appropriate procurement processes and approval from UBTLSE via DELT.

Remote Supervised Digital Examination (RSDE; from 2026/27)

A digital examination that is supervised but undertaken remotely (off-campus or in a generally accessible location on campus). It may either have a fixed start time (i.e., a 'fixed-window' timed-digital examination) or be set to be completed during a specified timeframe.

Remote Unsupervised Digital Examination (RUDE; from 2026/27) A digital examination that is not supervised and, therefore, normally considered to be 'open-book'. It is undertaken remotely (off-campus or in a generally accessible location on campus) and may either have a fixed start time (for example, a timed-digital examination) or be set to be completed during a specified timeframe. This includes exams downloaded from a source (e.g., Gradescope), written by hand and then scanned and uploaded to the relevant software or virtual learning environment.

In-class Tests

The term 'in-class test' is used to refer to hand-written or digital assessments that are administered by the relevant School/Department and take place outside of the University's designated Assessment periods. They will typically have a more specific focus and be less synoptic than an end-of-semester Examination. Details of the type of test should be stated in the Summative Assessment Information section of the relevant MDF. This assessment type includes the following:

In-Person In-Class Test

An in-person, hand-written or digital-based test that is held in a location on campus booked through the relevant module's timetable request[1] and undertaken with supervision of School/Department staff.

Remote Digital In-Class Test

A digital-based test that is undertaken remotely at a time specified by the module convenor or other appropriate member of staff, for example a Blackboard Ultra test. This assessment type is normally considered to be 'open-book'.

Practical skills assessment

This includes assessments of practical laboratory work, clinical skills (OSCEs), performance, role play, observed teaching session.

Oral assessment

This includes presentations, viva voce and oral language assessment. This may be carried out in person, or submitted as an audio or video recording, podcast, or screencast. Includes poster presentations where the mark for content is combined with the oral presentation.

Capstone project

This includes final year and Masters' projects and dissertations or other significant 'capstone' projects, usually requiring students to undertake a substantial piece of independent research. May also include significant work-orientated or community-based projects.

Written coursework assignment

Essays; analytical, evaluative, critical or review piece; blog; literature review; case study; reflective statement/account; management or care plan; project proposal/outline.

Set exercise

Problem sheets, (non-capstone) mini-projects and associated reports (or oral presentations, where these are only a small component of the overall project task and marking scheme), data analysis or modelling, bibliographic tasks, practical or lab write up, fieldwork notebooks.

Portfolio or Journal

Differentiated from written coursework assignment in that these are built from multiple entries from across a period of time.

Artefact production

This includes submission/exhibition of art or design work, photograph, website, poster, press release, or other specialist/technical output.

[1] Please consult the Timetabling and Room Bookings Office if a larger room or particular facilities are required for an in-class test.

Placement

This includes study abroad, fieldwork activity.

Research participation

This is specific to instances in which students are required to engage in research studies as a participant, where this is a requirement of accreditation and the activity does not fit into the placement model. The assessment of such activity for credit should be designed to enable a mark in the 0-100 scale to be awarded. Such assessment is included in the maximum number of assessments permitted per module.

5.3 NUMBER OF ASSESSMENTS

5.3.1 The assessment of the module should be commensurate with the module's credit weighting, and each assessment task should be commensurate with its weighting in the assessment of the module.

5.3.2 The following limits apply to the number of summative assessment items in a module:

- 20 credit modules must normally have one or two items of summative assessment, and must not have more than three items.
- Modules which are 40 or more credits must not have more than four items of assessment.
- Those modules wishing to submit portfolios of work as one assessment point must seek approval from their T&L Dean prior to establishing this format.
- For Split assessments in group work, see section 5.6.5 below, which indicates how different elements of assessment for group work are counted under the University's rules.

5.3.3 The University does not prescribe a word count for assessments of given credit weightings, since a standard word count would not acknowledge the complexity of tasks and/or the time taken to complete them. See guidance on considering word counts in Making assessment volume and distribution manageable for staff and students.

5.4 TIMING OF ASSESSMENTS

5.4.1 Modules are assessed in the semester in which they are taught. Modules which span semesters must have some summative assessment in Semester 1.

5.4.2 Where a module includes some teaching in the preceding year (e.g. preparation for dissertations/placements), there should not be any summative assessment until the relevant Part.

Assessments in-module or during end-of module exam period

5.4.3 Examinations must take place during the dedicated assessment period(s) in a module.

5.4.4 All assessments other than examinations should be distributed throughout the module duration.

5.4.5 It is expected that in-person practicals, in-class tests, presentations and oral exams will be held before the assessment period. This allows the assessment period to be used for scheduled exams across the University and, where appropriate, for coursework submissions. Please note that in-class tests should be scheduled throughout the semester, and not during the assessment period.

Avoiding bunching

5.4.6 Programme teams should work together to review the distribution of assessment deadlines to seek to minimise bunching of assessment deadlines.

5.4.7 Schools/Departments should set a maximum number of assessment submissions in any one week so as not to overload students.

5.4.8 In particular:

- Where there is more than one piece of summative assessment for a long/thin module, these assessments should be evenly spread across the 2 semesters (at least one summative assessment per semester).
- One assessment, as listed in a Module Description, should be set up as a single summative assessment in RISIS, and for an individual student there should be a single submission point in Blackboard. Multiple assessments should not be nested within a single assessment indicated in the module description. Further details will be detailed in Operational guidance for staff (assessments and submissions).
- Assessments for Joint programmes or complex programmes, which have multiple long/thin modules, should be mapped with particular care to avoid bunching. There should be an even split of assessment across both semesters for long/thin modules.
- Schools with scheduled examinations should ensure a reasonable balance of examinations between semesters.

Timing of assessment, feedback and progress towards achieving learning outcomes

5.4.9 The even distribution of deadlines throughout a module encourages students to work steadily towards the achievement of learning outcomes and avoids effort being focussed on a singular, terminal assessment point.

5.4.10 Formative activities prepare students for summative assessment. Where assessments within a module are related to each other, feedback from one assessment should be available in sufficient time to inform the preparation of the next related assessment.

5.4.11 Schools must ensure that every student receives a minimum of one piece of formative or summative feedback before the winter vacation (or equivalent for non-September starters) for each module taken during the first semester of their programme of study, preferably on an individual basis. Please see the provisions in the Assessment Handbook, section 12, for the requirements in relation to feedback on assessments in subsequent semesters.

5.5 SUPERVISOR REPORTS

5.5.1 Supervisor reports can be used directly as a summative assessment only in the very specific circumstances given in paragraph 5.5.2 below. In all other circumstances, Supervisor Reports can only be used for formative purposes.

5.5.2 *Summative assessment*

Supervisor Reports can be used directly for summative assessment in programmes only where there are defined competencies which cannot be sufficiently demonstrated through on-campus activities (e.g. where a healthcare or education student needs to be assessed in the healthcare/educational environment or workplace to demonstrate competence as part of PSRB requirements).

In such cases:

- These assessments must be Pass / Fail only and count towards the total number of assessment items on a module (unless they contribute to a portfolio assessment).
- Supervisors must assess using consistent criteria and be trained to make robust assessment decisions.
- Such assessments should normally be triangulated against other 'in-house' assessments of competence, with a clear quality assurance structure in place.

5.5.3 *Formative assessment*

In all other cases, Supervisor Reports can be used only for formative purposes. Examples of such Reports include:

- Dissertation Supervisor Reports, e.g. where a dissertation supervisor reports on a student's engagement with their dissertation/project work.
- Fieldwork Supervisor's Report, e.g. where a fieldwork supervisor reports on the engagement/performance of a student during fieldwork.
- Placement Supervisor's Report, e.g. where a placement supervisor for a programme not covered by 5.4.2 reports on engagement/performance during a placement.

The formative feedback in these reports may, however, provide the basis for a further activity which can be assessed summatively (for example: students producing reflective responses to the feedback received; or a viva voce at which the feedback is discussed and reflected upon; or formative feedback used to inform the overall consideration of a summative dissertation/project report).

5.6 ASSESSMENT OF GROUP WORK

5.6.1 It is a requirement that Boards of Studies and Student Experience (BoSSEs) take a view on the proportion of any final module mark arrived at through group work, especially where this exceeds 50%. In making this judgement BoSSEs should consider the impact of circumstances relating to group work that are not entirely in the student's control; and whether development of an ability to work in a group is central to the aims of the module.

5.6.2 In designing and implementing the assessment of group work, Schools are advised to consider CQSD's guidance.

5.6.3 Schools must apply the following principles :

i. Any assessment should be appropriately aligned to the learning outcomes of the module.

ii. The module convenor should provide a written explanation of how the group assessment marks will be derived, for example: will all group members receive the same mark? Will there be elements of peer assessment? Will there be elements of individual assessment?

iii. External examiners should be consulted on the design of group assessment;

iv. Thought should be given to the needs of students with specific learning needs and/or disabilities;

v. As with any assessment task, so particularly in respect of group assessment, it should be made clear where the limits of legitimate collaboration between students lie; and what constitutes improper collusion, which is a form of academic misconduct;

vi. It is the responsibility of the School to ensure that the assessment of group work is properly moderated internally and externally;

vii. The module description should be clear on arrangements for reassessment of group work.

5.6.4 In group work, as in all assessments, markers are responsible, subject to moderation, for evaluating the quality of work and assigning marks for assessments. Peer assessment may inform the marker's academic judgment and their determination of marks, but it is not permitted for peer assessment to contribute a mark directly to any mark for an assessment or module. This is consistent with the provision in the Assessment Handbook, section 10.2.1, that "Marking shall be carried out by appropriately qualified and properly appointed persons. It should be noted that peer assessment may be used for formative purposes and a marker's determination of a formal mark may be informed by peer marking".

5.6.5 Two 'split' assessments in group work (e.g. a group product + an individual reflection) may count as one summative assessment, provided that: (a) the assessments are interconnected; (b) at least one element assesses individual contributions; and (c) both parts of the assessment feed into a single mark. Note that this applies only where Module Convenors choose to use split assessments in their summative assessment for group work; split assessments are neither a required nor preferred structure for assessment of group work.

5.6.6 For provisions in respect of group work for students with disabilities, please note 5.6.3(iv) above and see Assessment Handbook, section 7.

5.7 MARKS FOR PARTICIPATION

5.7.1 Neither participation in a class nor attendance at a class are in themselves assessments and must not in themselves be awarded marks.

5.8 LANGUAGE OF ASSESSMENT

5.8.1 In respect of taught programmes, the language of assessment will be English (except in the case of programmes involving modern languages or British Sign Language, where teaching and assessment may be conducted in either English or the relevant modern language/British Sign Language at the discretion of the School). Any proposed variation from this convention requires the explicit approval of the University Board for Teaching and Learning and Student Experience (UBTLSE).

5.9 GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ASSESSMENT

5.9.1 The rise of Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools (GAIT) poses both challenges and opportunities. In its Position Statement on Generative Artificial Intelligence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment the University has adopted a pragmatic and proactive approach to the use of such tools.

5.9.2 The University welcomes the introduction of GAIT in assessment design and encourages staff to explore how they might best support their students in understanding how to effectively use these tools, recognise their limitations, and understand both the ethical considerations and the advantages of using them.

5.9.3 Schools should provide their students with clear guidance on whether GAIT can be used in their assessments. The University has determined that there should be three categories of GAIT use for assessments:

- Category 1: GAIT may not be used
- Category 2: GAIT can be used to support student learning and development
- Category 3: GAIT use is actively encourage to help students develop their skills in the use of GAIT and understand how their use can be incorporated into assessment tasks

5.9.4 The University recognises that prohibiting the use of GAIT (i.e. under Category 1) will be difficult, but that there may be some areas where its use is inappropriate or not possible (e.g. in-person examinations, online tests, or practicals).

5.9.5 It is assumed that the majority of assessments would fall under Category 2, where students are able to use GAIT to support them in exploring initial ideas and concepts, determining a structure for a piece of work, supporting their use of appropriate language, or otherwise support them in developing their ideas.

5.9.6 Under Category 3 the use of GAIT would take a central role in the assessment. Such assessments would provide students with the opportunity to showcase their effective and responsible use of GAIT. Category 3 support students in developing key skills to support their employability and digital literacy.

5.9.7 CQSD has provided further guidance on the application of the Category system in its Generative AI Tools and Assessment guide and on its GAIT webpages.

5.9.8 Where students have used GAIT (under Categories 2 and 3) they should cite their usage using both the Statement of Authorship and in their normal course of citing references. Different disciplines will have different citation rules for GAIT and students should be directed to refer to the guides provided by Study Advice and the Library (unless the School has adopted an in-house style).

5.9.9 Schools should indicate in their assignment briefs which Categories of GAIT use applies to the assessment. In the absence of a statement on which Category applies students should assume that the use of GAIT for that assessment is prohibited.

5.9.10 Where a student has used GAIT outside of the identified Category it would be considered under the Section 9 of the Assessment Handbook: Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct. Unless clearly detailed in the assignment brief, the University would normally determine that the unattributed cutting and pasting of content generated by GAITs into an assignment would count as plagiarism and be dealt with under the terms of Section 9 of the Assessment Handbook: Academic Integrity and Academic Misconduct.