

Assessment Guidance

Context

This guidance serves as a conversation starter for programme teams when they consider the assessment load for their modules. It has been developed to address concerns relating to student and staff workload associated with assessment activity. This guidance is **staff facing only** and should be disseminated as appropriate by senior leaders within each School to support decision making for summative assessment. The guidance does not include formative assessment activity, which should be embedded within curriculum design and module delivery as appropriate to the discipline.

Guidance

There are three areas to prompt programme team discussion:

1. Number of assessments per module credit weighting
2. Notional hours students should spend on their assessment activity
3. Word counts and their equivalency

1. Number of assessments per module credit weighting

Whilst the number of learning outcomes per module are not mandated, the number of items of summative assessment per credit value should **normally** follow the principles outlined in the table below.

Credits	Number of items of assessment
10	1
15	≤ 2
20	≤ 3
30	≤ 3
40	≤ 4
60	≤ 4

Table 1: Assessment points by module credits

When considering the assessment load per module, there are three caveats to the above guidance:

1. It is important for Schools and Departments to consider and discuss the student assessment load in relation to their discipline. For 10 credit modules, for example, a programme team may develop a series of mini-assessments (either formative or summative) that test foundation knowledge which is appropriate for a specific discipline area.
2. Where one assessment is used, this should not be in the format of an exam, which is considered to be high stakes from the student perspective.
3. Ensure there is an assessment early in every programme, particularly in Part A Semester 1

Whilst summative assessments will vary in type (e.g. coursework based assessments and examinations) across different disciplines, student workload in terms of preparation and production should be broadly similar.

This guidance should be considered as non-prescriptive but should be used as a discussion point amongst course teams as they plan modular assessments, in particular the workload that is appropriate for the discipline and the nature of the module being studied. For example, subjects that have a large credit weighting but have project based summative assessments may require additional mini-assessments (either formative or summative) points to ensure students have appropriate support and guidance towards meeting module learning outcomes.

Where assessment loads fall outside the above, the course team should provide a rationale for this.

2. Notional hours students should spend on their assessment activity

The proposal within this section has been informed by the following:

- FHEQ
- Literature on assessment practice
- University websites
- Previous working and steering group discussions

Based on the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications that states 1 credit equates to 10 hours of study, we are able to indicate the notional learning hours required for any module as:

Credit weighting	Notional learning hours
10	100
15	150
20	200
30	300
40	400
60	600

Table 2: Notional learning hours by module credits

QAA guidance states '[a]ssessment requirements take into account the notional learning hours for any given unit of study' (QAA, 2018: 5), to avoid workload issues for students. A search into practice from other universities suggests that the allocation of hours dedicated to assessment, including its preparation varies from between 20 – 30%. If we adopted this practice, the number of workload hours for students would be as follows:

Credit weighting	Assessment Workload Hours (20%)	Assessment Workload Hours (30%)
10	20	30
15	30	45
20	40	60
30	60	90
40	80	120
60	120	180

Table 3: Assessment preparation workload hours

If we were to adopt the above as indicative workloads for students, we would be able to determine whether students were exceeding the notional hours for their module assessments – something the assessment and feedback working group raised as an issue to be addressed.

However, it is recognised that the demands and preparation time across different disciplines can vary considerably and is dependent on the context and level of the assessment demands. In

addition, different work rates of students will influence the time spent on preparing for summative assessment. We will need to consider this as we work through this document to ensure that our assessment practices do not disadvantage any student.

Guidance from the sector:¹ may be helpful in considering the different types of activity required in completing an assessment when calculating student workload hours:

Assessment	Student workload	Hours (total)
1 hour exam (including unseen exams)	1 hour assessment 9 hours revision	10
Seen essay (1, 500 words)	1 hour writing/typing 9 hours preparation	10
Practical report	2 hours – writing/drawing graphs 3 hours preparation	5
10-minute oral presentation	5 hours preparation 10 minute assessment	5 hours 10 minutes
Poster (individual)	6 hours gathering information 4 hours on design	10
MCQ (1 hour)	9 hours revision 1 hour exam	10

Table 4: Total workload hours by assessment type

From this example, the assessment load requirements are broken down into what needs to be done for a particular assessment type. In determining workload hours for a particular assessment, course teams may wish to provide a more detailed and nuanced break down of the specific activities associated with an assessment to arrive at a realistic number of notional hours students require to complete the task. In addition, the course team should decide whether the notional hours include the assessment activity (as in the above table) or not. If not, the time for the assessment would need to be added to the student assessment workload hours. For reference, it was the view of the working group that notional hours should include the assessment activity.

The place of module delivery hours into the above needs to be considered and discussed. For example, if module delivery patterns are high, this reduces student capacity for independent work and preparation towards summative assessments. In project modules, for example, the percentage of time devoted to the assessment output could be much higher and programme teams will need to be aware of and discuss this to ensure the assessment load is appropriate for students. In addition, modular level expectation should be scaled to reflect any individual assessment loads within the total load for that module. This requires programme teams to consider the module and programme level assessment load expectations, when designing their assessment requirements.

It is also recognised that assessments may change over the course of a degree programme to reflect the increased complexity of the subject and this will be reflected in the type, volume and nature of the assessment.

Course teams should monitor the assessment pattern over a degree programme to ensure that module assessments are equally distributed over the academic year. This is particularly pertinent for year-long modules, where a final high stakes assessment should be avoided.

¹ Manchester Metropolitan

3. Word counts and their equivalency

Although word count equivalency can be used as an indicator of workload for a module, there are challenges in arriving at a 'perfect' word count equivalency across practical and non-traditional assessments. In addition, the number of words allocated to an assessment may not reflect the amount of effort that has gone into the work. Programme teams should consider the allocation of word counts, and their equivalencies to ensure:

- Students are able to demonstrate how they have met the learning outcomes for the piece of work;
- Have not exceeded the notional learning hours allocated to the module as outlined above.

The guidance below provides staff with a basis for discussion and debate on this area of assessment practice. The key consideration is to establish increased consistency in the student experience across modules and programmes.

Taking the guidance offered by Ulster University, which details word counts and equivalences, the following could be applied to Loughborough University assessments:

Assessment type	Notional assessment load or work hours: 10 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 15 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 20 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 30 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 40 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 60 credits
Written coursework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Case study ▪ Essay ▪ Laboratory report ▪ Policy briefs ▪ Reflective account ▪ Report ▪ Research proposal ▪ Technical report (written) 	2, 000 words (maximum ²)	3, 00 words (maximum)	4, 000 words (maximum)	6, 000 words (maximum)	8, 00 words (maximum)	12, 000 words (maximum)
Other coursework: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Computer code ▪ Mathematical problems ▪ Technical report (including figures, diagrams etc) ▪ Portfolio ▪ Poster 	Up to 6 ³ pages OR Between 5 and 6 pages	Up to 9 pages OR Between 8 and 9 pages	Up to 12 pages OR Between 11 and 12 pages	Up to 18 pages OR Between 15 and 17 pages	Up to 24 pages OR Between 22 and 24 pages	Up to 36 pages OR Between 34 and 36 pages
Exam/Test	1.5 hours maximum	1.5 – 2 hours maximum	2 hours maximum	2.5 hours maximum	3 hours maximum	3 hours maximum
Practical assessment	1.5 hours maximum	1.5 – 2 hours maximum	2 hours maximum	2.5 hours maximum	3 hours maximum	3 hours maximum
Presentation (Individual)	10 – 15 minutes	15 minutes	15 – 20 minutes	20 – 25 minutes	25 – 30 minutes	30 – 35 minutes

² Course teams may wish to provide a word count range depending on the assessment demands

³ Page numbers based on 3 pages per 1, 000 words, Ariel font size 12 and 1.5 line spacing. Calculations rounded up from: [Words Per Page: convert words to pages calculator \(wordcounter.net\)](https://www.wordcounter.net/)

Assessment type	Notional assessment load or work hours: 10 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 15 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 20 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 30 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 40 credits	Notional assessment load or work hours: 60 credits
Artefact	20 – 30 hours ⁴	30 – 40 hours	40 – 60 hours	60 – 90 hours	90 – 120 hours	120 – 150 hours
Creative work	20 – 30 hours	30 – 40 hours	40 – 60 hours	60 – 90 hours	90 – 120 hours	120 – 150 hours
Project	20 – 30 hours	30 – 40 hours	40 – 60 hours	60 – 90 hours	90 – 120 hours	120 – 150 hours
Tutorial participation	10 – 15 minutes	15 minutes	15 – 20 minutes	20 – 25 minutes	25 – 30 minutes	30 – 35 minutes
Viva/oral exam	25 minutes	30 minutes	35 minutes	40 minutes	45 minutes	50 minutes

Table 5: Assessment load per assessment type and module credits

⁴ Reflects all preparation, revision and other activities necessary to produce the final assessment piece and may be a larger percentage of the total hours allocated to the module.

For modules comprising 20 credits or more, where multiple assessments can be used to meet the learning outcomes for the module, word counts and their equivalencies should be reduced in-line with the required weighting for each component of the assessment.

When considering the weighting split, feedback from students stated that 80% and 100% assessment were high risk assessments as they carried so much weight, particularly when attached to award bearing modules. It is therefore recommended that any weighting split should not be less than 25% -75% and that reductions in each weighting bracket should be calculated on the percentage weighting of the component. This results in some 'interesting' word counts and times for presentations (all rounded up for the purposes of this document) and programme teams should consider whether the guidance totals are appropriate for students to demonstrate how they have met the module learning outcomes with a commitment to ensuring a manageable assessment workload.

The following table provides some worked examples for a 20-credit module:

Assessment weighting	Written coursework	Other coursework	Exam/Test/ Practical assessment	Presentation/ Tutorial participation	Artefact/ Creative work/Project	Peer assessment	Viva/Oral exam
25%	1, 000 words	Up to 3 pages OR Between 2 and 3 pages	30 minutes	5 minutes	15 hours	185 words	9 minutes
30%	1, 200 words	Up to 3.5pages OR Between 3 and 3.5 pages	36 minutes	6 minutes	18 hours	225 words	11 minutes
40%	1, 600 words	Up to 4.5 pages OR Between 3.5 and 3.5 pages	48 minutes	8 minutes	24 hours	300 words	14 minutes
50%	2, 000 words	Up to 6 pages OR Between 5 and 6 pages	1 hour	10 minutes	30 hours	375 words	18 minutes
60%	2, 400 words	Up to 6.5 pages OR Between 5.5 and 6.5 pages	1 hour 12 minutes	12 minutes	36 hours	450 words	21 minutes
70%	2, 800 words	Up to 7.5 pages OR Between 7 and 8 pages	1 hour 24 minutes	14 minutes	42 hours	525 words	25 minutes
75%	3, 000 words	Up to 9 pages OR Between 8 and 9 pages	1 hour 30 minutes	15 minutes	45 hours	565 words	26 minutes

Table 6: Assessment load per assessment type and module weighting

When considering the weighting of different assessments within a module where more than one assessment is included, course teams should consider the importance of each component. For example, a smaller weighted assessment and word count may demand specific analytical skills that provide a foundational step towards a larger weighted component, may result in a large workload for students. It is therefore important for course teams to consider overall module workloads for students when setting such assessments, particularly across joint honours programmes.

References

Bloxham, S., and Boyd, P. (2007) *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: A Practical Guide*. Maidenhead: Open University Press

Galvin, A; Noonan, E and O'Neill, G., 2012. Assessment: Assessment workload and equivalences. [Assessment Workload Equivalences \(plymouth.ac.uk\)](https://plymouth.ac.uk/assessment-workload-equivalences) – accessed 3.2.23

QAA (2018) UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance Assessment. [Assessment \(qaa.ac.uk\)](https://qaa.ac.uk/assessment) – accessed 6.2.23

Approved by Learning and Teaching Committee

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