



BLANTYRE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

BIU ASSESSMENT POLICY

January 2017

Private Bag 98, Blantyre, Malawi
Tel: +265 1 831516 | Fax: +265 1 831514
Email: info@biu.ac.mw
Website: www.biu.ac.mw



Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Assessment description	3
3. Purpose of Assessment.....	3
4. Principles of marking and moderation	4
5. Procedure and observations.....	4
6. Reliable marking	4
7. Moderation	5
Stage 1:	5
Stage 2:	5
Stage 3:	5
8. Second marking of dissertations and final year projects	6
9. External Examiners.....	6
10. Conclusion	6



Introduction

Blantyre International University, as a high institution of learning, assesses its students. Research demonstrates that assessment directs how students approach their learning. Good designs of assessment tools ensure that students actively engage with the learning activities and find meaning in them. Reliability is a core principle for assessment. This means that the outcomes of assessment for a student should be fair and justifiable. It assumes that if the marking process is repeated, a student can expect to receive a similar result. We know this is difficult to ensure when handling large numbers of markers and a diverse student body, and so the policy for marking and moderation is designed to ensure each student's work is considered appropriately, and to minimise the possibility of unfair outcomes for students. It also protects and supports the staff responsible for making judgments about the quality of student work.

Assessment description

Assessment can be defined as the systematic establishment of how much knowledge a student has acquired from a series of learning activities, while marking could be described as the process of determining the correctness of the learner's responses to a given task.

However, Harlen (2005) defines assessment as all processes employed by academic staff to make judgments about the achievement of students in units of study and over a course of study. These processes include making decisions about what is relevant evidence for a particular purpose, how to collect and interpret the evidence and how to communicate it to the intended users (students, parents, university administrators, etc).

The processes here include: devising assessment tasks; writing criteria sheets based on learning outcomes; judging students' achievement on those assessment tasks; providing feedback to students; and determining grades. These processes are followed at BIU and this ensures valid and reliable assessment of students' work.

Students can also be assessed informally. Macquarie University (2008) defines informal assessment as the observations of, and comments on student performance in class, as well as opportunities for practice with feedback that inform students and staff about students' progress towards desired learning outcomes. However, records of such assessments are not always publicly noted as assessment tasks and do not always attract grades.

Purpose of Assessment

As posited by Marzano (2005), assessment serves several distinct purposes, including:

- n Administrative purposes, such as determining student admissions into universities, facilitating student transfers between colleges, and aiding in job placements.
- n Providing feedback on student achievement.
- n Offering guidance to students, with grades helping counselors provide direction based on students' strengths.
- n Assisting in instructional planning, enabling educators to structure their teaching effectively.
- n Motivating students to enhance their efforts in their academic pursuits.



At Blantyre International University, assessment is primarily intended to enhance students' learning and offer indicators of learning progress, all of which are aligned with predefined learning outcomes. The responsibility for assessing these learning outcomes is entrusted to individual lecturers, who ascertain whether meaningful learning has taken place or not. Ultimately, assessment also serves as a means of ensuring and upholding academic standards within the university.

4. Principles of Marking and Moderation

A fundamental principle adopted across all university programs entails subjecting all assessed work that contributes to the final award to a form of independent internal and external scrutiny. The purpose of this scrutiny is to promote consistency in assessment standards and practices within a specific subject area and program. Additionally, it serves as a mechanism for providing written feedback aimed at improving these practices.

5. Procedure and Observations

At Blantyre International University (BIU), assessment is regarded as a vital means of communication between students and instructors. The university's assessment policy stipulates that students are required to complete at least two assignments and an examination to progress to the next level.

The marking process, as an assessment tool, involves three distinct stages:

The first stage, referred to as preparation, commences early in the course and involves communicating assignment expectations to the students, including university preferences for referencing style, font, spacing, and other relevant criteria. Lecturers at BIU diligently convey these expectations to their students.

The second stage entails the creation of a marking scheme, a valuable tool that fosters consistency and fairness in marking. Beyond this, the marking scheme reflects the professionalism of the marker or assessor. At BIU, every lecturer prepares marking schemes for both examinations and assignments.

The third and final stage is the actual marking or grading process, which occurs after students have submitted their work. During this stage, instructors review the submitted papers, providing both academic and personal comments while assigning grades in the form of percentages.

Moreover, it's worth noting that several methods of marking are recommended, including those based on a model answer, holistic assessment, and formula-based criteria. The choice of method depends on the nature of the assessment task.

All written work, with the exception of final examination scripts, is returned to students. The feedback provided in these comments serves as an essential tool for learning, addressing both the strengths and weaknesses of the paper while offering suggestions for improvement. Constructive criticism is encouraged, accompanied by positive feedback.

6. Reliable Marking

Marking not only serves as a means of motivating students and contributing to their learning through constructive feedback but also must be characterized by reliability and consistency.



This ensures that it effectively distinguishes between students' performances within the same program of study and enables the rank ordering of performance.

In this regard, a marker should aim for self-consistency, while the procedures of a panel of examiners should strive to achieve inter-marker consistency. Several aids to achieve this consistency include the use of assessment criteria for each task, marking schemes, anonymous marking to mitigate potential assessor bias, and double-marking and moderation procedures. Additionally, the university has established mechanisms for anonymous marking of student scripts and dissertations under examination conditions.

7. Moderation

Moderation is a critical process that monitors the proper implementation of assessment and marking practices to ensure consistency within a module and between modules at the same level. It aims to match learning outcomes, guarantee fair marking, and align with the established marking criteria. Moderation can be either internal or external.

The moderation process includes three stages:

Stage 1: To ensure:

That the assignments detailed in the module specification properly reflect the academic, generic, and cognitive learning outcomes of the module.

- n That the total package of assignments for the module does not exceed the specified word limit or its equivalent.
- n That assignment titles and tasks are appropriate and where necessary different from the previous assignments for the same module.
- n That arrangements for the approval of individually negotiated assignments are clear.
- n The external examiner is involved in the moderation of all assessment tasks for modules contributing to final degree classification.

Stage 2: To ensure:

- n That the marking properly reflects the intentions of the assignment and the learning outcomes of the module.
- n To ensure that there is consistency of marking across the module and between modules of the same level. This stage occurs after the module has been completed and the first marking has taken place. This might be achieved by second marking, blind second marking or sampling.

Normally marking of examination scripts and assignments should be done within a week after an examination or assignment has been submitted.

Stage 3: Moderation Report

- n A brief report on the process and the outcomes of the process of moderation should be included.



Our External Examiners are moderators of standards. Programme teams, that is, Deans, Heads of Department are responsible for ensuring that appropriate samples of assignments from each module are sent to the External Examiner for moderation.

As well as receiving samples of assessed work, External Examiners may be asked to consider individual student cases.

For example:

- n To adjudicate on a disputed grade following extensive internal moderation.
- n To advise on alleged plagiarism.
- n To consider exceptional/outstanding work that has been awarded a high grade.
- n To consider work of failed rating.

External Examiners should normally see all failed assessments as well as all First Class Passes.

8. Second Marking of Dissertations and Final Year Projects

All final year dissertations and postgraduate theses undergo independent second marking. This process is typically blind, with the second marker unaware of the first marker's grade. The final student grade is determined by averaging the marks from both markers and the student presentation mark. Records of this process are maintained and made available to external examiners.

9. External Examiners

Subject External Examiners have the authority to review all forms of subject assessment, including examination scripts, coursework, project reports, design work, and dissertations. The expectation is for detailed scrutiny of approximately one third of the modules assigned to the external examiner each academic year, providing essential input into the university's quality assurance framework.

10. Conclusion

Blantyre International University's approach to marking ensures the validity and reliability of student assessments. This process involves three stages: preparation, creation of a marking rubric, and the actual marking. The university adopts multiple marking approaches, including the model answer, holistic, and formula-based methods, based on the nature of the assessment task. External examiners are provided with samples for review, and they play a vital role in maintaining academic standards.