**Annex 5: Assessment and Feedback Strategy – 2022-25**

# **Introduction**

Assessment is a primary way that we ensure and express academic standards. It is also a vital lever for promoting student learning, engagement, and satisfaction. As part of the University’s mid-term review of Education and Student Experience (Kent 2025 Plan), this Assessment and Feedback Strategy charts a path for enhancing students’ experience of assessment and feedback.

Our overall goal is to embed a new, successful strategy for assessment and feedback that holistically supports staff in measuring student learning, boosting satisfaction, promoting equity and inclusion, improving graduate outcomes, and preparing students for future success. This work is supported by the cross-institutional Assessment & Feedback Steering Group (ASFG).

# **Drivers for Change**

We face both external and internal threats and opportunities that drive the aims and strategies we detail below.

Externally, the impact of the pandemic period was wide-ranging, but it particularly highlighted the challenges of supporting online assessment practices. Universities need to re-imagine assessment to offer more varied forms of assessment that leverage technological advances, reflect course and module intended learning outcomes (ILOs), balance workloads for staff and students, and ensure academic integrity.

At the same time, our regulatory landscape has changed. Universities must meet new Office for Students (OfS) requirements related to assessment to ensure compliance (embodied in our Assessment Regulations Framework, ARF). The OfS expects HE providers to ensure graduate outcomes meet threshold standards, while delivering an excellent experience for all students. Specifically, the OfS has set various student outcomes thresholds for continuation, completion, and progression as conditions for registration as an HE provider. Thus, providers are now accountable for continuously monitoring outcomes, that are not always adequately captured through our QA processes or practices.

Beyond meeting the OfS threshold requirements for continuation, completion, and progression, University performance is also benchmarked against the sector through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), that is based on these student outcome metrics, as well as those for student experience, including satisfaction through the National Student Survey (NSS).

This Assessment and Feedback Strategy outlines practices that are vital to achieving these key performance indicators. To address these new OfS conditions, we have developed our Assessment and Feedback Regulations Framework (ARF) and revised our associated academic regulations and Codes of Practice to ensure compliance, as well as to enhance assessment and feedback practice that will improve student experience and outcomes.

The sector is also focusing on employability, student mental health, development of graduate skills/ attributes such as those associated with sustainability and inclusivity. The OfS has set stretching targets for eliminating awarding gaps by 2030 that we are addressing through our Access and Participation Plan. Assessment and feedback design has an important role to play in addressing each of these sector agendas. The recent launch of ChatGPT and other generative AI writing tools, has prompted a review of the impact on teaching and learning and specifically, assessment practices.

We are also addressing pressing internal strategic challenges surrounding our educational delivery at Kent through a combination of reviews of our portfolio and market trends, timetabling systems and modes of delivery, alongside this strategy. This process involves consolidating course offers and pathways, building in course sustainability and flexibility to better respond to changes in recruitment, staffing or market demand.

Rethinking how students can best meet desired learning outcomes, including those at the course and stage level as well as for individual modules, involves integrated assessment and feedback practices. Specifically, clarifying and aligning ILOs with appropriate level descriptors and ensuring provision successively builds student learning towards the achievement of ILOs, as well as graduate attributes and outcomes.

Better integrated assessments at course level could balance workload for staff and students, that would support students’ mental health, their sense of belonging and cohort identity. Enabling students to engage in more peer and group work or authentic assessments, would build their graduate skills and attributes for employment. Kent Union has engaged in an extensive consultation process on authentic assessment with students in Divisions (2023) that will inform this work going forward.

The purpose of this Strategy is to tackle these external and internal drivers, drawing on sound theoretical and evidence-based principles as outlined in the Guidance section below. Research-informed and practically minded, it is intended to stimulate discussions in Divisions and support academics in Schools to re-imagine provision, processes, and assessment and feedback practices in ways that will assure standards and improve student experiences and outcomes.

# **Aims**

The strategy is intended to:

1. Clarify expectations of university staff regarding assessment and feedback practices.
2. Support a transformation of assessment and feedback processes and practices consistent with:
	1. OfS thresholds for quality under **Condition B4**, *which’ requires universities to ensure students are assessed effectively and receive credible qualifications that stand the test of time*’.
	2. Level qualifications [**Annex 2**] including assessment equivalence across different types of assessment and across modules [**Annex 1**].
	3. Student feedback from the extensive Kent Union consultations on assessment and feedback.
	4. The research-informed principles outlined in the recommendations section below.
3. Place assessment and feedback design at the heart of course development activities related to:
	1. simplifying our portfolio;
	2. meeting other internal strategic priorities such as education for sustainable development, mental health, and student satisfaction;
	3. enhancing student experience and outcomes [i.e. continuation, completion and progression].
4. Promote course-level planning of assessment and feedback designs to:
	1. scaffold complex course learning outcomes, including [Kent’s graduate attributes](https://www.kent.ac.uk/guides/grad-goals), over multiple modules;
	2. promote integration of learning and skills development by students across the degree course;
	3. consider student feedback gathered through module evaluations, the National Survey of Student, student voice forums and other means;
	4. more effectively manage staff and student workload.
5. Focus critical attention on the ways that assessment and feedback practices are related to attainment gaps.

# **Actions**

We will achieve these aims through the following strategic actions:

1. Embed the University’s Assessment and Feedback Regulations Framework (ARF) to ensure alignment with OfS conditions of registration.
2. Encourage staff to review their assessment and feedback practices using the requirements and implicit values outlined in the ARF, through course and module approval processes, a new continuous monitoring process, Periodic Course Review and external examiner feedback.
3. Bring together and promote guidance and documentation associated with assessment and feedback design and enhancement into a single, cross-referenced, web-based *Staff Guide to Assessment and Feedback* and *Course Leaders’ Guide to Rethinking Assessment and Feedback* *at the Course Level.*
4. Create and promote a readable, cross-referenced, web-based *Student Guide to Assessment and Feedback*.
5. Work with individual academic staff and teams through the AFS/PGCHE, train-the-trainer type workshops with leaders in each School and expert support to course teams in rethinking and revising assessment and feedback practices.
6. Work with academics to support students in understanding academic integrity, intended learning outcomes, assessment expectations, assessment criteria, and how to seek out, interpret and use feedback from a variety of sources.
7. Leverage Continuous Monitoring Reports to automatically capture assessment and feedback practices across the University and changes in those practices over time.
8. Evaluate the impact of different types of assessments and feedback practices on student outcomes and awarding gaps to inform practice.

# **Measures of success**

We have sequenced the measures of success according to the chronology of implementation and a theory of change about how our strategic actions will lead to our intended, downstream impacts. If we produce and promote appropriate resources and professional development activities, we assume staff will engage with those and change practices accordingly. If practice is enhanced, we’ll see longer term changes in key measures related to academic integrity, satisfaction, and outcomes.

1. Engagement with resources provided (views/downloads from the website).
2. Participation in course redesign activities described in strategies 5 and 6.
3. Changed practices consistent with the vision laid out in Aim 2, as measured through revised Continuous Monitoring Review and module and course change approvals.
4. Improved academic integrity as indicated by:

a. engagement with/completion with the University’s Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism module;

b. reduction in referrals for Academic Misconduct;

c. reduction in disciplinary actions.

1. Enhanced student ratings on module evaluation questionnaires.
2. Improved NSS/PTES scores, especially on assessment and feedback.
3. Enhanced student outcomes against key performance indicators [awarding gaps, continuation, completion, and progression].

# **Guidance for staff**

Transformation of our assessment and feedback must reflect the latest research on practices that have a demonstrable effect on student learning, engagement, and satisfaction.

We draw on the recommendations for practitioners in our review of literature from 2016-2022 (Pitt and Quinlan, 2022), which summarises relevant evidence and provides recommendations for practitioners (to be supplemented with practical advice, online resources and professional development for staff in due course, supported by AFSG).

These recommendations are intended to offer initial guidance to Divisions and Schools as they review their assessment and feedback practices and have been cross referenced to the ARF in red and to NSS themes in green.

1. **Aim to incorporate at least one high-impact practice into each student’s experience.**

Integrative capstones, work-integrated learning, undergraduate research experiences, and course level reflective portfolios are all examples of practices that embed public demonstrations of skills and knowledge (i.e., rich assessment) and feedback along with six other key educational principles. Combining powerful educational principles and practices creates high impact. (ARF – 7.6; Teaching Quality, A&F)

1. **Use, evaluate and refine authentic assessments.**

Authentic assessments are 1) realistic, 2) challenging and 3) supportive of students’ understanding of quality standards and their ability to self-assess. Their use promotes student satisfaction, engagement and achievement.

How to approach their design and implementation:

a. Ensure assessments and related feedback are aligned with complex, higher order intended learning outcomes and levels.

b. Prepare students for new assessment demands. Students are often nervous when facing new types of assessments; they benefit from early, low-stakes exposure and preparation.

c. Scaffold, scaffold, scaffold. When engaging with complex problems and new processes (such as collaboration or cross-cultural teamwork), students need prompts, structures, templates, guides, practice, informational supports, resources and emotional support.

(ARF 7; Teaching quality; Assessment & Feedback; Organisation & Mgt)

1. **Attend to the specific evidence-based requirements of each type of authentic assessment.**

For example:

a. Be cautious when considering high-tech or high-fidelity simulations, since cheaper, lower-tech options might be equally effective.

b. Attend to the design of related learning activities in and around high-tech simulations, as these are essential to ensure that learning is harnessed from the unique feedback opportunities afforded.

(ARF 9.2; Assessment & Feedback)

1. **Incorporate carefully designed groupwork across each student’s course**.

Group assessments can enable the practice of valuable collaboration skills, improve student performance, support the integration of diverse students, address EDI issues and reduce marking burdens on staff. To ensure groupwork fulfils its potential, prepare students for collaboration through scaffolding cross-cultural teamwork skills and processes, assign groups (don’t rely on student self-selection), create group goals, and ensure individual accountability in final products. Given the centrality of the teamwork and communication skills involved, scaffolding might occur over the course of a course, with multiple opportunities for collaborative projects.

(ARF 9; Learning Community, Learning Opportunity)

1. **Shift the culture of feedback to emphasise and support students’ use of it.**

Feedback is more than ‘telling’; students need to understand it and use it (part of Academic Literacy). Increasing students’ sense of responsibility in the feedback process and promoting more proactive reading, interpretation, and enactment (use) of feedback has been shown to improve students’ learning. Lecturers should foster a culture of shared responsibility around feedback. Feedback interventions can be used across a students’ course to build such a culture. (ARF 9; Assessment & Feedback)

1. **Treat feedback as part of an ongoing, positive relationship, not a one-off event.**

a. Opportunities for dialogues about feedback with lecturers and peers improves students’ learning outcomes. Feedback interventions are particularly effective when they occur within formative opportunities (i.e., drafts), so students can act on feedback to improve their work before submitting it for a mark.

b. Design multiple opportunities across a course for teacher and peer feedback. It is better for students to generate than receive peer feedback; generating feedback can improve students’ enactment of feedback and subsequent outcomes.

c. Anonymous marking misses opportunities to build productive feedback dialogues and ongoing educational relationships.

(ARF Principle 6 & 7.6.2; Student Voice, Learning Community)

1. **Help students understand assessment criteria and standards**. Assessment criteria and standards aligned to authentic learning outcomes define quality work in the field. Thus, they are central to learning in the discipline or profession, not just something that is done to earn a mark. Learning and quality standards can be achieved by spending time within curricula designing and reviewing assessment criteria or rubrics and working with and applying criteria against exemplars or students’ actual work-in-progress. Practice with assessing and giving feedback to peers helps students internalise quality standards. (ARF 7 & 8; Assessment & Feedback)
2. **Be aware that students come with different experiences of, expectations of, and preparedness to learn from feedback**.

Feedback experiences and expectations may be influenced by different cultural or educational backgrounds. Students also have different levels of emotional maturity needed to cope with constructive feedback. Feedback that enhances students’ self-confidence can help them cope with the higher expectations teachers may communicate in feedback. (ARF 7.6; Assessment & Feedback)

1. **Increase opportunities for peer assessment and peer feedback**.

These activities can help students develop the necessary skills to engage in self-assessment that will help them in their work. They work best when there are repeated opportunities. (ARF 7.4, 8.3 & 8.4.4: Learning Community, Learning Opportunity).

1. **Scaffold support prior to and during episodes of peer feedback and peer assessment**.

Practitioners should design peer assessment and feedback opportunities that promote dialogue about standards, quality and enactment of feedback so they improve students’ learning. Practitioners should look beyond one instance and use multiple opportunities to build upon each other, across a course of study (ARF 7.6 & 8.2; Assessment & Feedback).

1. **Evaluate educational technologies in relation to the educational goals they support and principles they afford**.

Make use of the affordances of immediate feedback, personalised feedback, video and screencast feedback and anonymous, asynchronous peer assessment. Technologies can effectively support gamification, peer interactions, community building, wider sharing of student work, greater creativity in assessment products, greater authenticity in processes or products, and immediate, personalised feedback. Benefits accrue from using these affordances of technology. Attend to whether a technology is simply replicating a low-tech option or whether it presents opportunities for incremental improvements through these educational principles or more radical improvements to educational processes. We recommend that educators attend to and design for the underlying educational principles that are likely responsible for associated gains in satisfaction, engagement or performance. (ARF 7.6 & 9; Teaching quality; Assessment & Feedback; Learning Opportunities; Learning Resources)

1. **Explore social, ethical and behavioural interventions in relation to academic integrity,** not just technical or legal solutions.

Concerns about academic integrity have come to the fore particularly in relation to online exams used during the pandemic, though other formats are also susceptible to plagiarism and academic misconduct (ARF 10).

# **References**

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