Policies and Procedures for the Management of Assessment
Assessment Grading, Criteria and Marking

The purpose of this paper is to **define** and **prescribe** institutional policy on assessment grading, criteria and marking and to provide outline **guidance** on their development and deployment.

Definitions

Standard descriptors sketch out in broad terms what is expected of students at a particular level. They are too generic to support making grading decisions for individual assignments, and so need to be interpreted into specific marking criteria for each task.

Marking criteria are used to judge the standard to which each learning outcome has been achieved. They need to be specific to the assignment because they need to link the criteria and the intended learning outcomes for the unit.

Verification refers to the practice of peer review of assignment briefs, which should include marking criteria, and which should be incorporated into the unit handbook. Verification is usually carried out by a colleague from a different unit and by the external examiner. [See 'Responsibilities in Marking and Moderation'].

Institutional Requirements

These institutional requirements support the QAA quality code indicator which expects institutions to "have transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks. "(QAA 2011, indicator 7).

Institutional standards descriptors should form the basis for the development of marking criteria at each level (Appendix 1). **Marking criteria** need to be provided for **each assignment task**. Programme teams may choose to use similar criteria for particular tasks at the same level across the programme (eg essays, presentations, exams, portfolios), or may use different criteria for each task. Criteria should be included in the unit handbook [see Communication of Assessment Arrangements to Students].

The use of common standard descriptors across a level or a complete programme will make it easier for students to judge their progress between different units and should facilitate moderation discussions about assignments.

University Standard Descriptors

The University Standard Descriptors are designed to be a reference point for assessment criteria in the appropriate subject area and to provide a common language for differentiating level and performance within each level. Programme teams are encouraged to use the generic criteria as a basis for evaluating and developing their own, discipline-specific criteria for each level of their own taught curriculum.

The University Standard Descriptors are based on the University Graduate Outcomes (employability and sustainability outcomes). It is therefore likely that the criteria for any particular assignment task will use a subset of the appropriate descriptors at that level.

Having achieved the full degree award at a given level, students should have been able to demonstrate learning at the appropriate level across all of the graduate outcomes. Subject specialists are best placed to interpret the generic descriptors into discipline-specific language and professional context for a given topic and form of assessment.

At Unit Level

Assignment tasks should be clearly defined and demonstrate a logical relationship to the unit's intended learning outcomes. The marking criteria for assessing student performance on the task should reflect the University Standard Descriptors for that level of the curriculum and show how each grading band can be achieved.

Programme teams may choose to use similar schemes for particular tasks at the same level across the programme (eg essays, presentations, exams, portfolios), or may use different schemes for each task. Criteria should be included in the unit handbook.

MMU Assessment Regulations state that all elements of summative assessment within a unit shall be marked out of 100. The weighted average mark for the unit is calculated from the marks for the individual elements of summative assessment.

Departments must have in place systems for checking the computation of marks in individual assessment tasks and for whole units and for ensuring that marks are recorded accurately. Where marks are stored electronically provision should be made for appropriate back-up copies.

Moderation of assessed work should be carried out according to the document 'Responsibilities in Marking and Moderation'.

Appendix 1: University Standards Descriptors

The basic aim of these standards is to develop a shared language to describe student achievement.

The standards are composed of a series of statements which describe an acceptable level for each of the university's graduate outcomes across each of the five levels taught at the University. The full set of standard descriptors then offer a model for differentiating performance at each level.

The standards need to be interpreted for each discipline and assignment task to create marking criteria for each task: words such as information, data sources, theory, practice and contexts such as community, appropriate audience, professional values and standards and team-work will require different approaches in different subject areas. The scope and context of the assignment task should also be considered when setting criteria: what is appropriate range and depth? Not all of the standard descriptors will be needed for each assignment task.

The table below shows a summary of the pass level descriptors for each taught level, to show the progression expected along the levels.

Detailed descriptors for all levels can be downloaded in editable form (Word document), or as PDFs for each level.

Level 3   PDF

Level 4   PDF

Level 5   PDF

Level 6   PDF

Level 7   PDF

For further guidance on using the University Standard Descriptors, see the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching website
http://www.celt.mmu.ac.uk/assessment/index.php

University Standard Descriptors: Summary of requirements for a pass at all levels of taught courses

Graduate Outcome	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7
1. Apply skills of critical analysis to real world situations within a defined range of contexts	Links between theory and practice are identified.	Links between theory and practice are analysed in a basic way.	Links between theory and practice are constructed.	Problems are solved with some reference to theory and practice and with evidence of some critical reflection.	Novel and complex problems are solved with reference to theory and practice
2. Demonstrate a high degree of professionalism* eg initiative, creativity, motivation, professional practice and self management.	The characteristics of a professional are identified.	An acceptable number of the characteristics of a professional are applied to their own work	Work is evaluated with respect to the characteristics of a professional.	There is evidence of the ability to work competently with reference to professional standards and values, able to reflect on their own practice	There is evidence of the ability to work autonomously with reference to professional standards and values, reflecting critically on their own practice.
3. Express ideas effectively and communicate information appropriately and accurately using a range of media including ICT	Work is recognisably structured and presented to a small group of peers.	Ideas are presented adequately to an audience of peers using a defined range of strategies and media.	Work is clearly communicated using a range of strategies and media.	Work is presented to a selected audience using a range of strategies and media	The outcomes of their work are presented clearly and appropriately to a defined audience using a range of strategies and media
4. Develop working relationships using teamwork and leadership skills, recognising and respecting different perspectives	The characteristics of successful teams are identified.	Evidence of contribution to a team to complete defined activities is presented.	Evidence is shown of ability to work in a team as either leader or member as needed to complete projects and identify strengths and weaknesses of performance.	There is evidence of working effectively in a team as either leader or member as needed to complete complex projects. Evidence of reflection on their performance within the team.	There is evidence of contribution to a team as either leader or member as needed to scope and complete complex multi-faceted projects and of some reflection on their own performance and that of others within the team
5. Manage their professional development reflecting on progress and taking appropriate action	The key features of a professional development plan are described.	Appropriate opportunities for their own professional development are identified.	Professional aspirations and action plans are articulated.	A plausible professional development plan is produced	Demonstrate a vision of themselves and their professional futures
6. Find, evaluate, synthesise and use information from a variety of sources	Information presented in the course is applied to new questions or situations.	Information from primary and secondary sources is collected, analysed, interpreted and applied to specific problems under supervision.	A project is designed and carried out to collect, analyse and critique information from primary and secondary sources under supervision.	A project is designed, planned and carried out using an appropriate range of primary and secondary sources. The results and/or outcomes are evaluated accurately.	A project is planned and carried out to gather information from appropriate primary and secondary sources and synthesise the results
7. Articulate an awareness of the social and community contexts within their disciplinary field	Social and community contexts within the disciplinary field are described	The social and community contexts of the discipline are identified	Social and community contexts of the discipline in work are identified.	The social and community contexts of the discipline are considered in drawing conclusions and making recommendations	The social and community contexts of the discipline are considered critically in drawing conclusions and making recommendations

* As defined in the discipline area

Appendix 2: reference list of descriptive terms

The table of adjectives is intended to provide an indication of the language which is commonly used to differentiate performance across a level.

Grade band	Indicative language
86%-100%	Creative, insightful, illuminating, inspiring, exciting, authoritative
70%-85%	Persuasive, sophisticated, original, reflective, ambitious, meticulous, critical, convincing, unexpected
60%-69%	Fluent, thorough, analytical, precise, rigorous
50%-59%	Clear, confident, consistent, thoughtful, accurate, careful, congruent, coherent
40%-49%	Satisfactory, sufficient, adequate, descriptive,
35%-39%	Incomplete, inadequate, inconsistent, derivative, contradictory, superficial, irrelevant, limited
20%-34%	Erroneous/wrong, missing, extremely limited, inappropriate, insufficient, incoherent, unstructured
0%-19%	Absent/none, lacking, formless, detrimental