

Assessment and Feedback **Policy**

Department of Economics
University of Warwick

Undergraduate and Postgraduate Degrees

Executive Summary

The Economics Department at Warwick University is focused on enhancing teaching and learning and we have already invested heavily in this area, as part of our longstanding commitment to developing and implementing a robust teaching and learning strategy. We actively encourage student engagement in the learning process and see assessment and feedback as two key elements within this overall strategy. We are continuously innovating to find new methods of improving the assessment and feedback process as a means of enhancing the student experience.

Assessment includes both formative and summative work and we aim to ensure that the assessment methods across all modules are robust, consistent and provide a rigorous approach to assessing work. Both summative and formative assessments are regarded as important aspects of the learning process for students, as they provide an invaluable source of guidance and feedback to ensure that students can improve with each assessment they complete.

Feedback is an integral part of any assessment, as it helps students to reach their full potential, by identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their work and the actions that are needed to develop their understanding and enhance their performance. Feedback can be at the level of the individual student's piece of work and understanding or can take the form of generic feedback. Whatever the type of feedback, students can use it to reflect on their progress and make improvements in light of the comments they received. The most basic form of feedback is the grading and comments received on a piece of work. However, feedback comes in many other forms, including face-to-face meetings in office hours, peer-to-peer feedback and solutions to seminar questions. While the Department will continue to invest resources in these areas to ensure that all students can benefit from this invaluable resource, we are also intent on developing new mechanisms through which feedback can be provided to enhance the student experience even further.

As a Department, we want our students to be confident in the assessment process and thus in the marks they receive. By setting out the rigorous steps taken in marking assessments, we aim to create a transparent system, which students trust. Furthermore, by providing good quality feedback, students will always have the opportunity to reflect on the critique of their work and understand the reasoning behind their mark. We hope that these steps will enhance the teaching and learning process, generate and maintain trust and confidence in the Department's policies and procedures and thus improve the overall student experience.

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August 2013

Chapter 1: Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process, providing crucial information to both staff and students. In the Economics Department, modules are typically designed to include an examination and another assessment, such as an essay or group project, as we believe that different skills can be developed through diverse assessment methods. Irrespective of the assessment method in place and whether the assessment is summative or formative, we understand the importance that students place on the marks they receive. We want our students to have confidence in the marking procedures we have in place, such that there are no doubts over the accuracy of the mark awarded on any piece of work. The main assessment procedures are set out below.

Examinations: Examinations provided by the Department of Economics are marked by at least two internal members of staff¹. ‘The First Marker’ is primarily responsible for marking each and every script. They must annotate scripts in the margins using the four symbols below, and associate the corresponding meaning and actions with them.

Marginal Symbol	Meaning	Action by First-Marker
✓	Correct point	Circle or underline text if appropriate
X	Incorrect point	Circle or underline text
^ or /	Omission	Explain what (briefly) in the margin
?	Unclear, or irrelevant	Circle or underline text that is unclear. Put a line through text that is irrelevant.

On non-technical papers and essay questions, the First Marker(s) should write a one- or two-line comment at the end of each question that is clearly legible and capable of being understood by moderators, external examiners and students. First Marker(s) must ensure that marks allocated to each question are transcribed onto the front cover of the exam script and a total mark reported on the front cover and that total mark should be entered onto [My.Economics](#), where the First Marker(s) will then sign them off, indicating that the scripts are ready for moderation.

The Moderator will have access to the marks and comments left by the First Marker and they are responsible for reviewing each and every exam script to check whether or not the mark awarded is correct and fair. In particular, to ensure that the First Marker(s) has left evidence of having marked every part of each question and check the appropriateness of the marking – making any adjustments to marks as seems appropriate in consultation with the First Marker(s). If the Moderator feels that the rules for marking (outlined above) have not been adhered to, then the Moderator should return all scripts to the First Marker(s).

The Moderator is also responsible for ensuring that the marks recorded within the script correspond to those recorded on the front of the script (including adding up). Once this has been completed, the Moderator should then sign off the final marks on [My.Economics](#) (confirming they have gone through the moderation process) and return all of the scripts to the Undergraduate/Postgraduate Office, as appropriate. Further clerical checks are then undertaken to ensure accuracy.

The next stage of the assessment procedure involves external examiners, who are senior and experienced academics from other UK universities. One part of their role is to review the marking and moderating processes in place and provide us with feedback. Any issues that are raised will be given

¹ Excluding first year exams, where only a sample of examinations on each module are moderated by a second marker.

consideration and changes will be implemented to ensure that our processes remain consistent and robust.

A second part of their role is to review a random sample of scripts from second and third year undergraduate modules and all postgraduate modules.² They review each of these scripts with the benefit of the internally agreed marks and the distribution of marks for each module. They must firstly decide whether or not the internally awarded marks are correct and secondly, based on the scripts they have, they will form a view on whether or not the marking on all the scripts has been applied fairly and consistently. This external layer of review provides an additional mechanism of ensuring robustness, accuracy, fairness and consistency across all modules in the Department. It is only after all of these processes have been completed and the external examiners are fully satisfied with the whole examination process, that the examination marks can be signed off and results can be released to students.

Finally, Exam Board meetings take place where the distribution of marks for each student and module are reviewed to confirm that all marks and Classifications are appropriate and fair. Further information concerning the role of and the decisions available to Exam Boards together with the Classification of Degrees can be found in the [Undergraduate](#), [MSc](#) and [MRes](#) Handbooks. The Exam Boards will use their discretion where relevant, especially when dealing with cases of mitigating circumstances, which are discussed in Appendix A5. It is only after all of these processes have been completed and the external examiners are fully satisfied with the whole examinations process that the marks can be signed off and results can be released to students.

Essays/Tests: Essays and tests are both vital parts of the learning process and further details regarding their role can be found in Appendix A2. Further details regarding the submission of essays can be found in Appendix A3. Essays and tests are often first marked by Teaching Assistants, who have been involved in teaching the module and thus have excellent knowledge of the content and expectations of the module leader. In some cases, the First Marker will be the module Lecturer and the responsibility for moderating will then be given to another member of staff. The responsible Lecturer provides solutions/guidance and the marking criteria and a meeting will have taken place between all parties to ensure that everyone involved in the marking process has all the necessary information. Annotations should be made throughout the essay/test with any corrections and guidance. For tests, there should be a clear indication of the allocation of marks for each question and in the case of essays, a detailed feedback sheet should be provided. Lecturers will see early batches of the marked assignments by each Teaching Assistant to ensure that their marking is consistent and in line with expectations, thus giving everyone further confidence in the marking of the assignments.

Once the Teaching Assistants have marked their allocated assignments, a random sample of 10% will be moderated by the Lecturer responsible and students will be emailed as to when their assignments, with feedback, are available for collection from the Undergraduate or Postgraduate offices. This will be within 20 working days.³ While the quality of feedback is important, so is the time it takes for students to receive it. We therefore aim to meet this deadline, but have also put provisions in place, as outlined in Chapter 2, to ensure that the quality of our feedback and marking is maintained.

Further details regarding submission, appeals, the role of essays and tests, the 20 working day deadline and mitigating circumstances can be found in Appendix A2 – A7.

² In any year, the external examiner will receive both 2nd and 3rd year exam papers for the same cohort of students for Undergraduate Programmes and will receive the exam papers for Postgraduate students.

³ The deadline does not refer to the date by which work must be marked, but to the date by which students are able to collect their work. It should be noted here that it is the date from which work can be collected and not the date on which students actually choose to collect their work that is important. This distinction is particularly important regarding appeals, as outlined in Appendix A4.

Chapter 2: Feedback

Learning is a dynamic process and feedback plays an important role in helping students to develop their knowledge and build confidence in their own abilities. Therefore, in the Department of Economics, our aim is to provide students with as much feedback as is reasonably achievable, given the volume of students taught on any module. Students are encouraged to take an active and responsible approach to their own learning and development and so they must make the most of the various forms of feedback available. Much of the time at university is spent receiving feedback, but students are often unaware that they are being given it. Further background concerning the importance of feedback can be found in Appendix B1. As feedback is such an important element of the teaching and learning strategy, it is important for students to be aware of all the occasions and methods where feedback is provided, so that they can make the best use of it. Appendix B2 contains further information on each form of feedback.

Written Comments: The annotations and constructive comments provided when marked work is returned to students, which should guide the students as to improvements they can make and allow them to reflect on their performance.

Guided Feedback: When an essay is returned to students, guided solutions and/or feedback will be provided by the Lecturer and students should reflect on these when reviewing their own essay.

Generic Feedback: This includes an overview of the entire cohort of students and their performance on the assignment. Students should use this information to reflect on their performance and how they ranked relative to their peers.

Test scripts: These will be fully annotated by the marker(s), including the mark allocation; right/wrong answers; missing information etc. Students should use this feedback to learn and improve their performance in the next assessment.

Solutions: All tests/problem sets will have a set of written solutions, which should be used by students to work back over the test paper and learn from any mistakes.

Seminars: These feedback sessions are a prime opportunity to ask questions and generate discussion. The solutions/guidance provided in class are an invaluable source of feedback.

Office Hours: These are an opportunity for students to meet with their Lecturers and Tutors on a one-to-one basis and receive invaluable feedback and guidance or simply discuss interesting topics.

Although we want to provide numerous opportunities for students to receive feedback, we also want to ensure that the quality of feedback is maintained. Feedback should not only provide a reflection on the submitted work, but should also suggest areas for development and improvement. This aspect of feedback is vital for the personal and academic development of all students, as it is this which helps students develop and improve as they move from one assignment and one year to the next. We ensure that every Teaching Assistant receives guidance as to what is expected from them in terms of feedback for good, average and poor quality essays and the feedback they provide on the essays is judged against these criteria. The module Lecturer will moderate essays and will review the feedback and if it is felt that the amount of feedback provided is insufficient or does not reflect the mark that has been awarded, the first marker may be asked to re-mark the essay and then re-write their feedback. For further details on the roles of the first marker and moderator, please see Chapter 1.

Despite the variety of methods through which feedback is provided, we are always looking at new methods of providing more and better quality feedback to our students. In the 2012/13 academic year, we invested more resources in the provision of good quality feedback, by giving the responsibility of

sampling feedback on assignments to the Assessment and Feedback Co-ordinator. With a focus on essays, we implemented a Feedback Reward Scheme, which provided those Teaching Assistants marking assignments with a financial reward if the feedback they provided was deemed to be of a good quality. Although this scheme had only been in place for one year, we found that the average quality of feedback did improve and we will thus be investing more resources into this scheme for the 2013/14 academic year. More guidance will be given to Lecturers and especially Teaching Assistants on what we deem to be good quality feedback. This will include more examples of feedback on good, average and poor quality essays to show members of staff exactly how we define good quality feedback. New Teaching Assistants will also be provided with additional and more detailed training at the start of the academic year. We hope that this will provide a further incentive in the marking and feedback process and thus give further assurances that feedback across all essays is consistent, constructive and coherent.

Furthermore, as from the 2013/14 academic year, a new method of feedback will be introduced. 'Forums' are an online platform, where students can post their comments and discuss the issues relating to topics and discursive questions set by the module Lecturer. They will thus act as a more accessible and focused form of peer-to-peer feedback, allowing students to develop a range of skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving and acting as a researcher. Forums will be monitored by Class Tutors, who will summarise the discussions, answer any questions and correct any mistakes that were made.

By encouraging students to respond to each other via the Forum, everyone will be receiving an invaluable source of feedback from their peers. The module Lecturer will also review these Forums to gauge how students are responding to questions and, where relevant will post their own thoughts. Thus, those students who make the most of these Forums will not only receive feedback directly from their peers, but will also receive additional feedback from both Lecturers and Teaching Assistants. Further details concerning Forums and their role within teaching can be found in Appendix B3.

Another key development is the introduction of Development Review Meetings for our final year Undergraduates. Every finalist will meet with a member of staff for up to 30 minutes to discuss their progress so far, ask any questions they might have about their future plans and generally discuss and receive feedback on their personal and academic development. Each student will be asked to reflect on their performance and progress prior to the meeting to ensure that the meeting will be as productive as possible. Further details regarding these Development Review Meetings are in Appendix B4.

Summary

The Economics Department is committed to enhancing the student experience and we believe that assessment and feedback is a key component of our teaching and learning strategy. Each year, key members of the Department will meet to discuss the areas where further improvements can be made and any new initiatives will be outlined in this document.

We welcome feedback from members of staff and from our students on the assessment and feedback processes we have in place and hope that through this, the student experience at Warwick Economics will continue to improve.