

# Assessment Handbook

Edition 3

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## 1. Introduction

This handbook is intended to provide advice and guidance for students in relation to the administration and conduct of assessments at iQualify UK (for courses which include an assessment).

It provides an overview of the relevant iQualify UK policies and different awarding organisation rules and associated policies, regulations and procedures, details of which can be accessed in the relevant course information section of the Teaching Zone.

This Assessment Handbook consists of the iQualify UK rules/regulations for assessment and submission procedures. It is important that all students go through it as it outlines iQualify UK's policy relating to the different elements of assessment that a student has to complete for the fulfilment of requirements for the course. Awarding Organisations have their own assessment policies for their qualifications, and these may differ from the policies in this Handbook, which are for iQualify UK's own qualifications, although there is much commonality, and this Handbook will be helpful to all students to understand the subject. In the event of any discrepancies the Awarding Organisation policies have priority for their own qualifications.

## 2. Terminology

*Assessment items*: a piece of assessed work, e.g. an essay, project, assignment or examination; assessment material should be valid, reliable and authentic.

- validity relates to the need to ensure that the assessment task measures student attainment of the intended learning outcomes
- reliability relates to the need to ensure that the assessment is accurate and repeatable
- authenticity relates to the design of assessments that require students to demonstrate skills and capabilities that represent problems and situations likely to be encountered in the 'real' world

*Assessment brief* - guidance provided for students on how to complete a specific item of assessment, to include information about the nature of the task, the format for presentation, and assessment criteria, and, if used, the marking scheme

*Assessment criteria* - specify the qualities of student work required to successfully complete the assessment item and indicate how particular grades may be achieved

*Grade Descriptors* - describe in broad terms the typical performance required to achieve a particular band of marks or degree class; iQualify UK publishes generic grade descriptors for undergraduate and postgraduate work to be used by course/subject teams as a reference point or benchmark in establishing assessment criteria

*Approval of assessment* - a process involving both internal and external scrutiny to assure assessment items and assessment criteria are appropriate in terms of academic level, and learning outcomes are valid, reliable and authentic and that there is broad equivalence for students across modules/units

*Marking scheme* - a detailed framework for assigning marks, where a specific number of marks is given to individual components of the assessment

*Moderation of Marking* - a process to assure assessment criteria, and thus academic standards, have been applied consistently and that assessment outcomes are fair and reliable

*Internal moderation* - a process of professional engagement by iQualify UK staff to demonstrate that the grades awarded are accurate, appropriate and consistent to ensure parity of standards

*External moderation* - a process of objective engagement by experienced academic peers (external examiners), independent of iQualify UK, to ensure that the level of achievement of students reflects the required academic standards and is comparable to similar programmes nationally

*Assessment Board* - responsible for:

- Acting in accordance with iQualify UK's regulations and procedures and to meet as necessary after each assessment point to fulfil this requirement
- Scrutiny and approval of assessment items and their marking, assuring the appropriate standards for modules/units
- Considering the performance of students on modules/units
- Confirming the grades achieved by students on modules/units

### **3. Principles of assessment**

- IQualify UK believes that assessment is an integral part of effective learning processes, and has established the following principles for the design and management of assessment practice.
- Each module/unit or course element will have an assessment strategy which is aligned with the intended learning outcomes and learning activities.
- All stated learning outcomes for a module/unit/course element will be summatively assessed.
- Assessments will enable students to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of the module/unit/course element and the overall aims and learning outcomes of their course or programme of studies and achieved the standard required for the award.
- Each course will include a variety of assessment types and an appropriate balance of assessment for summative and formative purposes.
- Information about assessment, including the details of assignments and due dates for submission, schedules for examinations, assessment or grading criteria, plus assessment regulations and arrangements for publication of results where these are course specific, will be published in the course information, module outlines or equivalent as appropriate, at the start of the course.
- Assessment tasks and assessment items will be reliable, valid and authentic.
- The scheduling and amount of assessment will be manageable for students.
- Constructive and timely relevant feedback will be an integral part of the assessment process.
- Assessment processes and regulations will be transparent, consistent and equitable across courses.
- Assessment processes and outcomes will be monitored and evaluated through the annual monitoring process.

### **4. Types of Assessment**

The standard types of assessment used by iQualify UK are as follows: assignments, group projects, examinations and dissertations. These are the most common. The details of assessment are given in the introduction to the relevant course, or the specific assessment section for the course in the Teaching Zone. Most courses generally contain two types of assessments: assignment (or a combination of assignments) and an examination. The different types of assessment are defined

below:

## **4.1 Assignments**

The assignment assessments are made up of Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs). TMAs are usually essay or short answer questions, although some courses require extended essays and/or dissertations. You must submit the assignment before the cut-off date unless you have been given an extension.

### **Formative and summative assignments**

Formative assessments are for teaching purposes only and the scores are not counted towards the course results. However, most of the course assignments are summative and scores of these assignments are counted towards the overall score of the course. The details of all the summative assignments for different courses are given in the relevant course information.

### **Submitting TMAs**

All of the TMAs are submitted online through a link on the individual course page on the iQualify UK Teaching Zone. This submission may be checked for plagiarism through plagiarism detection software 'Turnitin'. As a policy, all TMAs are submitted through Turnitin to check for plagiarism. An explanation about plagiarism is given in Appendix 1 of this document.

You should note that you can submit only one file for each TMA (if you submit a second file it will overwrite the last one). You must ensure that your submission contains all the work that requires to be submitted. Unless told otherwise, your file size should not be more than 8MB.

You need to ensure that your TMAs are submitted on time before the cut-off date. If an assignment is not received before the deadline, the TMA will not be accepted and hence will not be marked, unless an extension has already been granted. The cut-off date given on the submission link is the last date to submit your assignment. The submission box is closed one hour before the deadline, e.g. if the submission cut-off date is 18 August 2015, 12:00 hours, the box will close at 11:00 hours. It is the students' responsibility to submit on time.

The system automatically records the submission time and date and constitutes as a receipt for the student.

### **Extension on TMAs**

You are advised to plan well ahead and take appropriate measures to ensure that you submit the assignment on time. In extenuating circumstances, you may request an extension; in such cases you must:

- Inform the student support team well in advance.
- Make a formal request to the Principal with requisite evidence concerning the extension. Please use the Extenuating Circumstances Form attached as Appendix 3

Note: A request for extension should not be considered automatic; an extension is only valid if formally approved by iQualify UK.

## **Late submissions**

All students who are unable to submit on time will be given a grace period of 7 days to submit their assignment under a late submission link on the individual course page. This constitutes a penalty of 10% deduction in the marks. A mark of zero is awarded after the grace period of 7 days elapses.

## **Plagiarism check**

IQualify UK has a strict policy pertaining to plagiarism (see Appendix 1). All TMAs submitted will undergo plagiarism detection software Turnitin. Information on the use of Turnitin is available in the Teaching Zone. An explanation about Turnitin is given in Appendix 2.

- All TMAs can be checked for plagiarism through Turnitin.
- Turnitin will generate an originality report which highlights the plagiarised work in the coursework. The threshold for matches is 30%.
- The coursework will be graded on Turnitin itself.

## **4.2 Examinations**

This component is made of a closed book exam. The question paper will always be an unseen one. The detailed instructions for examination are made available to the students through the course information.

Examinations are held at set dates. Please ensure that you are aware of the examination timetable so that you can make any arrangements for holidays in accordance with the examination timetable. The attendance of examinations is mandatory.

### **Absence from examinations**

If illness or special circumstances prevent you from attending the examination, you may be able to defer to the next sitting of examinations, which is usually the resit examination for the course. Please ensure the following:

- Inform your tutor and student support that you will be unable to attend the examination.
- Any student with an authorised absence will be allowed to take the exam during the resit examinations. In such cases, this will normally be regarded as the candidate's first attempt and the exam paper graded accordingly i.e. no penalties will be applied (although some Awarding Organisations may have different rules).

Note: Any unauthorised absence will constitute as an attempt and students will be awarded a grade of fail for that examination

### **Resit examinations**

All students are allowed one resit examination if they fail to pass on the first attempt or have missed the first examination. All decisions for resits are made after the Assessment Board.

## 5. Policies and procedures

### 5.1 Word count policy

Each assignment brief issued to you will include a specific word count. The word count excludes the title page, executive summary, reference list and appendices. Where assessment questions have been reprinted from the assessment brief these will also be excluded from the word count. All other words ARE included in the word count. Printed words include those contained within charts and tables. Penalties will apply if the work count exceeds the specified word count. Where the word count is exceeded the following penalties will apply:

- Word count exceeded by up to and including 10% - no penalty
- Word count exceeded by more than 10% can be penalised at the discretion of the tutor.

You are required to indicate the exact work count as defined above on the title page of the assessment. The quotation of an incorrect work count will be treated as an attempt to deceive and will be considered as a disciplinary offence.

### 5.2 Feedback policy

Effective and timely feedback will be given to you for all formal and informal assessments including examinations.

Feedback encompasses a marker's comments on your performance in an item of assessment and should be provided on all summative and formative assessments. Types of feedback include, but are not limited to:

- Individual oral feedback
- Group oral feedback
- Written comments for individual students
  - Model answers
  - Generic written or oral feedback, e.g. assessor's or examiner's report.

Feedback on your assessments should:

- Promote learning and enable you to improve your performance in subsequent assessments by indicating areas for improvement and/or setting specific targets or goals for improvement
- Be clearly linked to learning outcomes and assessment criteria provide you with an understanding of the way in which your grade was derived and your relative success in meeting the learning outcomes
- Be based on a consistent course team approach to providing assessment feedback to students.

The details of all formal assessment items should be included in module outlines, together with the deadline for submission and the date by which you will be able to collect the marked assessment item.

In normal circumstances assessment items should be marked and returned to you with feedback within four weeks of the date of submission. Where, for valid reasons, this cannot be achieved, the member of staff concerned should consult with the course leader; agree an alternative date, and inform you of the revised date of return. In such circumstances it may be desirable to provide students with feedback in advance of the return of the assessment item and determination of the provisional grade.

### **5.3 Results and grading procedures**

The results and grading procedures vary for each programme and are available on the Teaching Zone in the respective course information.

### **5.4 Academic difficulty and counselling**

Your personal tutor and the student support team will be available throughout the program to discuss overall program performance with you. iQualify UK makes every effort to ensure your success on your course and is available for consultation regarding any difficulty you may be having. If an academic difficulty arises, you are strongly encouraged to look at the ways you study to see if they can be improved and to speak immediately with your personal tutor and the student support team to determine ways of improving performance.

### **5.5 Student progression**

Depending on the course you are studying, and the method of delivery (online/distance/blended learning) at the end of the term or teaching block you will normally receive a Student Progression Report which notes the overall marks achieved for the subjects taken in the period. These grades are subject to approval by the Assessment Board. In addition, as part of the PDP process (see below) you are encouraged to complete an Assignment Action Plan after receiving feedback from each assignment and a Reflective Statement after the second term or block which have been designed to encourage you to reflect on your achievement so far and put plans in place to further improve your work. These action plans are discussed with your personal tutor at key stages in your studies.

### **Personal tutoring and Personal Development Plan (PDP)**

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a valuable, supported process in which you are encouraged to review and evaluate your learning, progress and performance, allowing you to set realistic and specific goals and to plan for your personal, educational and career development.

At iQualify UK you are assigned a personal tutor at enrolment who will formally contact you at two points during the academic year to support and guide you through this process. You will be required to complete the following documentation as part of this process.

- Student's initial statement
- Skills audit
- Assignment action plans
- Reflective statement

Please refer to Appendix 4 for the PDP Process

### **5.6 Double marking and internal moderation**

The aims of internal moderation and double marking are principally to:

- Provide a check that an assessment has been marked in line with the expressed aims and learning outcomes of the assignment/examination, and in terms of marking criteria;
- Provide assurance for students of fairness of marking and hence the equality of treatment of each student;
- Assure internal consistency of assessment within a module;
- Provide an approach to the comparability of standards across modules within a subject area.

At iQualify UK all summative assessments are subject to double marking, which may include the

following:

- Examination papers
- All course work
- Any assessment which might require substantial element of academic judgement by the marker where the mark awarded by the first marker(s) falls into one of the following categories:
  - All first class/distinction marks;
  - All failing marks;
- Any marking undertaken by persons other than members of iQualify UK's academic staff
- All rubric violations in examinations

#### **Number of students taking the assessment/percentage of assessment to be double marked**

- Up to 5 - 100%
- Up to 20 - minimum of 40%
- 21-50 - minimum of 30%
- 51-100 - minimum of 20%
- 101-200 - minimum of 10%
- Above 200 - a minimum of 20 assessments (or students)

Such sampling should ensure a full range of marks/degree classes is included and all borderline fails.

#### **Mark variances between first and second marker**

These are expected and arise naturally from independent judgment. Nevertheless, the Assessment Board meeting will be given a single set of agreed marks.

Where differences arise in cases where the assessments have been fully double marked, they will be resolved as under. If the difference is less than or equal to 10% and does not affect the grade qualification for that assessment; an average of the difference is taken, else they should be resolved by:

- An average mark (but only where the two marks are within 10% of the total marks and both rest within the same degree classification);
- A discussion between the markers to resolve the difference. The discussion is to be recorded.

Should the above measures fail to resolve the difference; the marks are reviewed and assessed by one of the following to review the assess work and guide the first and second marker:

- The Principal
- A Director
- Any other senior academic staff nominated by the Principal

Note: iQualify UK administrative staff may attend Assessment Board for observation and record keeping purposes.

Normally this should be able to resolve the difference, but in exceptional circumstances the unresolved difference between the marks can be presented to the External Examiner/verifier for finalisation.

Where differences arise in cases where assessments have been moderated, individual marks should not be changed (except in a case of arithmetical error) to ensure that no student may be advantaged or disadvantaged as a result of their assessment being included in the sample.

Instead, depending on the level of difference between the internal examiners the Chair of the Assessment Board should discuss with both markers whether:

- Based on the sample moderated (or an increased percentage), a judgment be applied to the assessment as a whole;
- The entire set of assessments is fully double marked (see possible outcomes above).

The result of any such action should be discussed in full with the External Examiner and Moderator.

### **Organisation of internal moderation and double marking**

The first marker is the person who sets the assessment and is the module leader.

The second markers are earmarked as part of the academic resource meeting at the start of each course thereby avoiding cosy pairs and ensuring consistency across all modules. The second marker has access to the grade given by the first marker and there is generally no blind marking, but verifications do occur as the second marker is given clear evidence of difference in the form of the model answers which are collected at the start of the course.

Note the Chair of the Assessment Board can suggest blind marking for some of the modules.

A clear record is to be kept all pieces of assessment that have been double marked; the program coordinators are responsible for keeping that record. Where blind double marking has occurred, this may be recorded on the assessment itself after both markers have agreed a final mark. In other instances, the work of both examiners in marking the assessment should be clearly seen on the assessment.

### **5.7 Academic Appeals Procedure**

All appeals regarding assessment results and related issues are the responsibility of the relevant Awarding Organisation, and they have their own set procedures which you must follow (usually within a specified number of days after the results are published), and usually require payment of a fee (which may be refunded if the appeal is successful).

## Appendix 1

### Plagiarism

What constitutes plagiarism or cheating?

If you submit an assignment that contains work that is not your own, without indicating this to the marker (acknowledging your sources), you are committing 'plagiarism' and this is an offence. This might occur in an assignment when:

- Using a choice phrase or sentence that you have come across.
- Copying word-for-word directly from a text.
- Paraphrasing the words from a text very closely.
- Using text downloaded from the Internet.
- Borrowing statistics or assembled facts from another person or source.
- Copying or downloading figures, photographs, pictures or diagrams without acknowledging your sources.
- Copying from the notes or essays of a fellow student.
- Copying from your own notes on a text, tutorial, video or lecture that contains direct quotations.

Although you are encouraged to show the results of your reading by referring to and quoting from works on your subject, copying from such sources without acknowledgement is deemed to be plagiarism and will not be accepted by iQualify UK.

We appreciate that poor academic practice may occur due to inexperience or lack of knowledge. So you should study the 'Effective Study Skills' section in the Teaching Zone or take help from the academic staff or your personal tutors. You should also read carefully all the course specific study advice that you receive in your course information, especially statements concerning plagiarism and how to reference your sources. Where plagiarised material is included in assignments, tutors are likely to notice the shifts in style and may be aware of the source. Seek their advice on this early on in your study. iQualify UK also uses plagiarism detection software (Turnitin), which may be applied to all assignments.

The temptation to plagiarise may arise from lack of self-confidence or from a lack of understanding about the aims of the assessment and about what is required of you. Assignments provide a vehicle for assessing your performance during your course and contribute to your overall course result. However, they also assist you in understanding your subject and aid your learning on the course. When you attempt to use the ideas and terms of the course independently you learn more thoroughly and develop your own writing style.

You are likely to perform better in examinations if you have learned how to write your own answers to questions in assignments. By submitting work that is not your own you are denying yourself the benefit of this valuable learning strategy. Copying the work of others would be counter-productive to your goal of understanding the course work and to real achievement. Most students will not wish to take such a negative approach to studying, and iQualify UK does not tolerate it.

You are encouraged to collaborate with others in studying, but submitted work copied from or written jointly with others is not acceptable, unless collaboration is required in the particular assignment. Therefore, you will be asked to acknowledge a statement to confirm that all assessment work you have submitted is your own and that you have not cheated.

Submitting work that has been done by someone else and persistent borrowing of other people's work without citation are obvious instances of plagiarism and are regarded as cheating. Copying

answers from social networking sites is cheating. Paying for work from other sources and submitting it as your own is also cheating. It is intellectually dishonest to cheat. Passing on your assignments to others, with the knowledge that another student may plagiarise the assignment will also lead to a penalty. If a case of plagiarism is proven, this is a serious offence and an award of zero is given.

Please also refer to iQualify UK's Academic Misconduct Policy for more information.

## Appendix 2

### Turnitin

#### Q. What is Turnitin?

A. Turnitin (also known as <http://www.submit.ac.uk/>) is an Internet-based plagiarism-detection service. iQualify UK submits all essays or assignments to Turnitin as a deterrent to plagiarism.

#### Q. How does Turnitin work?

A. Turnitin checks for possible plagiarism by comparing submitted papers to several databases using a proprietary algorithm. It scans its own database(s), and also has licensing agreements with large academic proprietary databases including:

- A current and extensively archived copy of the publicly accessible internet. The company uses a WebCrawler to continually archive the web
- Commercial pages from books, newspapers, and journals
- Student papers already submitted to Turnitin
- Scans all documents uploaded to GradeGuru.com
- Massive proprietary database
- Student paper database

#### Q. How is Turnitin used by iQualify UK?

A. iQualify UK uses Turnitin as part of its formative assessment for the course and not necessarily as a summative assessment. Using it as such becomes a teaching solution to help students to improve their referencing skills. This allows students to manage their assignments via multiple phases of feedback and revision. It also encourages proper citation. A student can re submit as many times before the cut-off date.

#### Q. What is an Originality Report?

A. An Originality Report is an indication of similarities between a piece of work submitted by a student, and a database of previously submitted assignments, websites and other sources. If a match between a submitted assignment and another work is found, Turnitin will highlight the matching text and provide a summary in the Originality Report. When the Originality Report is available to view, a percentage icon will appear in your assignment inbox. The colour of the report icon indicates the overall similarity index of the paper, based on how much matching text was found.

The possible similarity indices are:

- blue (no matching words) green (1 word-24% matching text)
- yellow (25-49% matching text) orange (50-74% matching text)
- red (75-100% matching text)

#### Q. What percentages are safe?

A. This is not clear cut as all work will probably contain some words from other sources. As a guideline 30% (greenish yellow) will suggest that no plagiarism has taken place. However, if the matching text is a continuous block this could be constituted as plagiarism (even if the percentage is 10% or below). It really depends on your work and the requirement of the essay/report

### **Appendix 3**

Extenuating Circumstances Form (ECF)

Follows

## Extenuating Circumstances Form (ECF)

### Confidential

This form must be completed and submitted with supporting third party evidence before any request for coursework extension and/or deferral of coursework or examination can be considered. You should hand all paperwork to your course tutor.

Please read very carefully the accompanying document 'Extenuating Circumstances - Requests for Extensions and Deferral of Assessment: A Guide for Students' before completing and submitting the Extenuating Circumstances Form and supporting evidence.

**Full name** (in CAPITALS): \_\_\_\_\_

**Student ID:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Course of study:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date started:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date of birth:** \_\_\_\_\_

The information that I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I give consent for this information to be disclosed to the relevant examiners and administrative officers at iQualify UK who are responsible for considering extenuating circumstances. I also understand that this claim for extenuating circumstances will be kept on my student record at iQualify UK, and may be referred to at subsequent Assessment Board meetings.

Note that fraudulent claims for extenuating circumstances are taken extremely seriously by iQualify UK and could result in disciplinary proceedings be taken.

**Signature of student:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Specify the overall period of time when your work has been or will be extenuating circumstances (from and to date: day, month and year)**

**2. Complete the information below:**

Module/unit Code and name:

Assessed work affected:

Tutor name:

Date of examination or coursework deadline:

Requested action Extension or Deferral:

**3. Describe your extenuating circumstances – the nature of your problem and how it has or will affect your work**

**4. Supporting evidence – please describe and attach supporting evidence to this form**

It is important that you submit this form to your course tutor no later than the relevant deadline date of the examination or due date. Forms submitted late are unlikely to be accepted unless extreme circumstances prevent submission. Your form should be sealed in an inner envelope clearly marked 'Extenuating Circumstances Form – Confidential' together with your name, programme of study and posted to iQualify UK. Alternatively, if time is short, you can scan the signed document and email it (with all the supporting evidence) to [support@iqualifyuk.com](mailto:support@iqualifyuk.com).

**For use by iQualify UK staff only**

Date ECT received: \_\_\_\_\_

Supporting evidence: Yes/No

Action taken/comments:

Decision about request for extension or deferral

Student notified: Yes/No

Relevant staff notified: Yes/No

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 4**

### **Personal Development Planning Process**

Personal Development Planning (PDP) is a valuable, supported process in which you are encouraged to review and evaluate your learning, progress and performance, allowing you to set realistic and specific goals and to plan for your personal, educational and career development

You are assigned a personal tutor at enrolment who will formally contact you (phone, email, Skype) at two points during the academic year to support/guide you through this process (if applicable to your course). The two meetings will be held as agreed between the tutor and the student.

A session on iQualify UK's Personal Development Planning (PDP) will be available on request from your tutor, in which the procedures and any required PDP documentation will be explained. (Initial Statement, Assignment Action Plans and Reflective Statements). In preparation for the first personal tutor meeting, you will be required to write an 'initial statement' which you need to upload onto the Teaching Zone under the general information section. The initial statement will act as a record of how you came to study with iQualify UK, why you chose to embark on the course and will act as a point of reference for you to return to from time to time during your studies.

#### **First personal tutor meeting**

The first meeting allows your personal tutor and you to get to know one another and to address any initial queries or concerns that the student may have. Your initial statement will be discussed and a short skills audit will be carried out to check that you are coping well. Any completed Assignment Action Plans should also be presented at the meeting. (They are to be filled out by you after each assignment has been returned and require you to think about how well you are doing academically and what you need to improve on). A note will be written on your profile confirming that the meeting took place and any completed documentation will be kept securely in your progress file.

Check list for first meeting:

- Initial Statement
- Skills Audit
- Assignment Action Plans

#### **Second personal tutor meeting**

The second meeting acts as a reflection on your studies with iQualify UK.

You will be recommended to provide your Action Plans for all the assignments you have had returned and a completed Reflective Statement (approx. 1000 words). The Assignment Action Plans from the first and second sessions can be compared to see what areas you have improved on and the Reflective Statement sets out to identify your strengths, weaknesses, what you have learnt in your first year and what actions you will take forward. This is also an opportunity for your future plans to be discussed. A note will be written on your profile confirming that the meeting took place and any completed documentation will be kept securely in your progress file.

Checklist for second meeting:

- Assignment Action Plans
- Reflective Statement