

# Policy on Inclusive Marking

This policy was originally endorsed by the Taught Student Education Board in April 2016. It has been revised to reflect the University's commitment to embedding inclusive practices into all taught student education. It applies to the assessment of written work although updates to the policy may cover a wider range of assessment formats in future.

## Summary

This paper sets out the University's policy on inclusive marking practices and makes specific recommendations for taking disability into account. The intention is to assist colleagues in their approach to marking written work and provide advice and guidance. Academic rigor is of upmost importance and the same marking criteria should be applied in all cases. It is not the responsibility of colleagues to interpret the intended meaning of students' work where the meaning is unclear, but to follow the assessment criteria.

The Leeds Expectations for Assessment and Feedback (LEAF) incorporate the need to take an inclusive approach to marking and feedback. As part of this, colleagues involved in designing and delivering assessment, marking student work and providing feedback should have an understanding of the underpinning principles and the agreed approach set out in this policy. Crucially, if modules or programmes are likely to include measures of competence around accuracy in written expression it is important to consider how this will be made explicit and communicated to students thus enabling those with support needs to arrange that support at an early stage.

Processes for the operationalisation of the flagging of coursework submitted by disabled students<sup>1</sup> are to be addressed and taken forward by the Assessment Functional Managers in 20/21.

## 1. Principles

- I. The University has an overall expectation that all students should be able to communicate their ideas and demonstrate their knowledge effectively in writing. This includes appropriate levels of English language literacy as demonstrated in the correct use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. The expected level of proficiency will differ depending on the nature of the programme.
- II. The University is committed to inclusivity and it is important that this commitment is reflected in assessment practices which reflect the needs of its diverse student population, and that these are fair, transparent and consistently applied. Students for whom English is not their first language and some disabled students such as those with

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<sup>1</sup> where eligible

Specific Learning Difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) could be put at a disadvantage if they are assessed on their skills of technical precision in English rather than their ability to communicate their ideas successfully.

- III. Technical accuracy in written expression should be stated as a learning outcome and linked to marking criteria only if it is deemed to be a competence standard<sup>2</sup> for the discipline.
- IV. Some disabled students, such as those with Specific Learning Difficulties, may have a particular need for feedback that acknowledges their difficulties with written expression and helps them to develop. For this reason, work from this group of students should be flagged to the marker. This is deemed to be a reasonable adjustment under the 2010 Equality Act.

## 2. Marking Practices for all students

- I. Written work for all students should be marked primarily on the content of the ideas. Where spelling, grammar and punctuation are not part of the approved (and published) assessment criteria, work should not be penalised for inaccuracies in the use of English language.
- II. Feedback on coursework should highlight issues relating to written expression if a student's work would benefit from improvements in the use of English. Where technical accuracy in written expression is deemed to be a competence standard for that subject or discipline, this must be specified in the marking criteria and marks awarded accordingly for all students. It is expected that in cases where this forms an explicit part of the marking criteria, information about this is made widely available to students and prospective students.

## 3. Marking Practices for Disabled Students

- I. Around 4% of University of Leeds students have a diagnosis of Specific Learning Difficulty (e.g. dyslexia) or another disability which affects their literacy.
- II. Written work submitted by students for whom there is an evidenced need of support and consideration in this area should be flagged to the marker as common practice. This

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<sup>2</sup> The Equality Challenge Unit provides the following definition of a *competence standard* and its application: "A competence standard is a particular level of competence or ability that a student must demonstrate to be accepted on to, progress within and successfully complete a course or programme of study. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have responsibility for developing non-discriminatory competence standards, and designing a study programme to address these competence standards. HEIs also have the responsibility to ensure that assessment methods address the competence standards" Equality Challenge Unit. 2016. [Online]. [Accessed 04/08/20]. Available from: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/student-recruitment-retention-and-attainment/inclusive-learning-and-teaching/competence-standards-and-reasonable-adjustments>

will enable the marker to bear this in mind when reading and evaluating the work.

- III. Where a disability is flagged to the marker, the marker should follow the guidance in relation to reading the work and providing feedback. Guidance for providing inclusive feedback for disabled students can be found on the [Disability Services webpages](#).
- IV. Where accuracy in written expression is a competence standard, and therefore forms an explicit element of the marking criteria, students should expect to receive marks which reflect this element and clear advice on how to develop any areas of weakness. This advice may include referral to other sources of support within the University.

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