# UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

# ASSESSMENT POLICY

| REVISION HISTORY | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **VERSION NUMBER** | **DATE (dd.mm.yyyy)** | **AUTHOR** | **DESCRIPTION** | **Reviewed and Approved By** | **Approval Date** |
| AP 1.01 | 01.12.2006 | SAIDE | Original | QAP Board | September 2007 |
| AP 1.02 | 19.10.2007 | QAPD | 1st Revision 1 | Senate | |
| AP 1.03 | 21.03.2008 | Dr. Makhafola | 2nd Revision 2 | Senate | |

**Directorate** : **Institutional Planning & Quality Assurance**

**Policy Reference Number** : **IPQA ME/01/2009**

**Date Approved by Council** :

**Signature of the Registrar** :

## 1. Introduction

This draft policy draws together information from the following existing relevant university documents:

- Statute of the University of Venda.4 May 2005.

- General regulations and General Rules for Degrees, Diplomas, and Certificates in the Calendar for 2006.

- Guidelines for Assessment of Students. QG01.01 August 2005.

- Guidelines on Assessment of Students' Projects. QG01.02. August 2005

- Guidelines on Examination of Modules and dissertations/Theses. Document E3 (undated).

- Assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning. (Prof NS Mahoko. Undated).

## 2. Purpose of policy

As assessment exerts one of the most powerful influences on the nature and extent of student learning, this policy especially emphasises the design of assessment to promote student learning. It is assumed that effective assessment is based on sound programme design, development and implementation.

This is acknowledged in the emphasis placed on assessment in the quality assurance approach of the Higher Education Quality Committee. In terms of the ETQA regulations (1998), the HEQC is responsible for ensuring the integrity, validity and reliability of assessment in the HET system. The *Criteria for Institution Audit*, and *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* place great emphasis on assessment, and in particular, the purpose of assessment and the quality management of assessment through internal and external moderation.

The purpose of this policy is to set out the principles upon which assessment at the University should be based in order to enhance the quality of student learning, institutional level policy to assure its validity, reliability, fairness, transparency, and security/rigour.

The purpose of the principles and policy is to provide academics involved in assessment with criteria by which their assessment practices at module and programme level can be measured. It still remains the responsibility of schools and departments to interpret them in school level assessment policies, in programme descriptions, in course outlines, and in individual assessment tasks.

## 3. Scope of policy

The policy covers the following aspects of assessment:

- Assessment design and support
- Quality assurance of assessment (internal and external moderation)
- Management of assessment
- Student rights and responsibilities.

It will apply to assessment in all undergraduate modules as well as to taught modules within structured postgraduate programmes. It also contains a section on the examination of theses and dissertations for higher degrees.

## 4. Maintenance

The Quality Assurance and Promotion directorate is responsible for maintenance of this policy on behalf of the Senate.

**5. Changes**

The Quality Assurance and Promotion directorate is responsible for making the necessary changes to this policy on behalf of the Senate.

**6. Responsibility**

The implementation of the policies will be monitored by Heads of Departments, Deputy Deans and Executive Deans through the relevant academic structures at departmental, school and faculty level. However, the Senate through its executive, Senex, is finally responsible.

**7. ASSESSMENT DESIGN**

**Assessment as integral to teaching and learning**

The guiding principle for assessment design is the HEQC programme accreditation criterion 13(i) which states:

*Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and is systematically and purposefully used to generate data for grading, ranking, selecting and predicting, an for providing timely feedback to inform teaching and learning and to improve the curriculum.*

This policy recognises that assessment, teaching and learning are integrated, rather than separate activities, and that assessment is used to improve the quality of teaching and

learning, not only to judge the achievements of students. In other words, assessment should be used formatively as well as summatively.

## 8. Summative, Formative and Continuous assessment

In each module at least 60% of the final mark is for formatively assessed course work and 40% for final summative assessment, which may be a written examination or an examination equivalent assignment. If a department wishes to deviate from the above in the case of a specific module, it should request permission to do so by providing a rationale for this to the Senate.

## 9. Assessment in terms of learning goals of the programme

Each programme and module description contains a statement of the overall purpose and learning goals and/or outcomes for the programme and module/course, and the assessment of students is clearly related to the overall purpose and learning goals/outcomes.

## 10. Validity and appropriateness

Diverse assessment methods are used to ensure that the full range of learning goals has been appropriately assessed and that it can with confidence be stated that the student has or has not achieved the overall purpose of the module. Part of the internal and external moderation of a module is a consideration of the validity of the assessment in terms of the overall purpose and learning goals.

## 11. Feedback on assessment

Provision is made for individualised and constructive feedback by lecturer/s on at least two formative assessment tasks per module. The module coordinator ensures that the

student receives the marked assessment task in time to use the feedback to inform completion of the next task. The guideline for this is seven days from the time of submission to the time of handing back the assessment task.

## 12. Information to students

Within the first week of the commencement of each course, the module coordinator/lecturer in charge of the course/module makes available to students a user-friendly course outline containing at least the following information:

- Aims and outcomes /learning goals and course content

- Number, format and timing of assessments

- Assessment criteria that will be used (where appropriate)

- Breakdown of the composition of the final mark, indicating the percentage contribution of the individual components of the course/year mark and the final mark if applicable.

- The satisfactory participation requirements with regard to attendance, performance and participation

Each assessment task gives clear instructions and an explanation of how the task will be assessed.

## 13. Reliability of Assessment

The implication of the requirement for reliability for assessment design is that, although assessment can only be a sample, the amount of work assessed should represent a sufficiently comprehensive portion of the curriculum. In addition, assessment instruments and the marking guidelines/memoranda associated with them should promote inter-marker reliability.

Through the internal and external moderation process, the assessment strategy and related

instruments are reviewed for comprehensiveness and the ways in which they promote inter-marker reliability.

## 14. Integrated Assessment

Consideration is given in programme planning to create the opportunity for integrated assessment.

In all professional qualifications, there is at least one integrated assessment procedure in the final year of the programme which is a valid test of the achievement of the overall purpose of the programme.

## 15. Moderation of Assessment

The examination or final summative assessment tasks of final year modules of undergraduate programmes and those of all postgraduate programmes are externally moderated. In the case of final year modules that are assessed completely by continuous assessment, 40% of the assessment tasks are externally moderated.

The examination or final summative assessment tasks of all modules not externally moderated are internally moderated, or, in the case of modules that are assessed completely by continuous assessment, 40% of the assessment tasks are internally moderated.

Moderation consists of two tasks:

- Reviewing the assessment strategy for the module as a whole, as well as specific assessment instruments;
- Remarking a percentage of the scripts in order to quality assure the marking.

## 16. Appointment of internal and external moderators

Internal moderators are appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the School Board of Studies. An internal moderator is usually a member of the academic staff drawn from the same department of school, or from another department or school, who has not been involved in the teaching of that cohort of students in that course/year, unless approved by the Head of Department.

External moderators are appointed by the Council on the recommendation of the relevant School Board of Studies through the Senate. An external moderator is drawn from another University or from an appropriate professional organisation and is competent in the area of study with a relevant qualification at least at the same level as the qualification being examined. A former member of staff shall not qualify to be an external moderator within three years of terminating service at the University.

External moderators are changed regularly and conduct no more than three consecutive external examinations per year course or six consecutive external examinations per semester module.

An external moderator shall not moderate more than three modules per semester.

## 17. Roles and Duties of Internal and External Moderators

Moderators are given access to the course outline as well as samples of course material and course work (indicating how feedback was provided to students) and any other information to provide a suitable background for the moderation.

If the assessments are practical/clinical/oral, the moderator is required to attend, observe and participate in the assessment.

The same moderator is appointed for the main and supplementary or deferred examinations.

Moderators are required to:

- Ensure that assessments are valid, fair, consistent, and accurate.
- Moderate a sample of between 10% and 25% of the scripts, drawing the sample from failing, average and good scripts, and paying particular attention to borderline cases.
- Recommend adjustments to marks for borderline cases and/or for the course as a whole, subject to the approval of the departmental examinations board/school board of studies.

Prepare a report on:

- The validity of assessment methods in relation to the learning outcomes/goals
- The reliability of marking process – fairness and consistency of marking
- The quality of student performance and the standard of student attainment across the results spectrum
- The quality of feedback given to students
- Any concerns or possible irregularities
- Recommendations for improvement of the assessment and the curriculum.

## 18. Examination of theses/dissertations

Assessment criteria and/or an explicit understanding of the quality of research achievement required, plus thesis production, length, referencing and layout requirements, are clearly communicated to students on commencement of their studies in

a user-friendly guide to postgraduate studies.

Supervisors are accountable to the School Boards & Higher Degrees Committee for the quality and regularity of their support. There may be more than one supervisor for a thesis especially if one of the supervisors is not sufficiently qualified to act as an internal examiner.

Anonymous examiners' reports may be made available to students concerned to make corrections and effect the necessary changes.

## 19. Quality assurance of external examination for theses

The institution provides clear guidelines to external examiners on the standard/quality of the research achievement required, on the nature of their task and on the Rules for Postgraduate Degrees (see Part Two of the General Rules for Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates in the University Calendar).

The Higher Degrees Committee, in consultation with relevant examinations committees, considers examiners' reports qualitatively and make considered decisions about examination outcomes.

## 20. Management of Assessment

**Assessment responsibilities of academic staff**

**Lecturers/module coordinators** are primarily responsible for assessment design and support, viz:

- Design of the assessment strategy as a whole as well as individual assessment

instruments,

- Provision of assessment information to students,
- Marking and grading of assessment tasks,
- Keeping of module assessment records,
- Support students in understanding the requirements of the assessment and giving constructive and timeous feedback,
- Implementation of the changes to the module/assessment recommended by internal and external moderators,
- Completing the assessment in the scheduled time
- Contributing to departmental processes of curriculum and assessment review.

Where external markers or workplace assessors are employed, the lecturer is also responsible for the quality assurance of the work of those assessors.

**Deans and Heads of Department**s are primarily responsible for quality assurance of the work of lecturers/module coordinators in regard to the tasks described above, viz:

- Reviewing the assessment strategy and instruments before they are implemented,
- Managing internal and external moderation as required in the policy,
- Conveying assessment results to the School Board of Studies, with a report on how the recommendations of the internal and external moderation have been effected,
- Implementing programme level changes or changes to assessment policy/procedures.

## 21. Roles and responsibilities of the Examinations Office

The functions of this office are administrative, and all proposed adjustments of student results (for example, condonations or the awarding of supplementary examinations) are referred to the relevant academic structure.

The Examinations Office is responsible for:

- Determining the schedule for various assessment tasks within the framework of the approved year plan in the university calendar, and in terms of policy on time limits for various tasks.
- Administration of external moderation, which involves the following:

1. Sending the examination scripts with mark sheet and brief (including timeframes, general requirements and/or department-specific guidelines) to the external moderator
2. Receiving the moderated scripts, reports and mark sheets
3. Referring the reports and mark sheets back to the relevant academic structure for decision-making
4. Payment of external moderator

- Accurate and secure assessment record-keeping at an institutional level
- Publishing of results and communication of results to students
- Communication with departments in relation to student results and awarding of opportunities for re-examination
- Administration of the certification process.

The Examinations Office provides to the Senate statistical reports on student achievement across the university as a whole, indicating trends and making recommendations.

## 22. Authenticity of evidence

There are set procedures for the organization of examination and test venues and these are followed.

Students are educated about what constitutes academic dishonesty and plagiarism, and they are informed of the consequences of academic dishonesty.

Each module coordinator ensures that mechanisms are in place to ensure that student are

doing their own work; for example if discrepancies are observed between marks received for assignments and marks received or written tests, these are investigated.

## 23. Assessment security in examinations

Please see Part 3 of General Regulations, (e) to (j)

## 24. Assessment records and feedback to students on assessment status

Although individual departments design their own mark sheets, these mark sheets reflect

- The assessments that contribute to the course mark/year mark,
- The assessment/s that contribute to the final summative assessment,
- The percentage contribution of the individual components of the course/year mark and the final mark

Individual departments/schools work out their own procedure for marking, grading, providing feedback, and recording the results of assessment as well as for informing students timeously as to their progress.

## 25. Rules for processing students through the system

Please see sections G10, G12, G13, G 14, and G15 of the General Rules for Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates.

The Examinations Office ensures that the rules are applied, but the relevant academic structure at School or Department level makes decisions on individual cases where interpretation of the rules is required.

## 26. Certification

The conferring of certificates, diplomas and degrees on the basis of assessment results for a whole programme rests with the Vice Chancellor and the Office of the Registrar.

Please see the section (m) of Part 3 of the General Regulations.

A range of measures are taken to ensure the security of the process[1].

## 27. Student rights and responsibilities

Please see section (a) of Part 3 of the General Regulations.

---

[1] For example,

- o  Certificates are printed by private company, rather than on campus

- o  School administrators in the various schools check the list of final year students to see if they meet all the academic requirements of the programme for which certification is requested, as well as the matriculation requirements of Higher Education South Africa (HESA).

- o  The electronic system is programmed to allow for a single printing of certification record, and if a repeat printing is required, the system has to be specifically over-ridden.

- o  The computer software extracts relevant data from existing student records for certification, so that errors are not made in re-entering data for certification.

- o  If a student loses a certificate, s/he will be issued with a statement of results only, rather than a new certificate – except in exceptional circumstances.

In identifying students who have not performed satisfactorily, the Head of Department, in consultation with the lecturer, considers attendance, participation and/or performance in assignments or tests.

Students at risk are contacted before the final assessment is due and notified of the procedures to be followed to gain the necessary requirements prior to the end of the course or final assessment.

## 28. Absence owing to illness

Please see section (d) of Part 3 General Regulations.

## 29. Re-submission on assessment exercises other than final summative tasks/examinations

Failed assessment exercises, other than examinations, may be resubmitted within provisions spelt out before the commencement of a module. Such provisions include, but are not limited to, the kind of exercises that may be resubmitted and the length of time between the original assessment and the re-assessment.

A request for re-submission of the exercise must be made within five working days of the return of the assessment exercise, to the Head of Department who, in consultation with the lecturer will decide on the merit of the request. The application must state strongly the grounds of the request. In grading approval to resubmit, the lecturer must indicate how much of the assessment exercise must be redone, and the date of the resubmission. The amended mark after than re-submission may not exceed 50%.

## 30. Re-marking of examination scripts

Please see section (l) of the Part 3 of the General Regulations.

## 31. Appeals Procedure

Students must direct appeals in writing to the to the faculty officer who represents the Deputy Dean in the case of final summative assessment or to the Head of Department in the case of an assessment task that forms part of the course work. Should the problem not be resolved, the matter can be taken to the next level following the necessary processes as determined by the university.

## 32. Staff development with regard to assessment

Deans/ Heads of Department arrange for assessment and marking workshops to be held on a regular basis in order to try to improve reliability at all levels of assessment.

Schools develop policies on common conventions such as the level of marking discrimination set, the definition of a borderline pass, the rules for condonation, etc., and these should be reviewed annually.

Schools ensure that all academic staff are familiar with the development of course outlines, especially course aims, outcomes/learning goals and criteria for assessment.

The criteria development process and the communication of these criteria in an explicit and open way to the students should be set out as a policy of the School.

Schools develop a plan and suitable activities to foster ongoing conversations around current practices in assessment and criteria development.

If registered students acting as tutors are involved in assessment (a) they should receive appropriate training in the assessment forms to be used and (b) their marking should be moderated by at least the course coordinator, who will take responsibility for the

assessment.