### Principle 1: Diverse forms of assessment designed to address a range of skills and knowledge

- **Assessment criteria**: Variety in the forms of assessment used on each programme. Assessment is not clearly linked to learning outcomes and little thought has been given to how the mode of assessment is chosen to demonstrate the learning outcomes of the course. Students are inadequately prepared for summative assessments with the skills they learn on the course.
- **Submission processes**: Inconsistent, simple, although largely paper-based. Students may experience problems depending on which department they are in. There are some access issues that haven’t been dealt with very well.
- **Deadlines**: Are made available online.
- **Marking**: Is consistent across all departments, although largely paper-based. Students may be provided with past papers but they are unlikely to be marked.
- **Feedback**: Is given on exams, although this may be generic or group feedback. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.

### Principle 2: Assessment criteria

- **Assessment criteria**: Vague, confusing and often contradictory. Students are hard to find and students are not directed to them.
- **Submission processes**: Inconsistent, simple, although largely paper-based. Students may experience problems depending on which department they are in. There are some access issues that haven’t been dealt with very well.
- **Deadlines**: Are made available online.
- **Marking**: Is consistent across all departments, although largely paper-based. Students may be provided with past papers but they are unlikely to be marked.
- **Feedback**: Is given on exams, although this may be generic or group feedback. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.

### Principle 3: Submission processes

- **Submission processes**: Inconsistent, simple, although largely paper-based. Students may experience problems depending on which department they are in. There are some access issues that haven’t been dealt with very well.
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- **Marking**: Is consistent across all departments, although largely paper-based. Students may be provided with past papers but they are unlikely to be marked.
- **Feedback**: Is given on exams, although this may be generic or group feedback. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.

### Principle 4: Workload distribution

- **Summative work**: Is completed in collaboration with peers. There is no self-reflection.
- **Feedback**: Is completed in collaboration with peers. There is no self-reflection.
- **Marking**: Is consistent within departments, although some departments allow students to grade their peers. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.
- **Feedback**: Is consistent within departments, although some departments allow students to grade their peers. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.

### Principle 5: Anonymity and externality

- **Summative work**: Is anonymous. There is little externality in the process.
- **Feedback**: Is anonymous. There is little externality in the process.
- **Marking**: Is consistent within departments, although some departments allow students to grade their peers. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.
- **Feedback**: Is consistent within departments, although some departments allow students to grade their peers. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks.

### Principle 6: Marking consistency and distribution

- **Students receive feedback too late to use for improvement. Some students do not receive any feedback at all.**
- **Students receive feedback that they can use to improve, but often not in time to complete a summative assessment.**
- **There is an institutional policy in place that is mostly well-implemented. Students receive at least one piece of feedback before they complete a summative assessment.**
- **Students receive feedback that is timely and adequate for improvement. Students receive at least one piece of feedback before they complete a summative assessment.**

### Principle 7: Feedback timeliness

- **Feedback**: Is considered holistic and allows for the design of their own formative exercises, in which criteria are linked to learning outcomes.
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### Principle 8: Feedback Quality

- **Formative assessment and feedback**: Peer learning is encouraged and common within the institution, although it plays a different role. Feedback encourages students to reflect on their performance in order to improve.
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- **Formative assessment and feedback**: Peer learning is encouraged and common within the institution, although it plays a different role. Feedback encourages students to reflect on their performance in order to improve.
This benchmarking tool is the latest in a series of resources NUS has produced to help you to improve the quality of feedback and assessment at your institution. You can use it in conjunction with the Feedback and Assessment Campaign Toolkit and other resources available on NUS Connect.

The tool is based on ten principles of effective feedback. In 2010, as part of the Student Feedback Project, NUS produced a Charter on Feedback and Assessment. This benchmarking tool is based on the principles of this charter, but the principles have been updated to reflect the priorities and needs of a new cohort of students.

How to use the tool
You can use the tool at a course, departmental, faculty or whole institution level. Read each of the principles, and decide which of the boxes best describes where you think your institution is. Once you’ve mapped out your current level, you may wish to choose a couple of priority areas to work towards achieving the next level. The tool is a good starting point for discussions between staff and students about how you can work together to improve feedback and assessment.

You could also share practice with other willing unions, perhaps on a regional basis or by mission group. You can learn from unions that place their institutions higher than yours: what good practice could you borrow and adapt? If they’ve recently made changes, what were the challenges they faced?

Things to bear in mind
• Each of the “outstanding” practices involve staff and students working in partnership. This partnership needs to be meaningful in order to work, which means that both groups must listen and be willing to compromise. Some of the principles may be mutually incompatible in some institutions: for example, it may not be possible to achieve “outstanding” in both feedback timeliness and feedback quality if the institution cannot afford more staff time for marking. Have honest conversations with institutional staff about what is and isn’t possible.
• You may not be able to achieve “outstanding” in everything at once. Decide where best to target your resources: do you want to work hard to get one particular area to “outstanding”, or do you want to spend that time getting three or four areas up one level from their current position? Are there specific departments you want to work with, or is a central minimum standard what is required?
• It is also worth bearing in mind that many of the people who mark coursework and exams are postgraduate students: you may wish to discuss the benchmarking tool with your postgraduate reps to make sure that your campaign is inclusive of all your members. This may mean ensuring that any additional work is incorporated into markers’ work plans, or campaigning for better pay and conditions for graduate teaching assistants alongside your feedback campaign.
• Your union may disagree with some of the levels in the benchmarking tool – and that’s OK! The tool was created collaboratively by student officers, based on principles put together from research into what students value from feedback. This doesn’t mean it will work at every institution. Feel free to tweak it or build on it to make it more relevant to the context of your institution. You could use it to start a conversation with institutional staff – what can you take from the tool and use to enhance the quality of feedback and assessment at your institution?

If you have any questions, please contact: nss@nus.org.uk

1. Diverse forms of assessment at a variety of appropriate times
   There should be a range of assessment mechanisms that are linked to learning outcomes and test competencies that graduates will need. Students should be involved in designing or choosing these assessment mechanisms.

2. Assessment criteria
   Assessment criteria should be clear, linked to learning outcomes and easily accessible to students. Students should be supported to understand them and to understand what constitutes academic misconduct.

3. Submission processes
   Submission processes should be simple for the student and electronic where possible. Processes should be appropriate to the assessment and accessible to all students.

4. Workload distribution
   Students should have their workload fairly distributed throughout the year, rather than clustering deadlines together.

5. Anonymity and externality
   Approaches to anonymity should be decided in partnership between staff and students, with the assumption that, unless decided otherwise, all summative assessments should be anonymous (as far as is possible). Appropriate external input is sought during assessment to ensure fairness and comparability.

6. Marking consistency and distribution
   Marks should be consistent across programmes, and the full range of marks should be used across the institution.

7. Feedback timeliness
   Feedback should be given in time for students to act on it in their next piece of work.

8. Feedback quality
   Feedback should be constructive, helpful and detailed, to enable a student to understand why they received the mark they got and what to do to improve for next time.

9. Formative assessment and feedback
   There should be opportunities for feedback on work that doesn’t contribute to the overall degree mark, in order to facilitate learning.

10. Self-reflection and peer learning
    Opportunities for peer learning and self-reflective exercises should be embedded in the curriculum.