

University of Birmingham

**A Clarification to the Codes of Practice on Student Development and Support in
Schools and Taught Programme and Module Assessment**

Purpose of Paper

1. To agree the addition of a clarification to clause 3.2.2 (c) of the Code of Practice on Student Development and Support in Schools and clause 7.1 of the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment relating to the amount of time after which students can have expected to receive feedback on assessed work.

Proposal

2. That the Code of Practice on Student Development and Support in Schools 3.2.2 (c) be changed as follows (additions underlined):

[All students should:]

be informed of the timescale for feedback arrangements. This should be timely (i.e. within four calendar weeks (20 working days) of the submission date of the assessment/piece of work, including holiday periods (that is, periods when the University is not in session) but excluding University closed days) so that they can adjust their patterns of work before subsequent assessment opportunities; Staff on term-time only contracts who are responsible for marking assessments should wherever possible comply with the Code of Practice on the deadline for the return of student work, and discuss in advance with their Head of School when any assessment deadline is unlikely to be met. When it is not possible for term-time only staff to meet a deadline, an agreed date for the return of work should be notified to all students.

3. That the Code of Practice on Taught Programme and Module Assessment 7.1 be changed as follows (additions underlined, deletions struck-through):

Registered Students should be given timely and relevant feedback on assessments, particularly those undertaken during a module and used to inform the Registered Student's learning (e.g. coursework). In accordance with the Code of Practice for Student Development and Support in Principal Academic Units, Registered Students should be informed of the timescale for feedback arrangements. This should be timely (i.e. within four calendar weeks (20 working days) of the submission date of the assessment/piece of work, including holiday periods (that is, periods when the University is not in session) but excluding University closed days) so that they can adjust their patterns of work before subsequent assessment opportunities; Staff on term-time only contracts who are responsible for marking assessments should wherever possible comply with the Code of Practice on the deadline for the return of student work, and discuss in advance with their Head of School when any assessment deadline is unlikely to be met. When it is not possible for term-time only staff to meet a deadline, an agreed date for the return of work should be notified to all students. ~~and this should normally be within four weeks of the submission date of the assignment/piece of work so that patterns of work can be adjusted before subsequent assessment opportunities.~~ Principal academic units may wish to provide this feedback in ways other than by provision of actual marks. Where marks are provided in advance of confirmation by the Board of Examiners, it should be emphasised that these marks remain provisional.

Background

4. The requirement that assessed work normally be returned within a four week period has been in force in the University for some time.
5. Practice within the University has normally been to require Schools to return assessed work with feedback within four weeks, including holidays (that is, periods when the University is not in session) within this definition.

Arguments to Support Proposal

6. Queries have been raised from various areas of the University concerning the interpretation of this clause, namely the College of Arts and Law, who are facing questions as to whether weekends are included, what counts as a 'closed' day, whether particular religious holidays should be taken into account, and how this applies to staff on term-time only contracts.
7. The four week requirement for feedback on assessed work does not apply only to programmes taught within the University session, but also to postgraduate taught programmes and other programmes where assessed work may be submitted outside of the University session. It would therefore be inappropriate to specify that the four week requirement only was required during the University session.
8. Should the requirement to return feedback within four weeks not be applied during holidays, it would be possible for a student who submitted an essay on 01 April 2011 (last day of teaching for second semester of the 2010/11 session) to not receive feedback until the 31 May 2011 (four weeks after the start of the summer term on 03 May 2011), that is within the examination period. Such an outcome is unacceptable, involving a two month wait for feedback that might be useful in an examination potentially undertaken prior to receiving the feedback.
9. Code of Practice on Student Development and Support in Schools 3.2.4 states:

Under 3.2.2 (c), requests for exemptions to the four-week deadline for the provision of feedback on assessment should be submitted, in a timely manner, to the College Director of Education for endorsement and then to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching, Learning and Quality) for approval.

This allows a certain amount of flexibility in requiring feedback to be received within four weeks: for example, feedback is dependent on the paper being 'marked' by an examination board, which would therefore mean the paper would fall outside of the four-week period, it would be acceptable for the School to seek an exception. There are therefore mechanisms in place to ensure that the four-week period is not overly-restrictive and bureaucratic.

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