

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR FLEXIBLE ASSESSMENT

### 1. Background

This document aims to describe the proposed SU assessment approach, which will allow for the current three systems to be kept under the umbrella of two main assessment systems, as well as the roll out of this plan in terms of implementation dates, roles and responsibilities.

The plan rests on the following points of departure:

- 1.1. That the quality assurance of student assessment practices in Faculties takes place through the already existing quality assurance procedures in Faculties subject to particular default institutional assessment rules. This is a departure from the current approach where the quality assurance of the flexible assessment happens via applications to CLT (approved by Senate) and that of the examination and continuous assessment systems happen in Faculties via sets of yearbook rules and Faculty Board approvals.
- 1.2. That SU will have an assessment approach comprising of two main assessment systems, namely examination and flexible assessment, which allows for the current methods, namely examination, continuous assessment and flexible assessment, to continue, but with the term *continuous assessment* falling away and the method being incorporated in flexible assessment. The **definition of flexible assessment** is the following: Flexible assessment (in terms of the determination of a final mark) is a process by which a student's work in a semester- or year-module is systematically assessed and weighed through consecutive opportunities during the course of the semester/year using a variety of assessment methods e.g. assignments, tests, portfolios, orals, laboratory investigations, seminars, tutorials, project reports etc. (depending on the specific requirements and outcomes of the module). A final mark is awarded without concluding the study period with a formal university examination.
- 1.3. That there needs to be clear and timeous communication between all stakeholders, namely faculties, administration and students.
- 1.4. That this approach will allow for flexibility in the design phase but not in the practice phase, except for flexibility that has been provisioned for in the design of the assessment scheme of a module.
- 1.5. That this approach will allow development under flexible assessment to grow organically.

The plan proposed here divides the management of assessment practices into two distinct legs. The first leg involves decisions regarding the appropriate form of assessment to be adopted within particular modules (i.e. what system of assessment to follow and what the design of that system will entail). The first leg is managed at faculty level with institutional oversight via existing Senate and quality assurance procedures. The second leg involves the centralised logistical arrangements regarding assessment periods as well as the capturing of assessment outcomes. This second leg is managed via a single system at institutional level.

## 2. The first leg: Choice of what assessment system to follow

The choice of what particular assessment system to adopt in a particular programme and module will be taken at Faculty level within existing teaching and learning and programme management structures.

This choice will be finally approved by the Faculty Board of the particular Faculty as part of the annual process of finalising the yearbook for the Faculty and will subsequently be subject to the normal academic planning control procedures in place under the final oversight of Senate.

Two main choices will be available to Faculties in terms of specific rules set out in part 1 of the yearbook:

- The current **examination system** will remain the **default option**, applicable to all modules not opting for the second option below.
- A single alternative assessment system called **FLEXIBLE ASSESSMENT, which will combine the current continuous assessment and flexible assessment options**. Modules wanting to use this system in the future will apply to do so in terms of procedures that will be published in part 1 of the yearbook. The procedures that will be published in part 1 of the yearbook are explained further on in this document. Modules that are currently assessed by means of continuous assessment can carry on with their current assessment design without going through the process of approval referred to here. Whenever changes in the current assessment design want to be brought about, the process of approval must be followed.

The choice of what particular system to use in a module, and the assessment scheme that will be used if flexible assessment in a module is chosen, must be made and approved by a particular date, coinciding with the process of finalising the faculty yearbooks for the next year. Once the decisions about a particular system and the assessment scheme, if flexible assessment is to be used, have been taken, the design of the assessment structure for the module for the next year is fixed and can only be subsequently changed for the subsequent year.

This system allows for some flexibility in the design phase. This flexibility can be transferred down to module level, or can be utilised at a higher level, in cases where the whole Faculty adopts a single system.

Importantly, though, once the design, at whatever level, has been fixed, approved (in the Faculty and by Senate), and printed in the yearbooks, modules are “locked” into the practice prescribed by the approved design. There is thus limited (only as much as is allowed by the approved design) flexibility in the practice phase.

## 3. Proposed rules to be included in part 1 of the yearbook pertaining to flexible assessment and replacing all current rules on continuous assessment and flexible assessment contained in the yearbook:

All assessment in terms of flexible assessment must adhere to the following general rules:

- 3.1. No single assessment opportunity may contribute more than 60% to the final mark. Faculties may, however, allow departures from this rule in individual modules based on justification in terms of the University's assessment policy as applicable within the particular module. Departures from this rule must – in the case of each individual module - be approved by Senate in accordance with the approval procedure explained further on in this document.
- 3.2. No particular assessment opportunity can be the sole determination of a pass or fail, but if students by choice do not use an assessment opportunity offered, they forfeit the right to multiple opportunities.
- 3.3. At least 40% of the final mark of the module is subject to internal moderation and, in the case of an exit level module, at least 40% of the final mark must be externally moderated as well.
- 3.4. Assessment schemes must provide for timely feedback to students, i.e. should normally include formative feedback. For assessments during the course of the semester, departments should give feedback (for instance via SUNLearn and as specified in the module framework) as soon as possible after the assessment opportunity was completed.
- 3.5. Completing additional, optional, assessments may not reduce the final mark, but the improvement in the final mark due to completing additional, optional, assessments may be limited.
- 3.6.  $FM \geq 50$  always indicates a pass and  $FM < 50$  always indicates a fail.
- 3.7. Details of the assessment scheme in a module must be stated in the module framework or study guide at the start of the semester.
- 3.8. The module framework or study guide must make clear whether writing any specific assessment opportunity is compulsory, or not.
- 3.9. Assessments used in the second examination period in November (the third assessment opportunity or A3) preclude a student from graduating that year in December.
- 3.10. Decisions about access to an assessment opportunity in the third assessment period (second exam period or A3) must be loaded on the system preferably five days, but no less than three days (not counting Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays) before the assessment opportunity.
- 3.11. Final marks between 35 and 50 are allocated in multiples of 5.

#### **4. Procedure for approval of flexible assessment approach:**

Should a module wish to opt out of the default examination assessment system, it should apply to do so in terms of the following procedure:

- 4.1. The proposed scheme will be considered within Faculties in terms of each Faculty's own teaching and learning and programme management structures, with the seven criteria for effective assessment - contained and described in the document *Assessment policy and practices at Stellenbosch University* - as foundation. The seven criteria are the following: validity, reliability, academic integrity, transparency, fairness, achievability, and timely feedback.
- 4.2. The particular lecturer will propose the flexible assessment scheme to be adopted in the module, with motivation in terms of the University's assessment policy, to his or her Head of Department for approval, after the lecturer has determined with the Student Information System Support office (SISS) whether the particular design can be accommodated in terms of the University's student records system (SIS).
- 4.3. Once the proposed scheme has been approved by the Head of Department and the Faculty's internal teaching and learning and programme management structures, it will be submitted to

the Programme Advisory Committee/Academic Planning Committee of SU and the relevant Faculty Board for approval by Senate as part of the Faculty's approval of its yearbook changes for the following year. This is essentially the same process as currently followed when a module intends to adopt continuous assessment (see rule 8.4.6 on p 141 in part 1 of the 2016 University Calendar).

## 5. The second leg: Capturing summative assessment outcomes

The proposed flexible assessment system as described further on will be supported by SIS (Student Information System) which will capture the information required by all stakeholders in order to do their job with as little difficulty and as efficiently as possible. SIS can accommodate the procedures proposed in this document.

The system of flexible assessment allows for **three official assessment** periods per semester. The first of these (**A1**) will be during the semester (the current test period), the second (**A2**) will be in the time period of the first examination, and the third (**A3**) will be in the time period of the second examination. All or none of these official assessment periods can be used for the assessment scheme of an individual module.

There will be **two** opportunities to upload marks – and in some modules a choice between two comments as determined by the lecturer in accordance with the assessment scheme of a module – onto SIS, namely:

- after **A2**, a **final mark** which can constitute a fail, pass, or pass with distinction, and a choice of **two comments**, namely (1) **module incomplete**, if a mark was not obtained in the course of the semester that can constitute a final mark, or (2) **admitted to further assessment**, if the assessment scheme of a module makes provision for a further assessment in A3.
- after **A3**, a **final mark** which can constitute a fail, pass, or pass with distinction. If a student was granted admission to A3, but did not turn up for the assessment, the mark uploaded onto SIS will be the mark obtained previously, or the comment **module incomplete**, if a mark was not obtained in the course of the semester that can constitute a final mark.

The detail of the particular approved assessment scheme that will be used in a particular module, must be communicated to students primarily in the Module Framework or Study Guide.

Terminology for marks that are loaded onto SIS and are accessible to students (except FM if the student's account has not been settled):

- (1) Progress Mark (**PM**) (Afrikaans: Vorderingspunt, VP) - used in undergraduate year-modules to indicate progress after the first semester.
- (2) Final Mark (**FM**) (Afrikaans: Prestasiepunt, PP)

List of comments against modules to indicate the outcome of an assessment:

- (1) Admitted to further assessment (comment to be uploaded by department after A2, where applicable)

- (2) Module incomplete (comment to be uploaded by department after A2 or A3, where applicable)
- (3) Fail (automatically attached by SIS to mark that is uploaded, with the exception of if after A2 the student is granted admission to A3, where applicable. Then comment (1) above is applicable)
- (4) Pass (automatically attached by SIS to mark that is uploaded)
- (5) Pass with distinction (automatically attached by SIS to mark that is uploaded)

## **6. The role of and information required by Timetable Office and Examination Office**

### **Timetable Office**

By May of the preceding year, the Timetable Office needs to know what will be expected of it with regard to dates to be allocated to modules for A1, A2 and A3. The procedure is the following:

- **For A1:** A1 is scheduled in accordance with historical data, namely if A1 was scheduled for the current year, it will automatically be scheduled for the following year. If A1 was not scheduled for the current year, it will automatically not be scheduled for the following year. Possible changes from year to year as far as this aspect is concerned should be kept to a minimum, as the implications for the Timetable Office are considerable.
- **For A2 and A3:** Codes will be created on SIS to distinguish between (1) modules only requiring A2, (2) modules requiring A2 as well as A3, and (3) modules requiring none of A2 and A3. If a change wants to be brought about by a lecturer for the following year, the procedure for approval explained earlier on in this document must be followed.

### **Examination Office**

As standard practice, the Examination Office will on request allocate venues to be used by modules using flexible assessment in the A2 and A3 periods.

In the case of modules wanting to utilize the service of the Examination Office for the administration of A2 and A3, the service will be supplied in accordance with the rules governing the management of examinations.

At the beginning of each semester, the Examination Office needs the following information of each flexible assessment module and will obtain the information by means of a web-based questionnaire, to be completed by each department (the questionnaire is already standard practice and will be expanded as necessary):

- Must a venue **and** invigilators be supplied (1) for A2, or (2) for A2 as well as A3?
- If an option above is chosen, must duplication of question papers be done?

## **7. Implementation: timelines, roles and responsibilities**

This plan will be phased in:

### 2016

- Faculties consider any changes to existing assessment schemes in individual modules. The process of approval explained earlier in this document would need to be completed in May 2016 for the run up to faculty yearbooks for 2017.

### 2017

- The overarching assessment rules are published in part 1 of the yearbook. The assessment used in every module is published in the relevant faculty yearbooks by means of a single inscription below the summary of the content of the module, for instance *Flexible assessment* or *Examination*. The assessment design must be published in the Module Framework or Study Guide.
- The process of approval continues for newcomers.

### 2018 onwards

- The Committee for Teaching and Learning retains oversight over the organic growth in flexible assessment schemes as part of that Committee's ownership of the University's assessment policy.
- The process of approval continues for newcomers.