

## Formative Assessment Guidance

The following guidance is based on the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) UK Quality Code – Advance and Guidance (Assessments) (November 2018)

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/the-quality-code/advice-and-guidance>

In accordance with QAA terminology, formative assessment is developmental in nature and assists students with their learning and reflective practice through the provision of ongoing feedback. It allows tutors to monitor student learning and put in place intervention practices if required. Formative assessment refers to a range of both formal and informal assessment procedures conducted during the learning process. They enable and support modification to both teaching and learning activities and to improve student attainment (Crooks, 2001).

Formative assessment, when designed well, assists students with learning and guides them towards their summative assessment. It enables students to identify their strengths and weaknesses, enables them to manage their learning in a structured manner. At the same time, it provides tutors and the university with information about the areas students are struggling with so that support can be put in place.

Formative assessment can be tutor led, peer or self-assessment. Formative assessments are part of classroom activities and usually carry no grade, which in some instances may discourage the students from doing the task or fully engaging with it. The activities can be used to assess whether learning occurs, and allows for teaching methods and resources to be adapted or changed if required.

### Developing formative assessment

Formative assessment should be constructively aligned with learning outcomes (Biggs and Tang, 2007). It should be explained to students what formative assessments are and how they will benefit them to achieve their summative assessments through the module learning outcomes.

An over-reliance on summative assessment at the conclusion of an element of study gives students a grade, but does not provide them with enough feedback that will help them develop and improve before they reach the end of the module/programme. Therefore, achieving a balance between formative and summative assessments is important, although one that students don't always fully grasp and/or take seriously. Formative assessments, provide an effective and risk-free environment in which students can learn and experiment. They are also suitable for peer reviews.

In addition:

- Use different formative assessments for different module content to keep students engaged;
- Explain how formative assessment lead students to their summative assessment;
- Provide students with feedback on their formative assessment and feedforward on how they can develop further to fill gaps in knowledge and skills;
- Use marking criteria and rubrics consistently;
- For summative assessments, ensure feedback aligns with the grades given.

### **Samples of formative assessment**

- Short online quizzes at the end of class
- One-minute reflective questions / papers (pose a question at the beginning of class and students have one minute at the end to write their answer)
- Group or pair discussions
- Draft essay reviews by tutors or peers
- Peer reviewed research proposals
- Student marking activities where students use the module marking rubric to mark their own or peer work
- Concept maps
- Compare and contrast two components of what is being learnt to help them demonstrate knowledge and understanding
- Elevator pitch

### **To engage students in formative assessment:**

- Clearly explain the rationale behind formative assessment – make it clear to students that through engaging with formative tasks they get to gain experience with their assessments, risk-free, and can develop far stronger skills in order to obtain better grades in the summative assessments.
- Create a link between summative and formative assessment – design formative assessments in such a way that they contribute to the summative task. This lowers the workload on the students and provides them with necessary feedback to improve their final performance. An example of such assessment is producing an essay plan, a structure of a literature review, part of the essay or bibliography.
- Lower the number of summative assessments and increase the number of formative assessments – yet do not allow one single summative assessment to carry too much weight in the final grade.

### **References**

Crooks, T.J. (2001). The validity of formative assessments: Paper for the annual conference of the British Educational Research Association, Leeds, UK

Biggs, J. & Tang, C (2011). Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does.