

Assessment Tariff

1 Introduction

The first iteration of the Assessment Tariff was introduced in 2013 as one of the appendices to support the Assessment Policy which had been introduced in September 2012. The Assessment Policy sought to address a number of issues associated with the consistency of the student learning experience. In particular, the Policy highlighted the concept that assessment should be fair and equitable and that the assessment burden for students taking joint and single honours programmes should be comparable and consistent. The Assessment Tariff was therefore seen as one way of helping programmes to comply with these aspects of the Assessment Policy at the time.

The Assessment Tariff was commended by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in its report of the University's 2015 Higher Education Review. The report identified that the Assessment Tariff plays an important role in ensuring that a consistent, transparent and equitable approach is applied to assessment at St Mary's during curriculum design, validation and delivery. The report also indicated that St Mary's staff regard the Tariff as a helpful framework, particularly for designing and modifying module assessments.

As a result of the QAA's observations and feedback from staff, this second iteration of the Assessment Tariff is largely unchanged. The significant change is the reduction in the maximum wordage for Level 7 written work, which is now in line with the maximum wordage for Level 6 written work. This change has stemmed from Level 7 programmes which offer 30 credit modules having significantly high wordage in written assessments as a result of trying to achieve a pro-rated wordage in line with the 20 credit maximum figures outlined in the Tariff.

The other change is that the viva voce has been included in both the presentation and the examination category.

As of September 2017, the Tariff now includes maximum wordage or time allowed for Level 3 assessment at the University. The maximum duration for Level 7 written examinations have also been brought into line with the maximum for Level 6 written examinations.

As of April 2021, The University was awarded Research Degree Awarding Powers which led to the inclusion of Level 8 tariffs for 360 credit Prof Doc, MPhil or PhD awards.

2 Guidance

The Assessment Tariff has been structured to provide the maximum wordage or time allowed for most types of assessments depending on their weightings. The Tariff should act as a useful starting point for those staff involved in designing modules and programmes, particularly those staff new to the University. Programme Directors may also find the Tariff useful when devising an overarching assessment strategy for their programmes.

On occasions where the wordage or time limit proposed is considered significantly lower than the maximum figures stated in the Tariff, staff must be confident that the time spent preparing for and completing the assessment is equitable to other assessments in the programme and that the assessment enables the student to achieve the module learning outcomes.

Lower wordage or time limits will likely be queried during the approval process so staff are expected to provide a clear rationale in the appropriate submission (validation/revalidation document, new module or module modification forms) and ensure that potential queries about equity of workload and students' ability to achieve module learning outcomes are addressed within this. This information should also be provided in the Assessment Rationale as part of the Module Outline.

There is no firm definition of what would be deemed as 'significantly lower' wordage or time limits than those stated in the Assessment Tariff. This is a matter of judgement for staff designing modules and programmes, and for those staff involved in approving assessments either as members of validation/revalidation panels, Faculty Academic Development Committee or Quality Assurance and Enhancement Sub-Committee.

However, the Tariff has not been designed to be completely prescriptive and it is advised that proposed lower wordage or time limits supported by a clear rationale (normally stemming from discipline-specific needs) are considered appropriately by those involved in the approval of assessment and are not rejected purely on the basis of failing to comply with the maximum figures in the Tariff.

On occasions where the wordage or time limit proposed exceeds the maximum figure stated in the Tariff, staff must also provide a clear rationale for this in the appropriate submission (validation/revalidation document, new module or module modification forms). Reasons for exceeding the maximum figure may be discipline-specific or to ensure compliance with requirements of a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB).

3 Contacts

The Assessment Tariff is the responsibility of the Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS). Any queries about the content and guidance in the Tariff, particularly at the stage of designing assessments, should therefore be sent to Quality and Standards Office based within CTESS.

The Quality and Standards Office can advise about the use of the Assessment Tariff as part of the wider approval processes for programmes and individual modules.

The below Grid template was based on template used by the CELT at the University of South Wales. Used with permission.

SS July 2013
SS Updated May 2016
SS Updated May 2017
SS Updated April 2021

Assessment Tariff
Maximum figures based on 20 credit modules

Assessment Group	Assessment Examples	Weighting	Level					8
			3	4	5	6	7	
Written	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essay • Literature Review • Report • Creative Writing • Case Study • Research Proposal • Critical Evaluation • Timed Essay • Portfolio • Workbook • Lab Report 	100%	2,000 words	3,000 words	4,000 words	5,000 words	5,000 words	Professional Doctorate – maximum 60,000-word thesis and a viva voce examination MPhil – maximum 60,000-word thesis and a viva voce examination PhD – maximum 100,000-word thesis and a viva voce examination.
		50%	1,000 words	1,500 words	2,000 words	2,500 words	2,500 words	
		25%	500 words	1,000 words	1,000 words	1,500 words	1,500 words	
Practical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production • Micro Teaching • Student-Led Session • Coaching Session 		No set tariff is proposed for practical assessments due to the discipline specific nature of these tasks. However, staff are asked to consider the time required to prepare for and complete the tasks to ensure equity with other assessments in the programme					The above tariffs are excluding bibliography and appendices. PhD, by published works (SMU staff only) – minimum portfolio of 5 single -authored or co-authored peer-reviewed publications, a 10,000-15,000 analytical commentary and a viva voce examination
Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral • Poster • Group • Viva Voce 	50%	10 mins 5 mins	10 mins 5 mins	15 mins 10 mins	20 mins 15 mins	20 mins 15 mins	
		25%		It is advised that presentations do not normally contribute more than 60% to the overall module mark				
Examination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclosed • Open Book • Closed Book • Oral • Practical • Class Test • Viva Voce 	100%	2 hrs	2.5 hrs	2.5 hrs	3 hrs	3 hrs	
		50%	1.5 hrs	2 hrs	2 hrs	2.5 hrs	2.5 hrs	It is advised that staff consider the use of 100% weighted examinations sparingly and that written examinations during semester one of Level 4 are avoided where possible. Staff should also be mindful when determining the duration of written examinations that students with additional needs will be eligible for extra time (usually 25% but occasionally 50%)
	25%	45 mins	1 hr	1.5 hrs	2 hrs	2 hrs		