

Timely Feedback Policy Guidance Document

Guidance from the Dean for Taught Students, November 2023 - Timely Feedback Policy

This guidance has been updated for the 2023/24 academic year. There has been no intention to fundamentally change policy from the 2022/23 academic year, but there has been an attempt to clarify the meaning and implementation of the broad principles that marks and feedback should be provided to students within 15-working days.

For programmes that adhere to centrally-published term-time dates and in accordance with precedent, this policy takes account of student vacations (as per the centrally-published list of term-times and vacations). Adjustments to expected turnaround times are made in the light of these.

1. Introduction:

- 1.1. Assessment and feedback are an essential part of the student experience and fundamental to the learning process; helping to promote learning and assuring academic standards and quality.
- 1.2. The University's policy relating to feedback states that it should:
 - 1.2.1. Promote effective learning and support the academic development of students.
 - 1.2.2. Be formative, enabling students to learn from the comments received to address weaknesses and build on strengths, whilst being rigorous and impartial.
 - 1.2.3. Aid students to be informed about how and when feedback will be provided. The sooner students receive feedback after submitting work, the more effective it is for their onward learning.
- 1.3. As part of [Strategy 2030](#), the University is committed to supporting the success of all of our learners by providing an exceptional, personalised and immersive student experience. As a part of this, to provide an excellent student experience and learning environment, the University of Exeter and the Students' Guild/ Students' Union continue to see the turnaround of assessed work within 15 working days as being a priority, particularly in relation to our National Student Survey (NSS) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) results.

2. NSS/PTES:

- 2.1. The 2021 NSS results showed that satisfaction with the quality, quantity and/or timeliness of feedback had declined year-on-year over a five-year period; with a decline to 60.6% for the assessment and feedback section of the survey.
- 2.2. There has been improvement in the NSS results in 2022 and in 2023, and this has been achieved against the backdrop of two challenging years, which makes this all the more significant. However, in 2023, student responses to the question "14. How often does feedback help you to improve your work?" were concerning (62.7%), compared to more positive responses to question "13. How often have you received assessment feedback on time?" (77.6%). See [Office for Students' NSS Data](#) for more information and also our internal [MI Hub](#).
- 2.3. It is crucial that there is an impactful commitment to both the quality and usefulness of feedback, as well as the timeliness of feedback, across all Faculties and Departments in the 2023/24 academic year; in order that we deliver the very best educational experience for our students. This will allow us to improve our [NSS](#) scores, and also [PTES](#) scores, of which Overall Satisfaction increased each year from 2021 to 2023.

3. The key principles regarding feedback are:

- 3.1. All feedback on assessment ought to be **formative**, even in the case of summative assessments (i.e., providing assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning). This ensures that students can consider and digest comments on their work and subsequently have a realistic opportunity to address weaknesses and build on their academic strengths.
- 3.2. A primary focus should be enabling students to **improve their performance in the future**, whether in forthcoming assessments, in further study, or when faced with comparable tasks in graduate employment.
- 3.3. **Clear communication of turnaround times and adherence to the times advertised is crucial** as part of our moral contract with our students. It is essential that staff and students are clear about both the general structure and specific deadlines for individual pieces of work and the timing of feedback. The use of ELE to give students an overview of the year's programme of dates for hand-in and hand-back for each module best facilitates this.
- 3.4. Feedback can be provided more efficiently when **marking criteria** are:
 - 3.4.1. made clear in advance;
 - 3.4.2. specific to the task in-hand; and
 - 3.4.3. focused on assessing particular intended learning outcomes (e.g., reference clearly defined knowledge and skills).
- 3.5. Feedback should be **educative in nature**, thereby proving helpful for students going forward.
- 3.6. Feedback should **justify the mark**, thereby demonstrating that the marking and assessment is fair.
- 3.7. **Marks and feedback should be returned together.**
- 3.8. **Prior to marks being released to students, the internal moderation process should have been undertaken, see [Chapter 5 - Marking](#)** (but not necessarily subject to External Examiner scrutiny).
- 3.9. The Timely Feedback period includes the **time to administer the submission of assessments and return them to students.**
- 3.10. **Submission deadlines** should be set on an appropriate date when staff can dedicate the time to marking and providing feedback. This should include consideration of **annual leave and vacation periods.**
- 3.11. Staff should plan **annual leave** around teaching commitments including marking student assessments. If staff are likely to be on leave and unable to mark and return student work, then the submission deadline should be set on an appropriate date when staff can dedicate the time to marking and providing feedback. This principle also applies to other reasons for which staff might be unavailable to undertake marking, e.g., research conference attendance and fieldtrip participation.

4. Terminology

- 4.1. In the context of this policy, for programmes adhering to **University term-time dates** that are **published centrally** (see section 5), the 'University working day' refers to **Monday to Friday excluding student vacation periods, Bank Holidays and University closure days** (e.g. Christmas closure). Working days are thus defined from an organisational perspective and not that of individual members of staff (e.g., annual leave or part-time working days).
- 4.2. It is recognized that the University offers a range of programmes which may operate alternative academic term dates. For these programmes, Faculties / Departments may need to exercise their own judgement as to how the underlying principles of this policy can be met. *Please see section 6 below for more information.*
- 4.3. **Student Vacation** refers to dates outside of University term-time (as defined in 4.1). This is a period of time when students are not required to attend academic activities. University academic staff may still be working (e.g., marking) during

student vacations (other than University closure days e.g. Bank Holidays), but it is not expected that staff / students are available to give / receive feedback during this time (see 6.2).

4.3.1. *For programmes that DO NOT adhere to centrally-published University term time dates, it is acknowledged that student vacations may apply to different times.*

5. University centrally-published term-time dates for terms 1 – 3

5.1. <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part2/calendar/>

6. Definitions

For programmes that adhere to centrally-published University term time dates:

- 6.1.** Feedback should be provided within 15 working days (as defined in 4.1). For coursework submitted within the first two terms, the 15 working day turnaround is a requirement. (Unless, very exceptionally, an exemption has been granted – see Q4 below.)
- 6.2.** It is not the expectation that academic staff are required to provide feedback outside of University term time. *The exception to this is programmes with teaching and submission deadlines over the Summer, as well as referrals and deferrals completed in August. The 15 working day feedback turnaround applies to the submissions mentioned above, unless otherwise stipulated by the Faculty.*
- 6.3.** Submission dates on programmes that adhere to centrally-published University term times should not fall outside of these term dates unless exceptional situations apply. *Where these exceptional situations apply, and assessments are due to be submitted during student vacation (i.e. dates outside of University term time, including Bank Holidays and Closure Days), then these should usually still be returned within 15 working days, unless otherwise stipulated by the Faculty.*
- 6.3.1.** *For programmes that adhere to centrally-published University term time dates:*
- (a) When the work is submitted within **two weeks** of the start of the vacation, the deadline is the **later** date of EITHER:
 - (i) 15 working days (as defined in 4.1); or
 - (ii) The Friday at the end of the first week of the following term.
- 6.4.** The Teaching Quality Assurance Manual, Chapter 6 – Feedback, 6.3, provides an Excel spreadsheet that details the expected feedback dates for these programmes.

For programmes that DO NOT adhere to centrally-published University term time dates:

- 6.5.** Feedback should be provided within 15 working days. *Please also refer to the Teaching Quality Assurance Manual, Chapter 6 – Feedback, 6.3, for a guidance note regarding the definition of 15 working days for these types of programme.*
- 6.6.** It is acknowledged that, for these programmes, feedback may need to be provided by staff, and received by students, outside of centrally-published University term-time dates. For example, where submission deadlines are over the Summer. Other examples include programmes like the Bachelor of Medicine Bachelor of Surgery programme (BMBS), where coursework feedback will be returned to students in-line with the principles of the Timely Feedback Policy but applied to the relevant term dates for that stage of that particular programme/programme structure.
- 6.7.** It is incumbent on the Faculty/Department that the workload and distribution of work are determined in such a way as to make this possible and reasonable for the member(s) of staff concerned. Constraints with respect to staff workload should be addressed in advance by the Head of Department and Director of Education and Student Experience, and staff should ensure that they plan and

diarise marking time when setting assessment dates. *Also see Q4 below.*

- 6.8.** Faculties and Departments are required to calculate their own turnaround deadlines, in keeping with the general rules and principles set out in this document. An Excel spreadsheet is not pre-populated for such programmes, but Faculties/Departments may optionally wish to create their own, utilising the rules of the policy. Student experience must be considered as part of the creation of these deadlines, with feedback received in a timely manner, prior to the next summative assessment, so that the student can benefit and **improve their performance in the future**, whether in forthcoming assessments, in further study, or when faced with comparable tasks in graduate employment. *Please refer to sections one and two above* (Introduction, and Principles) for further information on the expectations of this policy.

Examples of these types of programme include, but are not limited to, Online Programmes, CEDAR, Degree Apprenticeships, and Programmes with a January start date.

Assessment Queries:

Q1: Are examinations included?

There are two major University examination periods (January and May), as well as referral and deferral examinations (August). For end of module examinations, occurring immediately prior to APACs (and the validation by External Examiners), there is a published University-wide results release date when marks are distributed. This occurs both after the January and May assessment periods and the referred/deferred examinations. The marks for dissertations (and research projects designated as equivalent to dissertations) may also be released on the University-wide results release date.

For the successful management of ensuring the extremely large bulk volume of examination marks can be recorded, processed, and authorised in time for the University-wide results release to students, internal mark return deadlines will be set by Education Support teams. These internal deadlines will cater for elements such as the size of the cohort to be marked and the date the examination was sat, so will vary by assessment. Due to the constraints of the examination and APAC period, the time allocated for marking prior to the deadline for the return of marks and feedback is likely to be less than 15 working days. These internal deadlines are the key return dates for examination marks from academics and for which appropriate planning should be undertaken to ensure marking can be completed by those dates.

For all other assessments[^] and in-class tests/ examinations, the mark should be returned in a timely fashion, within 15 working days of the original submission date after internal moderation.

[^]*Excluding the exceptions listed below, and the allowances required for submissions made to the second submission point in ELE 2 (those requiring 1–2 week extensions, and exceptional 3 week extensions) – also see below Q6-7.*

Q2: Are dissertations included?

The marks for dissertations (and research projects designated as equivalent to dissertations) may be released on the University-wide results release date. Faculties should make this clear on their module templates for these module types. There will be a publicised results release date following APACs, and this is the date when students will get their results/feedback. Permission for this would not need to be sought from the Dean for Taught Students (in liaison with the Students' Guild Education Officer/ Students' Union President Exeter) in advance, provided that the return dates are clearly flagged up to

students in advance. The release of marks for postgraduate students submitting dissertations may be delayed beyond the 15 working day deadline. This is where marks need to be confirmed by External Examiners, which may not be possible within that timescale. In these instances, the mark and feedback should be provided following the APAC meetings.

Q3: Are PGT assessments included?

Faculties should seek, wherever possible, to meet a 15 working day deadline; however, the answers to Questions 1 and 2 are also applicable to examinations and dissertations/ research projects on PGT programmes, whereby marks will need to be confirmed by External Examiners before release, which may not be possible within the normal timescale of 15 working days. *It is acknowledged that the University has an increasing number of PGT dissertations which may fall outside of the University centrally-published term-time dates, and therefore exceptions may be required.*

Exemptions/ Mitigation Queries:

Q4: Will you be considering any other exemptions? If so, on what grounds?

Exemptions can be applied for through the Dean for Taught Students, in collaboration with the Students' Guild Education Officer/ Students' Union President Exeter. Any exceptions must have been first endorsed by the Faculty, via the Associate Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). The grounds, as before, would be that the practical implications of applying a 15 working day turnaround would damage the pedagogical effectiveness of the marking process and so disadvantage the students. That is the only acceptable ground. As noted above, constraints with respect to staff workload should be addressed in advance by the Head of Department and Director of Education and Student Experience and, as noted above, staff should ensure that they plan and diarise marking time when setting assessment dates.

Q5: Does this apply to assignments submitted during the Summer term?

Where assignments are submitted in the summer term for consideration by an APAC scheduled to take place at the end of the same term, feedback may be returned to students on the post-APAC University-wide results release date. Where assignments are submitted for consideration by an APAC scheduled later in the year, the Timely Feedback policy will still apply, unless it is an examination or dissertation/ research project.

Q6: What happens if a student has been granted an extension via the self-certification or evidence-based mitigation processes?

The timely feedback deadline will be calculated either from the point of the original submission deadline or the extended submission deadline. Within the new ELE system, launched for 2023/24 (ELE 2), there will be two submission links for students;

- a) one link for the students working towards the original submission deadline and 72-hour self-certification extensions (applicable only to the original submission point), and
- b) another link for the students with an approved 1or 2-week evidence-based extension, and including exceptional 3-week extensions (extended submission point).

The submissions to the first link should be marked within 15 working days of the original deadline. Submissions to the second link should be marked within 15 working days of the longest actual deadline (e.g. if there are students with a 2-week extension, but no student

with a 3-week extension, then the work should be due back 15 working days after the 2-week extension date. If there were students with 3-week extensions, the feedback should be due 15 working days after that later extended submission date).

Q7: What happens if a student submits work late without mitigation?

By handing in late, without mitigation, the student has forfeited the right to receive feedback within 15 working days (the Timely Feedback policy does not apply). Late penalties are calculated for the student's deadline as appropriate once they have submitted to their relevant submission point.

It is important to recognise that students submitting work late are likely to be experiencing significant disruption to their study that may be outside their control and should continue to be signposted to appropriate support and mitigation processes. Nonetheless, it is important that staff return the marks/feedback for unauthorised (without mitigation) late submissions that are submitted prior to the general release of marks/feedback to students. This is to ensure they are available for APAC processes and in the event of a successful application for retrospective mitigation. If this is not possible, they should inform the Chair of the APAC at the earliest opportunity. Colleagues can contact their Hub Team/Info Point if they require clarification regarding APAC process timelines.

In order for students to benefit from feedback aligned to the planned module delivery, staff are encouraged to make every reasonable effort to return work to students as soon as it is possible.

It is recognised that this may not be possible regarding unauthorised (without mitigation) late submissions because of factors, such as (i) the number of students who submit late; (ii) the extent of the delay to their submissions, and (iii) the flexibility/capacity of the academic member(s) of staff. It is expected that it will normally be possible to return work within 30 working days of the original submission date.

The following table summarises how the policy applies to coursework submitted on time, and late (with and without mitigation):

| Submission date | Action by marker | What constitutes a 'late' return |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Original Submission point: Original submission date for the student.</p> | <p>Return marks/feedback on published feedback date*.</p> | <p>Any marks/feedback released more than 15 working days after the original submission deadline date.</p> |

| Submission date | Action by marker | What constitutes a 'late' return |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Original Submission point:</p> <p>Coursework submitted late without an authorised extension, but up to 24 hours after the students' original submission deadline.</p> | <p>Return marks/feedback as soon as possible, but this work is not included in the Timely Feedback guarantee. Work submitted up to 24 hours late without an authorised extension will be capped at the pass mark.</p> | <p>Markers should return marks by the deadline set by the APAC. (It is expected that it will normally be possible to return work within 30 working days of the original submission date).</p> |
| <p>Original Submission point:</p> <p>Coursework submitted late without an authorised extension, and more than 24 hours after the students' original submission deadline.</p> | <p>Return marks/feedback as soon as possible, but this work is not included in the Timely Feedback policy. Work submitted beyond 24 hours without an authorised extension will be capped at zero.</p> | <p>Markers should return marks by the deadline set by the APAC. (For coursework submitted late, but prior to the general release of marks/feedback, it will normally be possible to return it within 30 working days of the original submission date)</p> |
| <p>Original Submission point:</p> <p>Original submission date plus 72 hours under new self-certification mitigation rules.</p> <p>(See guidance above regarding late submission).</p> | <p>Return marks/feedback on published feedback date*.</p> | <p>Any marks/feedback released more than 15 working days after the original submission deadline date.</p> |

| Submission date | Action by marker | What constitutes a 'late' return |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Extended Submission point:</p> <p>Original submission date plus up to 3 weeks in exceptional circumstances.</p> | <p>Return of marks/feedback within 15 working days of the students' revised deadline.</p> <p>For example, for 3-week extensions (where a third week has exceptionally been granted), the return of marks and feedback should be within 30 working days of the original deadline (i.e. 15 working days after the longest possible [3-week] extension).</p> | <p>Any marks/feedback released more than 15 working days after the latest revised (i.e. extended) submission deadline.</p> |
| <p>Extended Submission point:</p> <p>Coursework submitted late without an authorised extension, but up to 24 hours after the students' revised submission deadline.</p> | <p>Return marks/feedback as soon as possible, but this work is not included in the Timely Feedback guarantee. Work submitted up to 24 hours late without an authorised extension will be capped at the pass mark.</p> | <p>Markers should return marks by the deadline set by the APAC. (It is expected that it will normally be possible to return work within 30 working days of the original submission date).</p> |
| <p>Extended Submission point:</p> <p>Coursework submitted late without an authorised extension, and more than 24 hours after the students' revised submission deadline.</p> | <p>Return marks/feedback as soon as possible, but this work is not included in the Timely Feedback policy. Work submitted beyond 24 hours without an authorised extension will be capped at zero.</p> | <p>Markers should return marks by the deadline set by the APAC. (For coursework submitted late, but prior to the general release of marks/feedback, it will normally be possible to return it within 30 working days of the original submission date)</p> |

*Published feedback date is the feedback due date as determined by the Timely Feedback policy.

Q8: What happens if a significant proportion of students are granted extensions or submit late?

If a marker feels that the proportion of authorised and unauthorised late submissions may impact the reliability of the marking/moderation processes with regard to those students who submitted by the original date, then the Module Lead may apply to their Head of Department and Director of Education and Student Experience for approval to extend the marking period up to 20 working days after the original submission date.

Approval would not need to be sought from the Dean for Taught Students (in collaboration with the Students' Guild Education Officer/ Students' Union President Exeter) for marking extensions granted on these grounds, but a record must be kept of all such instances for onward reporting (as necessary).

Each request must be judged on its own merits, bearing in mind (i) the number of students on the module; (ii) the proportion of students who have extensions/submitted late; and (ii) the extent of the delay to their submissions. In all cases, any delay in the return of marks/feedback needs to be communicated empathetically to students and the reasons for the delay explained carefully.

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