

Procedures for Assessment of Learners

Part 1

a. Purpose of Assessment

1. The College recognise that Section 23 (a) of the Act requires it to establish procedures for the assessment of learners, which are fair and consistent and for the purpose of compliance with standards determined by HETAC. The purpose of these procedures and guidelines is to ensure that the College operates methods of learner assessment that:

- are fair and consistent, and comply with standards determined by HETAC or other approved validating bodies
- comply with the validating body's standards in respect of the National Framework of Qualifications
- are effective in measuring the attainment by each learner of the intended learning outcomes
- provide feedback to the learner enabling the learner to improve his/her performance
- contribute positively to the total learning experience and in particular to achieving the intended learning outcomes
- encourage elements of creativity and original initiative in demonstrating achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

A full graphical description of the following information is to be found in fig. 1, "Flowchart of Learners' Experience in Assessment Process", which appears at the end of this section.

2. At DBL College we believe that assessment of learners forms an integral part of the teaching/learning process. The purpose of assessment is to maximise the students' learning potential by identifying their language and/or business education needs, and continuously adapting and developing the syllabus to meet these needs. Continuous assessment enables teachers and students to analyse the specific areas of learning that need to be addressed. By doing so, it helps the academic staff to tailor the pedagogical programme in order to meet the needs of the students in the best possible learning environment. Ongoing assessment also enables teachers to structure their classes in a way which allows for optimum progress.

3. Each newly recruited teacher at DBL participates in an induction day; on this day the teacher is given a "Teacher's Handbook" which contains information concerning their employment at the College. Included in this information are guidelines for learner assessments which teachers are asked to use as a model of reference throughout their period of employment.

4. Each student is in possession of a handbook which they are given upon registration and required to bring with them to school each day. This handbook contains a portfolio section which is used to keep an ongoing record of the student's assessment results and progress during their time at the school. Students are given regular informal assessments, as planned by the particular teacher with the aid of the Director of studies, which are followed up by one-to-one feedback sessions during which the teacher will advise the students on their progress and make recommendations for self-study in order to target areas of learning where they may be experiencing problems.

5. In the case of English language classes, there is an entry assessment when all students complete copies of the Oxford placement test in order to ensure that each student is in a class of an appropriate level.

6. In the case of business students, all new entrants, who are not native speakers of English and who do not have recognised formal documentation confirming a level of English that is

adequate for the standards required, must complete the ELSA English for Business examination of the London Chamber of Commerce.

7. The schedule of assessments is confirmed one month before the beginning of the academic year and this is kept up-to-date as further assessments are confirmed with Awarding Bodies. This information is included in the calendar of the academic year which is given to every student, published on official noticeboards and the College website, and sent by e-mail. Teachers will also explain these assessments, along with other activities, in the week of orientation that begins each programme of modules.

8. Results of all formal assessments are kept on file for the duration of the student's time at the college and are retained for a period of three years after his or her graduation.

9. Regular meetings take place between academic management and teaching staff to ensure coordinated planning of continuous assessment. All issues raised or suggestions put forth are taken into consideration when assessment procedure is being planned.

10. The procedures for the above are explained in the document "Procedures for Assessment of Learners" in the following page below.

b. Placement Assessment

1. It is the policy of DBL College to assess the level of each student upon registration in order to ensure they are placed in a class of the correct level.

2. In the case of non-native speakers of English, the academic management employ placement tests of an international standard designed to assess the reading/writing/listening and speaking skills in English of each student wishing to take either English language or business classes.

3. Teachers are asked to liaise with academic management to ensure that the student has been correctly placed and, in the event of a student being incorrectly placed, to ensure that this is rectified immediately.

4. If a teacher feels that a student has been placed at the wrong level, he/she will issue the student with a signed transfer slip and send the student to the Director of Studies to be placed in a new group.

c. Assessment: Participants and Basic Principles

All activities involved in the assessment of learners are the responsibility of the Director of Studies, the Internal Verifier (Registrar), the Assessment Manager (College Principal) and the Examinations Secretary (Academic Director). Experts and other people external to this core group may also participate if this is found to be necessary.

It is the basic policy of the College that the management of assessment should:

1. Be simple, clear and comprehensive.
2. Be compatible with the assessment policies and methodologies of outside bodies, including HETAC, FETAC, the NQAI and the Awarding Bodies it works with.
3. Respect the autonomy of providers and/or awarding bodies in the design of their programmes and their awards systems and regulations.
4. Encourage learner participation and mobility by facilitating access, transfer and progression.
5. Facilitate the attainment of awards and of smaller units of learning.
6. Support the comparability and recognition of further education and training awards.
7. Where appropriate, support the development of education/training systems including the design and/or redesign of modules, units and entire programmes.
8. Support change in curricula and in delivery systems.

9. Permit stakeholders to carry out their rightful responsibilities.

Part 2

The Assessment of Learners

1. The College undertakes its assessment through a **team** consisting of the Director of Studies, the Internal Verifier, the Assessment Manager and the Examinations Secretary (and if appropriate other stakeholders). Their duties are set out in the document "Matrix of Responsibilities for Internal and External Examinations" (Appendix 12).

2. The College coordinates its assessments through a general staff/management **meeting** held in August, one month before modules begin, and thereafter once a month or as required. The methodology, content and calendar of assessments for each period is agreed upon by the Director of Studies in consultation with appropriate colleagues, as well as the Registrar (Internal Verifier), College Director (Assessment Manager) and the Project Director (Examinations Secretary), in certain cases with input from outside stakeholders.

3. Planning of Assessment: An **assessment plan** will be designed for each programme and must address the following:

- i. Purpose of assessment
- ii. Provision of appropriate feedback, including how the learner can improve his/her work
- iii. Assessment schedule outlining the weighting and timing of assessments
- iv. Details of how and when assessment judgements will be made known
- v. Criteria for assessment, including descriptors of expected standards of attainment for particular marking bands
- vi. Grading and marking conventions to be employed
- vii. Consequences of assessment for both progression and final award

4. The **method of assessment** should be such that

- i. it is appropriate to the particular level of achievement of the learner,
- ii. it involves objective evaluation,
- iii. it is valid in measuring the intended learner outcomes, and
- iv. it is uniform and reliable.

5. Both learners and teachers should be aware of the **reasons for choosing** a particular assessment instrument.

6. Specifically in terms of **assessment regulations**, learners should familiarise themselves with the following:

- a) the obligations as set out in the document "Rules and Regulations for Students" (see Appendix 1)
- b) the procedures regarding Reviews and Appeals (see Appendices 1, 4 and 6),
- c) the appropriate Marks and Standards document.

7. In particular, candidates must be familiar with any relevant

- a) assessment schedule for the particular programme,
- b) penalties for work submitted late,
- c) procedures for seeking a continuous assessment deadline extension,
- d) assessment criteria used to mark submitted work, and
- g) guidelines for referencing.

8. The **obligations** that must be met by students regarding their assessment are explained in the document "Rules and Regulations for Students" (as set out in Appendix 1) and include the following:

- i. Learner responsibilities
- ii. Use of identity card
- iii. Examination attendance
- iv. Examination materials
- v. Conduct at examinations

vi. Breaches of assessment rules (such as cheating, plagiarism, etc. See also advice given in Appendix 22, "Assignment Cover Sheet").

vii. Responsibilities of College staff (also in Appendix 12, "Matrix of Responsibilities for External Examinations")

9. Assessment instruments should be designed with **learner feedback** in mind and should show how his/her grade could be improved upon without damaging his/her self-esteem. Learners who have consistently low grades will be given guidance.

10. The points outlined below must be addressed when **designing new programmes** and reviewing existing programmes.

11. **Assessment criteria** are developed at the College in keeping with standards defined by HETAC and take account of variations in subject content and the level of award. The assessment criteria should follow the advice as given by the validating body.

12. Assessment criteria define the knowledge, understanding, skills, and other qualities that a learner is required to achieve for particular grade bands.

13. Assessment criteria can be presented in broad terms to help assess individual essays, projects, etc. If necessary, certain modifications of this procedure will be permitted for group assessment..

14. A number of assessment criteria forms (generally based on templates and advice received from validating bodies) are in use College-wide for marking final projects.

15. The **validity of assessment** can be further enhanced by developing assessment criteria that are closely linked to the particular knowledge and skills, the subject/module, and the level of the programme being assessed.

16. The assessment criteria should be clear to both learners and lecturers, and published prior to assigning the work. Confirmation that all learners have understood these criteria is essential.

17. All **assessment techniques** should be examined, with identified best practice used to improve all the assessment instruments. They can be grouped together under generic titles such as examinations, skills demonstrations, learner records and project work.

18. Procedures are in place for the **receipting of assessments** by the Director of Studies. However, learners must retain a copy of submitted work where possible (see Appendices 19 and 20).

19. In the case of **late submissions**:

a. A formal mechanism for considering requests for extensions to deadlines for major assessments is also in place (see Appendix 21).

b. The following is the clear policy for dealing with work that is submitted after the deadline:

i. The total marks available for an assessment will be reduced by 15% for work up to five working days late.

ii. The total marks available will be reduced by 30% for work of between six and up to ten working days late.

iii. Assessment work received more than ten working days should receive a mark of zero.

iv. Work is deemed late when an unauthorised missing of a deadline has occurred.

v. The appropriate extern examiner(s) should be informed of instances where penalties have been applied.

20. The Director of Studies is responsible for the **schedule of assessment**, in conjunction with the Academic Director. A schedule of assessment is an outline of the assessment requirements for the programme. The assessment schedule should state

a. The subject/module title

b. The percentage of marks for the work

c. The date when the assessment will be handed out together with the date for handing in completed work

21. The assessment schedules are included in the **academic calendar** which is established as completely as is possible one month before the academic year commences in the first full week of October. This calendar will include at least the following:

- a. The dates, times and locations, as well as assessment title and Awarding Body, are clearly presented in this calendar.
- b. This calendar is published and placed on noticeboards and on the College website. Hard copies are also printed and given to students. The same information is also sent by e-mail to participating students.
- c. Teachers will also explain these assessments, along with other activities, in the week of orientation that begins each programme of modules.
- d. All parties are informed that this calendar may be changed or extended according as new information is received.

22. Learners should be given at least **four weeks' notice** of the submission date for assessment work, and the minimum possible overlap in the timing of assessment work for the different subjects/modules should be managed.

23. The College has created an **appeals procedure**, as outlined in the document "Appeals Procedure" (see Appendix 4 along with other relevant elements in Appendices 1 and 6).

24. Any **re-assessment** that is deemed necessary should be reflected in the record of assessment as organised by the Director of Studies.

25. The policy on assessment repeats (specifically for HETAC modules and modules of other Awarding Bodies) is the following:

- a. Students who wish to repeat a module or programme, who have been unsuccessful previously, will be entered on the appropriate form for the specific assessment like other candidates.
- b. They are required to present evidence again, as required by the module or programme descriptor.
- c. They may present evidence again from the previous round of assessments, clearly identifying this to the external examiner.
- d. They may present new assessments (e.g., exam and/or assignments or other sections) for marking for the current year.
- e. All marks will be entered on the individual candidate marking sheets and the module result sheets.
- f. The external examiner will monitor/moderate the evidence in the usual manner.

26. The **security of materials**, as well as the reliability of the assessment, is of paramount importance to the College. All efforts will be made to comply with assessment procedures and be consistent with the highest national and international standards. The following procedures will be followed with regard to the security of assessments:

- a. The definitive schedule of assessments will be confirmed at the earliest opportunity, as stated above.
- b. The materials for assessment (exam papers, assignment information, etc.) will be procured at the latest ten working days before the assessment date.
- c. These materials will be stored in a metal cabinet in the office of the Academic Director. This cabinet will be securely locked and, when the Academic Director is not present, the room will also remain locked.
- d. Guidelines (received from HETAC or another Awarding Body) as to those persons who can conduct the assessment and handle these materials will be strictly observed. Guidelines as to consistency between assessors will also be strictly observed. This will be coordinated by the Examinations Secretary and Assessment Manager, under the supervision of the Internal Verifier, with the guidelines and conduct open to external verification. Please see document "Matrix of Responsibilities for Internal and External Assessments" (Appendix 12).

e. Careful checks are made of assessment methodologies, question papers and examination materials. All those taking part in the assessment will be made aware of these.

f. Supervisor(s), invigilators and assessors receive training concerning the particular assessments they must look after and the guidelines to be followed, but are again instructed very carefully about their duties prior to each individual assessment so as to guarantee consistency. An agenda and minutes will be taken by the Assessment Manager dealing with the preparation of the assessment, particularly as set out in points 25 (d), (e), and (f) above. This will be verified by the Internal Verifier.

g. For formal, written examinations, the examination venue is checked for correct furnishing, display material, clock, location of seating (1.5 metres of space front, back and at the sides), and invigilation arrangements.

h. Preparations for this in the specific examination site will be completed before the examination starting time. Passports or a similar formal ID with photo will be required by invigilators and candidates can enter only with those instruments and other aids permitted by the Awarding Body.

i. Other written assessment material (such as portfolios) are collected on specified dates and are sent, at the earliest opportunity and by the safest means, to the appropriate examiner or external body for marking.

j. The return of all assessment material is the responsibility of the assessment team, coordinated by the assessment manager who follows the appropriate checklist and ensures that, if necessary, the appropriate signature is received.

k. Assessment materials, when complete, will either be internally marked, internally marked and then sent to the Awarding Body for re-assessment, or sent within one working day to the Awarding Body to be externally examined.

l. The Assessment Manager, under the supervision of the Internal Verifier, will retain all materials pertinent to the assessment process of each candidate. He or she will also receive, publish and keep all results of assessments.

m. The Internal Verifier will produce a report concerning this, and will sign off on results and confirm and sign a checklist.

n. The Assessment Manager, in conjunction with the Internal Verifier, also ensures that a record of monitoring by staff is kept in case of assessment by third parties, specifically for reasons of External Verification.

27. The College keeps up-to-date with **national and international standards** so as to maintain the excellence and consistency of its service. This is achieved by

- a. keeping student records and feedback,
- b. doing follow-up based on the reports of external examiners (see Appendix 16) and establishing clear communication with them,
- c. holding the correct and most recent guidelines for assessors,
- d. offering at least one training day each quarter for staff and keeping records of

this,

- e. keeping and publishing agendas and minutes of assessment team meetings, and
- f. keeping programme evaluation reports.

28. The College has established a procedure for **corrective action** with regard to assessments. On recognising a problem, the assessment team agrees the corrective action that is appropriate and practical, and the Internal Verifier, Assessment Manager and Director of Studies implement it. This may or may not involve input from an outside body. The records of the internal and external verification of assessment, and the full corrective action that is taken, along with their consequences, are kept. All input from students and staff are also kept.

29. The **conduct of assessment** will be monitored by External Evaluators (it should be noted that these may also be called External Examiners, External Assessors or External Verifiers). These persons are appointed to ensure national and international standards.

30. The College understands that any room, laboratory or workshop where assessment is taking place can be visited at any time by **External Evaluators**.

31. In the case of HETAC and FETAC, the External Examiners are assigned by certificate area (see Appendix 14). In the case of the other Awarding Bodies, they are experienced and well-trained evaluators formally recognised and delegated by a particular institute.

32. In the case of assessments, in general their role is to undertake the following:

- a. Ensure that assessment has been carried out and that the assessment criteria have been applied as specified in the module descriptors.
- b. Verify that examinations, assignments, portfolios and/or evidence has been marked in accordance with national and/or international standards.
- c. Return correct candidate results.

33. It should be also made clear that the College conducts its annual, general assessment of its current performance and future development, under the supervision of an External Evaluator.

Part 3

HETAC, FETAC and other External Bodies

The following statements specifically deal with programmes recognised by HETAC and other similar bodies.

1. Assessment is regarded as an integral part of the learning process.
2. All NCEA-National Council for Educational Awards (and their equivalents) are criterion-referenced. Each assessment technique has assessment criteria that detail the range of marks to be awarded for specific standards of knowledge, skills and competence demonstrated by candidates.
3. The mode of assessment is generally local, that is, the assessment techniques are devised and implemented by internal assessors under the supervision of the examinations secretary in the centre.
4. Assessment techniques in NCEA modules (and their equivalents) are valid in that they test a range of appropriate learning outcomes.
5. The reliability of assessment techniques is facilitated by providing support for assessors.
6. Arising from an extensive consultation process, each NCEA module (or its equivalent) describes what is considered to be an optimum approach to assessment. When the necessary procedures are in place, it will be possible for assessors to use other forms of assessment, provided they are demonstrated to be valid and reliable.
7. To enable all learners to demonstrate that they have reached the required standard, candidate evidence may be submitted in written, oral, visual, multimedia or other format as appropriate to the learning outcomes.
8. Assessment of a number of modules may be integrated, provided the separate criteria for each module are met.
9. Group or team work form part of the assessment of a module, provided each candidate's achievement is separately assessed.
10. Assessment is normally achieved through the following techniques: assignment, collection of work, examination, learner record, project, and skills demonstration.
 - a. **Assignment:** An exercise carried out in response to a brief, given by an internal assessor, with specific guidelines and usually of short duration. This normally involves an oral presentation, case study, observations, or another specified activity.
 - b. **Collection of work:** A collection and/or selection of pieces of work produced by candidates over a period of time that demonstrates the mastery of skills. Guided by the internal assessor, candidates present a collection of work demonstrating a range of specific learning outcomes or skills. This can be self-generated or carried out in response to a specific assignment.

- c. **Examination:** A means of assessing the ability of a candidate to recall and apply skills, knowledge and understanding within a set period of time and under clearly specified conditions. Examinations can be practical, oral, interview-style, aural, or theory based answered in writing or orally, etc.
- d. **Learner record:** A self-reported record by an individual, in which he/she describes specific learning experience, activities, responses and skills acquired. Candidates compile a personal logbook/journal/diary/etc, which covers specified aspects of the learner's experience.
- e. **Project:** A substantial individual or group response to a brief with guidelines, usually carried out over a period of time. Projects may involve research or process, and are based on a brief provided by the internal assessor or agreed upon by the candidate and internal assessor. If a group is involved, the individual contribution of each candidate must be clearly identified. Projects are a demonstration of understanding and application of concepts, use/selection of techniques and information, analytical ability, understanding of implementation methods, use of tools, presentation skills, and team working and general participation.
- f. **Skills demonstration:** Assessment of mastery of specified practical, organisational and/or interpersonal skills. The candidate is assessed by the internal assessor while undertaking relevant tasks, in the context of the learning environment, role-play exercise, or real-life/work situations. The candidate may submit a written report/supporting documentation as part of the assessment. Examples of skills assessed are: laboratory skills, computer skills, coaching skills, and interpersonal skills.

Part 4

Access, Transfer and Progression Policy

1. The College undertakes to abide by the provisions set out by law and by the NQAI, particularly the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act of 1999. It understands clearly that these provisions outline the policy and practices that must be carried out by colleges located in Ireland, with the objective that

the learner should be able to enter and successfully participate in a programme, or series of programmes leading to an award, or series of awards, in pursuit of their learning objectives. The national framework of qualifications and associated programme provision should be structured to facilitate learner entry, and to promote transfer and progression, so that learners are encouraged to participate in the learning process to enable them to realise their ambitions to the full extent of their abilities. (NQAI, "Policies, Actions and Procedures for the Promotion and Facilitation of Access, Transfer and Progression," March 2003.)

2. The College facilitates a learner's entry and successful participation in each given programme. This is achieved through procedures on

- a. **Information Provision:** Learners will make informed choices based on information dealing with programmes and relevant services.
- b. **Learner Entry Arrangements:** Procedures for selecting learners for their programmes are transparent and fair, and candidates for programmes are fully informed of these procedures beforehand.
- c. **Recognition of Prior Learning:** Procedures are in place so that prior learning is recognised before entry into any particular programme. In certain circumstances, credit, examination exemption or direct entry into a particular examination can be awarded for prior learning (see Appendix 17).
- d. **Facilitation of Diversity:** The College operates according to national law, the policies of its awarding bodies and its own rigid regulations, to maintain the highest level of equality and non-discrimination.

For a full and simple explanation of the following procedures, see above, "Flowchart of Candidate Experience from Enquiry to Certification" in Section 5, Part 3, Fig. 1 above.

3. The College informs all candidates for each programme of its policy and procedures regarding access to programmes, and transfer or progression from one programme to another or within the same programme of studies.

4. In general terms of access, transfer and progression, the College publishes the content of each programme on its website, or the link for this information to the website of an Awarding Body, as well as in its brochures and other printed material.

5. It also includes information concerning the expected level of candidates, the level of the teaching staff, the material to be used, the duration and timetable of the programme, as well as the materials, examinations, feedback mechanisms, award types, and (as the case may be) details of the awarding body.

6. Candidates are also made aware of College rules and regulations (and those of the Awarding Body), and health and safety, quality assurance and protection of learners policies.

7. In order to maintain a fair and consistent mechanism for entry to programmes, the College provides the following information to potential students:

- a. A statement of the entry requirements for each programme.
- b. Programme content.
- c. Information concerning how the selection process operates.
- d. Assistance for each student in making his or her selection.
- e. The procedure for appealing a refused application to a programme.

8. The College (in this case, the Director of Studies) reviews each written application to consider whether a case can be made for recognising prior learning (see Appendix 17). It might be necessary afterwards to conduct an interview with the candidate. This is done for four reasons:

- a. The international profile of the student body and the wide diversity of prior study, with associated questions about the prior study concerning its level, reliability and indeed veracity.
- b. As part of the entry requirements to a particular programme.
- c. To receive credit towards an award, according to College and (as might be the case) an Awarding Body rules.
- d. To gain access to an examination or, in very exceptional cases, to an award.

9. The criteria for recognition of prior learning (RPL) are set out in this section. The College keeps records of the following:

- a. Student records with information concerning prior learning (copies of RPL applications) and level at entry, along with information concerning ongoing progress.
- b. Assessment records.
- c. Survey questionnaires.
- d. Guidelines for assessing prior learning to place student at appropriate level, as set out in the appendices.
- e. Guidelines for credit, examination exemption and direct entry, again as set out in the appendices.

10. The College recognises that candidates might have particular needs in order to participate, transfer and progress successfully within its programmes. For this reason, an adaptation or specific support can be made to the selection mechanisms, the entry requirements, the programme content, the assessment process and the physical location. This includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- a. Individualised guidance procedures.
- b. Learner induction.
- c. ESOL support.
- d. Mentoring involving feedback, design of special additional educational plans, and similar support.
- e. Easier access for people with disabilities.
- f. Introduction or design of new programmes in response to learner needs or ambitions.
- g. Modification of timetables/calendars to better suit the participating learners (for example, a morning to an evening schedule, etc.).
- h. The possible options to facilitate students of diverse language backgrounds (for example, an extra course of English for Business for students of business administration).

11. The College carries out the facilitation of diversity through questionnaires, one-to-one interviews, student and staff meetings, observation of classes, advice from external moderators, and associated methods.

12. The College includes in its induction programme for new members of staff information on its policy and practices for access, transfer and progression. Staff are also presented with this information in written form and at the annual general meeting of staff.

13. The College will adapt any part of its installations to better serve those students, or incoming new students, who have physical disability. It also sets aside in its budget a certain amount of funding to assist in those practices that help maintain the highest standards of access, transfer and progression.

14. The College will keep up-to-date with all qualification frameworks that are pertinent to the units, programmes and awards it offers.

15. The College assesses the success of this policy, and considers improvements to its application, in its quality assurance revisions and particularly in its annual quality assurance meeting held in June each year.

16. For further details concerning the processes involved in the recognition of prior learning, please consult the appendix 17, "Process of Recognition of Prior Learning".

Fig. 1 Flowchart of Learners' Experience in Assessment Process



