

Guidance on numerical marking

References from the QAA Grading Handbook (January 2012) regarding numerical marking
<http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/home/publications/default.asp>

Section A

Section 3b

The unit grades have no numerical equivalents. They are not derived from or converted into numerical marks. The regulations permit a restricted use of numerical marks, in relation to the assessment of certain types of performance on specific assignments. (See Section C, Annex 1). If used in these restricted circumstances, numerical marks contribute to the final grade for the unit, using a method prescribed by the regulations. No other use of numerical marks is permitted.

Section B

Numerical marking may be used with grade Descriptors 1 and 3 (Understanding of the Subject and Application of Skills), following the detailed regulations on numerical marking. The regulations should be consulted (See Section C, Annex C1) when the assessment of the unit is being planned.

Section C

Section 2 Planning for assessment with grading

d Planning for numerical marking

- *If numerical marking is to be used for the assessment of any part of a unit, the detailed regulations relating to this (see Annex C1 on page 9) must be taken into account when the assessment of the unit is being planned.*

Section 5

Tutors may only use numerical marking in the circumstances permitted by the numerical marking regulations. The use of numerical marking must be planned for and included in the unit assessment plan and assignment brief (see Annex C1 on page 9).

Annex C1: regulations for use of numerical marking

This gives clear guidance on the rules for numerical marking, together with a set of frequently asked questions.

5 Professional judgement

The use of a standard set of grade descriptors and the application of a common method of arriving at final grades provide evidence for, and comparability of, grading judgements on all Access to HE courses. At the same time, the choice available within the grade descriptors and the recognition that professional judgement has a legitimate role to play in arriving at grades avoids a purely mechanistic approach that presumes that assessment is a precise science governed by computation which is divorced from judgement.

Summary

1. Individual assignments should not have a grade assigned to them. If the exam is only one aspect of the assessment of the unit then the exam should not have a grade attached. It should be assessed to ensure that the learning outcomes have been met (mapping of questions to learning outcomes will assist this). If the assessor is confident that a pass is indicated (i.e. that all selected learning outcomes have been met) then it should be assessed against the chosen grade descriptors to decide if merit or distinction grades are *indicate*.
2. Merely feeding back to the student that they achieved a percentage and therefore a Pass, Merit or Distinction does not explain to the student how grade descriptors are used in assessment, nor does it provide feedback on their performance in relation to the descriptors assigned to the unit.
3. Allocating marks to questions in a worksheet or examination that require a discursive response is not appropriate. Making a professional judgement about whether the response demonstrates evidence for achievement of a learning outcome is, however, appropriate.
4. All units must use a minimum of two grade descriptors, and one of these is grade descriptor 7 (Quality), therefore no unit can be assessed entirely through grade descriptors 1 and/or 3. Grading an examination via percentages is therefore inappropriate unless grade indication is restricted to 1 and /or 3 and the examination is only part of the assessment plan for that unit.
5. Deciding on a pass grade via a mark boundary is inappropriate as the numerical mark is only used to clarify the achievement of Merit or Distinction and then only for GD 1 and/or 3, so only contributes to part of the final unit grade. A Pass is always defined through a student's achievement of the associated learning outcomes(s), and not through a specific mark on a scale, unless it can be shown that achieving that mark guarantees that the student has also achieved the learning outcome.
6. If an examination or worksheet is using numerical marking, and GDs 1 and 3 are being used, then each question needs to be mapped, not only against the relevant learning outcome but also the GD which may be indicated.
7. Final unit grades cannot be directly derived from, or converted into, numerical marks.
8. All outcomes recorded on the grade profile are grades (D, M, P), not numerical marks.

Sylvia Waghorn
Access Quality Manager