Assessment Handbook (Microcredentials)

This Assessment Handbook applies to the assessment of all microcredentials starting on or after 1 March 2020.

It is your responsibility as a student to read this document carefully and to refer to the information and guidance it provides for the different stages of your study. If you need further clarification, you can ask your Mentor for advice.

If you are a continuing microcredential student with The Open University, you need to be aware that some aspects of policy, procedure and deadlines relating to assessment matters may have changed and you must not assume that arrangements which have applied to your previous study continue to be applicable. You must ensure that you refer to current information, including this Handbook.

This document has been produced by Assessment, Credit and Qualifications at The Open University.

While we have done everything possible to ensure accuracy, the information in this publication may change in the light of altered regulations or policy or because of financial or other constraints.

We may record our phone calls with you to make sure that we have carried out your instructions correctly and to help us improve our services through staff training.
1 Introduction

1.1 How to use this handbook

This Assessment Handbook (Microcredentials) applies to the assessment of all microcredentials starting on or after 1 March 2020.

It outlines The Open University’s policies relating to the different assessment tasks you may have to complete for your microcredential and explains the outcomes and/or result you will receive at the end of each microcredential. You’ll find our formal Code of Practice for Student Assessment (Microcredentials) on your course website. At appropriate points in your study you will also be directed to other documents which provide specific information relating to assessment such as the How to submit your microcredential assessment document.

This Handbook tells you the general rules and regulations for completing and submitting your assessment and explains the result grades we use, while separate microcredential-specific information on your course website will tell you about the individual assessment for your microcredential.

This Handbook contains an appendix which provides information about The Open University’s statement on Plagiarism.

1.2 Types of assessment

The Open University uses a range of standard assessments to assess your performance on your microcredential, including:

- assignments
- dissertations
- speaking assessments
- portfolios
- practical assessments
- projects

There are other types of assessment, but the above are the most common.

Your course website will provide specific information related to your assessment. You should read this carefully. For more information about assessment see Sections 2 and 3 below.

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2 Assessment Preparation

2.1 Preparing your assessment

Your assessment serves two main purposes. It helps you to learn and The Open University to judge the standard you’ve achieved.

The preparatory work you do for an assessment and the process of writing it should help you to concentrate on particular aspects of the course and to consolidate what you've learned so far.

2.2 Confidentiality in assessment

All information you give in your assessment is regarded as confidential to you and won't be divulged outside The Open University and FutureLearn.

Some microcredential courses may have additional confidentiality guidelines and data protection rules which you will be told about in the course-specific information.

Assessment for some microcredential courses may include work done using collaborative tools such as forums, wikis or blogs. These tools are accessible to anyone with the relevant permissions to the website on which they are hosted. As such, the work done in these media cannot be considered to be confidential.

During your studies you may be encouraged to apply the course content to your own employment context. This means that you may need to give information about, and occasionally to pass judgement on, the company or organisation for which you work or have worked for in the past. The Open University treats such information with complete confidentiality. Mentors and Markers may use it only for purposes directly connected with the delivery of the course, and may not divulge it for any other purpose during or after their service with The Open University.
2.3 Processing personal data as part of your studies

You will not usually be expected to process personal data as part of your studies. If you do need to do so (perhaps for the purposes of a project) you must obtain the agreement of your Mentor that the processing is necessary and immediately inform the Data Protection Team (data-protection@open.ac.uk).

The Data Protection Team will advise you about the requirements and implications of the data protection legislation, including the security arrangements appropriate to your set of personal data. The Data Protection Team will also be responsible for dealing with subject-access requests related to personal data you hold.

2.4 Posting assessments on websites

Posting your own assessments and/or Marker feedback on any website is not allowed unless you are required to do so as part of your assessment. Advertising assessments for sale is also not allowed (see the Code of Practice for Student Discipline).

3 Assessment Submission

You have to work independently to produce an extended piece of work rather than sitting a traditional exam at the end of your study. For ease of reference, these essays, projects, portfolios, dissertations, etc. are referred to collectively as assessments. Assessment can take many forms, ranging from a very short piece of text written in a foreign language, through project reports of a few thousand words in length, to files of evidence summarising your achievements. A word limit and a strict submission deadline apply to assessments.

Your course website will tell you what specific format your assessment will take and will provide information on the word limit and submission deadline (also known as cut-off date).

If you do not submit your assessment or do not reach a pass standard, you will fail. There is no opportunity to resubmit your assessment.

You should refer to the How to submit your microcredential assessment for further details.

3.1 Keeping copies of your assessment

You are strongly advised to keep a copy of your assessment submission, at least until you have received your result. We do not return your assessment to you.
3.2 Submission deadline

You must submit your assessment in accordance with the published cut-off date. Extensions to the cut-off date will not be permitted under any circumstances. The deadline for receipt is noon (UK local time) on the cut-off date. The Open University operates a ‘grace period’ of 12 hours so work submitted by 23.59 hrs (UK local time) on the cut-off date will be accepted without penalty. Assessment submissions received beyond the ‘grace period’ will be considered as a late submission.

3.3 Late submission

If your assessment is received up to 24 hours after the ‘grace period’ (eg. after 23.59 hrs (UK local time) on the cut-off date and before 23.59 hrs (UK local time) on the day following the cut-off date), the assessment will be accepted but the score will be reduced by up to 10 percentage points or to bare-pass level, whichever gives the higher score. You won’t fail the assessment because of the penalty, but it might have implications for how well you do overall.

Assessment submissions received beyond this penalty period will not be marked and you won’t be considered to have completed the assessment. You will not be offered another opportunity to submit this assessment and you will receive a Fail result.
4 Assessment Results

4.1 Determining results

Your course result will be determined by the score you achieve on your assessment as recommended by the Module Result Panel.

4.2 Result Panels

Each microcredential course has a Module Result Panel (MRP) that is responsible for recommending results for individual students. The MRPs use their academic judgement to decide if each student has reached the standard required to be awarded credit for the microcredential course.

Each MRP comprises a Chair (usually the Chair of the microcredential course team) and internal examiners (usually members of the microcredential course team).

The MRP will have:

- your individual assessment score
- your assessment
- various statistical analyses

MRPs work within policy approved by Senate, which is The Open University’s authority for academic matters. Senate sets the upper and lower boundaries for each result grade (see Section 4.3). MRPs have limited discretion to set the lower boundary for each grade of pass below that shown in the tables. This is entirely a matter for the MRP, within the policy approved by Senate, and will remain confidential to it.

MRPs recommend results to a ‘Cluster’ Examination and Assessment Board (Cluster EAB). External Examiners attend the Cluster EAB. External Examiners are senior academics from outside The Open University, usually from another university or higher education institution. The Cluster EABs have a quality assurance role in reviewing and confirming the standards between microcredential courses and of the result process as a whole.
4.3 Result grades

Microcredentials award the following result grades of pass:

- For undergraduate microcredentials: Pass 1, Pass 2, Pass 3 and Pass 4
- For postgraduate microcredentials: Distinction, Merit and Pass

The following tables show the scores needed for particular grades of pass:

Table 1: Undergraduate microcredentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microcredentials Assessment Scores</th>
<th>Microcredential Result Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85-100</td>
<td>Pass 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-84</td>
<td>Pass 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-69</td>
<td>Pass 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-54</td>
<td>Pass 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-39</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Postgraduate microcredentials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Microcredentials Assessment Scores</th>
<th>Microcredential Result Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>85-100</td>
<td>Distinction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-84</td>
<td>Merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-69</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-49</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Receiving your result

Results are usually available about six-to-eight weeks after the assessment cut-off date. You will be sent an email to advise you of your microcredential result.

No results will be given by telephone.
4.5 Feedback on your assessment

You will be provided with feedback from your Marker on your performance in your assessment. This will be sent to you by email. Your assessment will not be returned to you.

4.6 Pending results

Occasionally an MRP may not have enough information or evidence to reach a decision about the result (for example, a Marker returning a score late). In these cases you’ll be given a ‘pending’ result and we will take urgent action to provide the Panel with the information it needs. We aim to release your final result within six weeks of your pending result being issued, but it may take longer in some cases.

4.7 Result checks

Since MRPs are responsible, on behalf of The Open University Senate, for determining students’ results, their decisions are final. There’s no right of appeal to any other Open University body against the academic judgement of the MRP. Careful checks are made at every stage of the award process to make sure that the Panel’s decisions rest on full and accurate information.

If you have evidence that an error has been made in determining your result you can query it by completing a result check form. You must submit the microcredential result check form, along with the appropriate evidence, to arrive within 28 calendar days of the date of the release of your microcredential course result. Result checks can’t be dealt with over the telephone. You must use the formal microcredential result check process to request a check.

You should carefully read the information and guidance found on your course website on how to submit provided before deciding to submit a request for a result check. The chances of your microcredential result being incorrect are extremely small. Open University policies and procedures do not permit the following:

- the return of assessments to students
- re-marking/reconsideration of any assessment
- challenges against academic judgements
- an appeal made by another person on your behalf.

It is not possible to obtain more detailed information about your performance.

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4.8 Formal microcredential course result appeals

4.8.1 If you have evidence that an error has been made you should first request a result check (see Section 4.7 above).

If you are not satisfied with the response to your result check you may request a review by the Senate Academic Appeals Review Panel. For a review to be accepted for consideration there must be information or evidence that the decision was determined in an inappropriate way - for example, on incorrect or incomplete information. Your discontentment with the outcome of the result check response is not evidence of any procedural irregularity concerning the way in which the decision was made.

If there’s evidence that your result was awarded improperly and your case is upheld, the MRP will be asked to reconsider your result.

4.8.2 To make an appeal

If you feel you meet the grounds for review*, write to the Secretary to the Panel, within 28 days of the date of the result check response. You should set out your grounds and provide any additional evidence which has not previously been submitted.

Send your appeal to StudentCaseworkOffice@open.ac.uk The Student Casework Office will acknowledge receipt of your documents within three days of their arrival, telling you which delegate authority of The Open University has been asked to reply direct to you.

* that relevant evidence has not been taken into account; or that irrelevant evidence was taken into account; or that any relevant University regulations, policies or procedures have not been applied correctly; or that the reasons for the decision were not fully and clearly communicated to you; or that there was bias, or the likelihood of bias in making the decision; or that the decision was made by a person or body without the necessary responsibility or authority; or that the procedure followed was not fair or adequate; or that the decision was not one which, in all the circumstances, it was reasonable for the University to have made.

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Appendix - Plagiarism

What constitutes plagiarism or cheating

If you submit an assessment that contains work that is not your own, without indicating this to the marker (acknowledging your sources), you are committing ‘plagiarism’ and this is an offence. This might occur in an assessment when:

- using a choice phrase or sentence that you have come across
- copying word-for-word directly from a text
- paraphrasing the words from a text very closely
- using text downloaded from the internet
- borrowing statistics or assembled facts from another person or source
- copying or downloading figures, photographs, pictures or diagrams without acknowledging your sources
- copying from the notes or essays of a fellow student
- copying from your own notes, on a text, tutorial, video or lecture, that contain direct quotations.

Although you are encouraged to show the results of your reading by referring to and quoting from works on your subject, copying from such sources without acknowledgement is deemed to be plagiarism and will not be accepted by The Open University. This means that you must make it clear which words and ideas are yours and which have come from elsewhere, through the use of quotation marks as well as in-text citations.

The Developing Good Academic Practice website may assist you with your studies. You should read carefully any specific study advice that you receive, especially statements concerning plagiarism and how to reference your sources. Where plagiarised material is included in assessments, Markers are likely to notice the shifts in style and may be aware of the source. The Open University uses text comparison software which it applies to electronic assessments.

You may be encouraged to collaborate with others in studying, but submitting work copied from or written jointly with others is not acceptable, unless collaboration is required in the particular assessment. By submitting your assessment you are confirming that the work is your own.
Submitting work that has been done by someone else and persistent borrowing of other people’s work without citation are obvious instances of plagiarism and are regarded as cheating. Copying answers from social networking sites or paying for work from other sources and submitting it as your own is also cheating. Passing on your assessment to others, with the knowledge that another student may plagiarise your work, could also lead to a penalty. If a case of plagiarism is proven, this is a serious offence and the Open University disciplinary procedures will be followed, as described in the Code of Practice for Student Discipline.

5 Summary of Changes

September 2020

Section 4.3 – Updated result grades for undergraduate microcredentials