

Fact Sheet 5

How your work is assessed



THE ADAM SMITH COLLEGE, FIFE
INSPIRING LEARNING

Most of the courses offered by the Adam Smith College are certificated by national awarding bodies and can be roughly divided into two groups.

The first group covers courses which are assessed mainly, or entirely, using an end-of-course (external) examination which is set by the awarding body and marked outwith the College.

The second group covers courses which are mainly, or entirely, assessed on a continuous basis and do not involve external end-of-course examinations. In these courses, the assessment of student work is carried out by College staff, so they are usually known as 'internally assessed' courses.

Deciding the results of internally assessed student work involves three stages:

Stage 1 – Internal Assessment

The majority of courses offered by the College are certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), and assessment is often on a continuous basis, which means that you will be assessed on your learning at the end of each section or part of your unit of study.

Many students find this approach to assessment less stressful than the more traditional end-of-year examination, because it allows them to be assessed on parts of their work as they go along rather than all of it at the end of their course.

Lecturers teaching a class of students assess their learning as part of the unit of study. In other words, the lecturer teaching a class also assesses the work of the students in that class.

Students who do are not successful in an assessment at the first attempt will be provided with advice and support (often called 'remediation') by the lecturer and given the opportunity to be re-assessed.



Stage 2 – Moderation

So that assessments are fair to all students - regardless of who teaches them - internal assessments are regularly checked by another lecturer teaching the same, or similar subjects.

Meetings are held at which student work from a number of classes, each taking the same or similar units of study, is compared. This is to ensure that common standards of assessment have been applied. This process is called 'internal moderation'.

Occasionally, the judgement made by a class lecturer who first assessed a student's work is challenged during the moderation stage. This is done in the interests of fairness, to ensure that all student work is assessed in the same way and to the same standard.

Stage 2 – Moderation [continued]

While this does not happen very often, a class lecturer's assessment of student work can be changed at the moderation stage by his/her colleagues, if they are of the view that the class lecturer's assessment has been too lenient (e.g. by passing student work which is not of the required standard) or if the lecturer's assessment has been too harsh (e.g. he/she has failed student work which, in the opinion of the internal moderator, is of pass standard).

The key point is that a class lecturer is not in a position to tell a student in his/her class definitely whether or not work has passed or failed before moderation has taken place. When your lecturer gives you feedback on your assessment, he/she is trying to be helpful, but you must not mistake informal feedback for the final decision on your work. Moderation of assessments can lead to changes. Your lecturer may not have the final decision on these matters (for the reasons given).



Stage 3 – Verification

To be strictly correct, no one in the College can tell you definitely whether or not your work has passed or failed. This is because the College is usually not the organisation awarding certificates. Only the awarding body (e.g. SQA) can certificate student work. Over and above the internal moderation of assessments carried out by College staff, awarding bodies themselves check that colleges are assessing work appropriately.

This process is often called 'external verification' (to indicate that people from outside the College are involved). The verification process involves the awarding body carrying out checks on College staff's assessments of student work. This is done by sending 'verifiers' to the College, where they check assessments against national standards.

Appeals

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome on an internal assessment decision, you can appeal using the process described in the College Academic Appeals Procedure [QP2.13].

Summary

To recap, if your work is being assessed internally it will normally be assessed first by your subject lecturer. Your work may then be assessed again at the internal moderation stage by other lecturers in the College to ensure fairness. It may then be assessed yet again by representatives of the body awarding the final certificate at the external verification stage. Only after the three stages have been completed can you be sure of your results, which will be sent to you by the awarding body, not the College.

External Examinations

A number of courses are assessed by means of an externally-set and externally-marked examination. In these cases, it is for the examining body to inform you whether or not you have completed your course successfully. College lecturers are not in a position to tell you whether you have passed or failed, until they have been informed by the examining body (usually at the same time as you will know directly from the examining body).