

Methods of assessment (from 2026/27)

Programmes at the Royal Agricultural University are assessed through the use of different assessment methods across modules of study. Assessments are underpinned by the [QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education \(June 2024\)](#) and as set out under Principle 11 – Teaching, learning and assessment:

Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.

Key Practices

Learning and assessment at all levels is informed by research and/or scholarship. Teaching, learning and assessment align to ensure students can demonstrate their achievements, reflect on and reinforce their prior learning, skills and knowledge, and fulfil their potential.

- a. Students are given clear information about the intended modular and/or programme learning outcomes and the purpose of assessment and are enabled to use feedback/feedforward to support further learning.
- b. Staff involved in facilitating learning and supervising research are appropriately qualified and supported to enhance their teaching and supervisory practice. Research degrees are delivered in supportive environments that are conducive to learning and research.
- c. Students are enabled and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to take an active role in shaping and enhancing the learning process. Providers offer ongoing advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them.
- d. As students move through their learning journey, they are given the opportunity and support to transition effectively between academic levels, further study and employment. Providers enable students to recognise the progression they have made and steps they need to

take to achieve their potential.

- e. Providers design assessments that test appropriate learning outcomes and are fair, reliable, accessible, authentic and inclusive. Where applicable, and sustainable, students are offered different options for undertaking assessments to promote accessibility and inclusion.
- f. Providers establish coherent approaches to technologies that impact teaching, learning and assessment (such as Generative Artificial Intelligence). These approaches are clearly communicated to staff and students, include how they are utilised and define misuse of such technologies.
- g. Providers offer advice and guidance about academic integrity to ensure that students and staff understand what is expected of them throughout the learning journey. The advice is kept current.

Module learning outcomes are aligned to programme learning outcomes. Assessments within programmes and courses apply a range of delivery methods and are utilised where appropriate to evidence learning. Individual assessments should be linked to the RAU Graduate Framework and the four employability domains which are Professional Approach, Innovative Business Thinker, Sustainable and Environmental Mindset and Technically Skilled. The goal is to maximise students' learning potential leading to positive outcomes. Module and programme learning outcomes are to be assessed effectively and rigorously through the use of different assessment methods which allows for different skills to be assessed.

All assessments are defined within one of three broad assessment types which are:

- Written Exam
- Coursework
- Practical

Arrangements for assessment setting, completion, marking, moderation and alternative assessments are different for each type of assessment. Module learning outcomes should not normally be summatively assessed more than once unless appropriate.

Typical summative assessments for a 20-credit module could be:

- A single, individual 4,000-word assessment (100%)

- An individual assessment of 2,500 words (50%) plus a 1-hour examination (50%)
- A group (2 to 4 students) presentation of 30 minutes (30%) plus a 3,000 word assessment (70%)
- Pass/Fail assessments are classified as Practicals and have no weighting (write Pass/Fail)

Typical summative assessments for a 15-credit module could be:

- A single, individual 3,000-word assessment (100%)
- An individual assessment of 1,500 words (50%) plus a 1-hour examination (50%)
- A group (2 to 4 students) presentation of 30 minutes (30%) plus a 2,000 word assessment (70%)
- Pass/Fail assessments are classified as Practicals and have no weighting (write Pass/Fail)

The below word counts, with the exception of the dissertation, and time limits are suggestions only and depend on other assessment components in the same module.

**Quercus code*

ASSESSMENT TYPE: Practical				
COMPONENT	QUANTIFICATION	EXAMPLE (i.e. what is on the module spec)	ASSESSMENT FOCUS	DESCRIPTION
Peer review <i>*PEER REVIEW</i>	Not applicable	Peer review	Academic Scientific Professional	An individual peer review of a practical assessment by other students, for example of a presentation.
Presentation <i>*PRESENTATION</i>	Time limit OR Slide limit	Presentation (5 minutes) OR Presentation (6 slides)	Academic Scientific Professional	A live presentation delivered by the student, in-person or virtually. (see 'audio visual media' for presentations which are pre-recorded)

Role-play <i>*ROLE PLAY</i>	Time limit	Role-play (10 minutes)	Professional	A timed role-play between two or more students, or between a student and a third-party participant. The participant must not be the assessor.
Skills observation <i>*SKILLS OBSERVATION</i>	Time limit OR Number of skills	Skills observation (10 minutes) OR Skills observation (5 skills)	Scientific Professional	In person observation of a student demonstrating a skill or technique for example wildlife handling, or demonstration of a laboratory technique.

ASSESSMENT TYPE: Coursework				
COMPONENT	QUANTIFICATION	EXAMPLE (i.e. what is on the module spec)	ASSESSMENT FOCUS	DESCRIPTION
Academic poster <i>*ACAD POSTER</i>	Word count	Academic poster (500 words) OR Academic Poster	Academic	A traditional academic poster, presenting academic information through a combination of visual imagery, charts and text with consideration for both the content and layout of the poster.
Annotated Bibliography <i>* ANN_BIB</i>	150 – 250 words per source	The annotation gives information about the relevance and quality of the sources students cited through a 150-250 word	Academic	A list of the sources including citations that students have used in their research with brief 'annotations' (summary or analysis) for each that describe the sources' content and summarise its main argument.

		description or interpretation of the source.		
Audio visual media <i>*AUDIO-VIS MEDIA</i>	Time limit OR Slide limit	Audio visual media (5 minutes) OR Video (6 slides)	Academic Scientific Professional	An item of audio and/or visual media including videos, pre-recorded presentations, podcasts etc.
Business Plan <i>* Business Plan</i>	Word count	Business plan (3000 words including SWOT and data analysis)	Academic Professional	A document describing the key financial and organisational aspects of a business with a focus on the overall organisation and not specific activities. This document may be required as part of funding applications. Can include SWOT, data and risk analysis.
Case study ++ <i>*CASE STUDY</i>	Word count	Case study (2000 words)	Academic Scientific Professional	Can be undertaken individually or as a group assessment in the form of a problem-based inquiry approach requiring identification of potential solutions.
Dissertation <i>*DISS</i>	Word count	Dissertation (BSc 12,000 words, MSc 15,000 words)	Academic	An extended piece of structured writing through which a student demonstrates learning gained from an in-depth analysis or study of a topic using either primary or secondary research techniques. A dissertation is used as a capstone assessment for a degree programme.
Essay <i>*ESSAY</i>	Word count	Essay (1800 words)	Academic	A piece of structured writing through which a student presents an explanation, argument or analysis regarding a specific question or topic using secondary research, or critical analysis.
Grant application <i>*GRANT APPL</i>	Word count	Grant application (1000 words)	Academic	Students are required to use real/adapted versions of different grant application forms to plan a

				research project. This could be assessed using the published criteria as a basis for the marking criteria
Group Work <i>*GROUP WORK</i>	Marking arrangement** <i>(see end of document)</i>	Group Presentation (5 minutes, individually marked) OR Group Professional Practice Report (2000 words)	Academic Scientific Professional	Any item of assessment where students work collaboratively. All students participating in group work must be awarded an individual mark.
Learning log <i>*LEARNING LOG</i>	Word count	Learning log (2000 words)	Professional	List of activities, competencies and outcomes which students check off during a period of learning during placement.
Literature review <i>*LIT REVIEW</i>	Word count	Literature Review (2000 words)	Academic	A piece of structured writing through which a student presents an overview of academic sources which provides a description, summary and critical evaluation of these sources in relation to the research problem under investigation.
Online test <i>*ONLINE TEST</i>	Time limit	Online test (30 minutes)	Academic Scientific Professional	A timed, online quiz which consists of one or more questions including multiple choice questions, long answer questions, short answer questions or statistical/mathematical questions. The rubric for an online test may be similar in format to a formal written exam but online tests are not invigilated. The test may take place at a scheduled time, or may be available for students to complete at any point during a longer period of time; once started the test must be completed within the time limit.
Portfolio <i>*Portfolio</i>	Word count	Evidence of documented skills, qualification, education and training	Academic Scientific Professional	A purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the

				criteria for selection and materials that exemplify skills, qualifications, education, training and experiences. This can include an element of self-reflection.
Problem sheet <i>*PROB SHEET</i>	Word count OR Question type	Problem Sheet (short answer questions) OR Problem Sheet (1000 words)	Academic Scientific Professional	An assignment which consists of one or more questions including multiple choice questions, long answer questions, short answer questions or statistical/mathematical questions. The rubric for a problem sheet may be similar in format to a formal written exam but problem sheets are not invigilated or scheduled. Students are given a defined period of time, usually 1 or 2 weeks, to complete the problem sheet and submit their answers.
Professional practice report <i>*PROF PRAC REP</i>	Word count	Professional Practice Report (1000 words)	Professional	A structured piece of writing which imitates, or directly replicates a format which students might expect to undertake when working in the relevant sector.
Research proposal <i>*RESEARCH PROP</i>	Word count	Research Proposal (1000 words)	Academic	A piece of structured writing in which a student summarises a proposed research problem, setting out the central question which will be investigated with reference to current academic literature.
Research paper <i>*RES PAP</i>	Word count	Research paper (1500 words)	Academic	A piece of structured writing, replicating the format of an academic journal, through which a student demonstrates learning gained from an in-depth analysis or study of a topic using either primary or secondary research techniques.
Scientific report <i>*SCI REPORT</i>	Word count	Scientific Report (2000 words)	Scientific	A structured piece of writing which follows the format and style of a traditional scientific or laboratory report.

Skills portfolio <i>*SKILLS PORTFOLIO</i>	Number of skills	Skills portfolio (6 skills)	Scientific Professional practice	A portfolio which evidences a series of skills, techniques or behaviours this could be presented as a physical item, for example a laboratory notebook, or in a digital format, for example a Moodle Database.
Subject specific exercise <i>*SUBJ SPEC EX</i>	Varies – seek advice from Academic Services	Subject specific exercise (xxx)	Professional	An exercise which imitates, or directly replicates an activity which students might expect to undertake when working in the relevant sector but which is not a structured written report. Examples include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equine ration exercises • Equine synthesis tables • Coding exercises • Circuit design exercises • Calculation exercises • Species identification
Textual visual media <i>*TEXT VIS MEDIA</i>	Word count	Textual visual media (800 words)	Academic Scientific Professional	An item of textual and/or visual media including magazine articles, posters leaflets, infographics or press releases.
Written self-reflection <i>*SELF-REFLEC</i>	Word count	Written self-reflection (500 words)	Academic Scientific Professional	A loosely structured, or unstructured piece of writing through which a student reflects on their own learning and development with regards to a specific activity, for example an individual assessment or a placement.

ASSESSMENT TYPE: Exam				
COMPONENT	QUANTIFICATION	EXAMPLE (i.e. what is on the module spec)	ASSESSMENT FOCUS	DESCRIPTION
Written exam <i>*WRITTEN EXAM</i>	Time limit	Written exam (2 hours)	Academic Scientific Professional	A formal, traditional, examination which is scheduled and invigilated and consists of one or more questions including multiple choice questions, long answer questions, short answer questions or statistical/mathematical questions

ASSESSMENT TYPE: Research				
COMPONENT	QUANTIFICATION	EXAMPLE (i.e. what is on the module spec)	ASSESSMENT FOCUS	DESCRIPTION
Thesis <i>* THESIS</i>	Word count	PhD: 80,000 words MPhil: 40,000 words Excluding appendices	Academic Scientific Professional	A concentrated piece of original research which explains the conclusion that has been reached as a result of undertaking the research project.
Viva Voce <i>* VIVA VOCE</i>	There are no rules concerning the length of time a viva will take.		Academic Scientific Professional	Formal examination in which a student answers questions regarding their thesis and research area. Assessment can be conducted by one or more examiners and allows examiners to:

	<p>Examiners have discretion to make it as long or as short as they think necessary. Each combination of thesis, student and examiners is unique.</p>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • examine the general field within which the thesis lies; • discuss the thesis in detail; • explore the ideas and the theories proposed in the thesis; • clarify any points of ambiguity; and • satisfy themselves that the thesis is the student's own work
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****Assessing Group Work**

All students participating in group work must be awarded an individual mark. Academics must be able to explain how the mark was derived at in the event of an academic misconduct investigation.

While group work provides students with an authentic and inclusive learning experience that contributes to their graduate attributes, group work often creates problems where there is a lack of clarity as to whether the process of working in a group is being assessed; the coursework output; or both. Group work can be used to develop skills such as team-working, collaboration, organisational and time management, all of which are important for future employment. Assessments should be designed such that they are seen as inclusive and fair, while allowing for the scaffolding of group tasks.

When using group work as assessment tool, module leaders should reflect on the rationale for the appropriateness of how the group work is to be assessed, and what the alternative assessment will be in the event of resits or deferrals.

To avoid student dissatisfaction, group work should be introduced by:

- **Implementing group assessment guidelines** that explain how the assessment will meet the module learning outcomes, marking criteria and rubric. The guidance should set out how participation in group activities will be evidenced and assessed; and how marks will be balanced between individual and group effort.

- **Determining the group membership, size and the process** for forming the group. Groups should be diverse and they should be encouraged to set up their own plans for group work activities. Module leaders should set out how groups are being supported in the event of problems outside of the groups control, e.g. sickness.
- **Allowing time in scheduled teaching sessions to facilitate group work tasks**, e.g. idea generation; recording progress; provision of constructive feedback; reach consensus for progress and actions.
- **Providing tools to enable and facilitate the collaboration** which can be used to evidence progress; e.g. discussion group on the VLE; team meetings via chat groups; formative submission of the group's progress with the task; peer review on progress.

Assessing group work

The issue of fairness in marking group work is a common concern when establishing this type of assessment. Typically, assessors may want to mark the produce of group work, as this provides a reduced burden in the marking process. However, where there is a disparate dedication of time and effort into group work amongst group members, this can lead to animosity, where members may feel that they are carrying the burden of work for their peers but being awarded the same marks (Boud and Falchikov, 2007).

At the RAU, all students participating in group work must be awarded an individual mark. Group can be assessed either through:

Individual assessment

Assessing the product:

- By allowing students to take a particular focus or role (through self-allocation or by module leader allocation). This ensures that each student has an area of focus for the completion of the overall coursework product and students will be marked on the quality of their work in the whole product. Marks are awarded for individual contributions which are evidenced by individual output and against the marking criterial.

Assessing the process:

- Students are provided with the assessment criterial and guidelines for how they should keep track of the group work process. Students are awarded a portion of the marks for the overall output of the group work and for individual components based on their self-

reflections and record keeping of the process. Marks awarded refer to the group output against the assessment criteria and reflective reports such as self-reflections, meeting notes, presentations or work notes.