



# **Guides for Higher Education Providers for Effective Practice in Examining and Assessing in a Language other than the Language of Tuition**

Subject to consultation

December 2017

## Introduction

- 1 The purpose of this guide is:
  - to promote effective practical arrangements for providers to reflect the 12th Indicator of good practice of Chapter B6 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code):<sup>1 2</sup> degree-awarding bodies assure themselves that the standards of their awards are not compromised as a result of conducting assessment in a language other than English
  - to acknowledge the particular circumstances of higher education providers in Wales in ensuring the equal status of Welsh and English under the terms of the 1993 Welsh Language Act and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011
  - to acknowledge the responsibilities of higher education providers in Wales to provide opportunities, wherever possible, for assessing student performance in the Welsh language, irrespective of the language(s) of teaching/tuition.

## Status

- 2 This guide is advisory only and does not form part of the Quality Code.

## General

3 This guide starts from the premise that there is a degree of risk attached to making reliable and valid judgements about student achievement where there is any intervention between the assessor and the work produced by the student for assessment. Best practice in assessment therefore should seek to eliminate or, so far as possible, minimise any such intervention.

4 The most effective means for securing reliable and valid judgements of student achievement is for internal and external examinations to take place in the same language. So, in Wales, the appointment of internal and external examiners who are linguistically and academically competent to make judgements on the original Welsh language text is regarded as a first principle.

5 Where this is not possible, providers may wish to consider offering an academic translation service. This constitutes a significant intervention, and therefore carries a higher risk. Translation may unintentionally fail to convey, for example, technicalities and nuances of meaning; it may also unintentionally enhance performance through inferring meanings not actually present within the original.

6 The risk associated with translation is present within both internal and external examining processes, and may be to the advantage or to the disadvantage of the student.

7 Providers offering such a service should ensure that arrangements are in place to minimise the risk and to safeguard the reliability of the assessment process.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education sets out the Expectations that all UK higher education providers are required to meet, available at: [www.gaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Available at: [www.gaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b](http://www.gaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code/quality-code-part-b).

## **Good practice**

8 The good practice in internal and external examining described below removes the need for translation and minimises the risk of advantage or disadvantage to the student.

### **Internal examining**

9 Risk is lowest when providers are able to appoint bilingually competent internal examiners from within the department/school that delivers the students' programme, to grade assessments submitted in both languages for comparative purposes. Providers may wish to consider including within examination regulations how they might determine the bilingual competency of internal examiners for this purpose.

10 When a provider is unable to secure a competent bilingual examiner from within the department/school, providers may wish to consider appointing a bilingual examiner in the appropriate specialism/discipline, from elsewhere. As an associate internal examiner, this person should work with the examination team. So, for example they would help to set the assessments in English and Welsh and mark together assessments submitted in both Welsh and English. Providers may wish to consider how examination regulations can assure the quality of this process.

### **External examining**

11 The risk to external examining is minimised by appointing bilingually competent external examiners who meet the generic criteria that providers apply to all external examiners' appointments.

12 Providers, collectively, may wish to consider establishing a database of such bilingually competent subject specialists to assist individual providers in the appointment of appropriate external examiners. Lecturers sponsored by the Coleg Cymraeg Cenedlaethol may be able to assist in relation to Welsh-medium assessment.

13 When a provider is unable to appoint a bilingually competent external examiner who meets the normal criteria, providers should consider appointing an associate external examiner, with the appropriate subject expertise, who is bilingually competent. The associate external examiner should work closely with the designated external examiner in considering examination scripts and assignments in both languages, and in meeting other external examiner duties, including commenting on the quality of learning resources and the learner experience.

### **Use of translation**

14 Where translation is used, providers should ensure that its arrangements for minimising the associated risk:

- do not compromise the opportunities for students to be assessed in the language of their own choosing
- provide opportunities for students to demonstrate they have met the learning outcomes, and to get feedback that enables them to develop their potential.

15 In pursuit of these two aims, providers should counsel and advise students on their best interests, including their language skills, and on the risks implicit in the translation of assessments.

16 Providers may also wish to consider the extent to which different levels of risk attach to different modes/styles of assessment and to different discipline areas, and counsel students accordingly.

## **Quality assurance of assessment through translation**

17 Reliance on translation alone, both for the purposes of setting assessments, and for grading completed assignments, carries a high risk and providers doing so will need to consider means of minimising this.

## **Planning**

18 To assure the quality of all translated materials, there is a need to identify, at an early stage in each academic year, the demand for assessment in another language where it is required or offered and to ensure that examination arrangements are effectively organised to meet these demands. In particular, providers should set and publish clear timetables for students and staff to facilitate sound and timely translations of all relevant materials.

## **Ensuring comparability**

19 When providers set assessments in one language that they translate into another, one should expect comparable standards. The translation should ensure equitability and that it does not advantage or disadvantage any students.

20 Providers may wish to consider how examination regulations place the onus of responsibility on departments/schools to secure this.

## **Subject sensitivity**

21 Providers should note the different risks attached to the different styles and modes of assessment relating to different subjects/disciplines. Ideally, translators will need to be 'subject sensitive' and providers may wish to consider pooling their experience and expertise in order to use translators who might specialise in broad discipline areas. Subject sensitive translators could also ensure that the nuances of language codes associated with particular disciplines can be addressed in the translation process. When it is not possible to use subject sensitive translators, providers may consider commissioning a second translation for comparative purposes.

## **Assuring standards**

22 Providers should consider having explicit criteria, comparable with those for students who submit assignments in English, in order to determine the overall quality and standard of the Welsh text in students' submitted assignments.

## **Verification**

23 Translated examination papers/assignments will need to be verified. Providers will need to consider the standard practice of 'back translation' as a means of securing this.

## **Independence**

24 Translators may be internal or external to the provider. In all cases, however, providers should take steps to ensure they are independent from the teaching, examining and marking processes, in respect of the students whose work is being translated.

