



Assessment & Grading Framework

Epoch-Aligned Criteria — Version 3.1

Senate — Academic Standards Committee
Fitzherbert University · 2025

ABSTRACT

The master framework for assessing student work across all programmes, calibrated to the current Epoch and reviewed at each Epoch Transition. Version 3.0 introduced the Verified Reasoning Dimension (VRD) following what the committee minutes describe as 'the 2024 Grade Inflation Crisis,' in which 34% of M.AI submissions were awarded Distinction despite being, upon closer review by a human moderator, very confident and substantially incorrect. The VRD requires that student reasoning be both algorithmically novel and independently verifiable by a disinterested human examiner. Version 3.1 adds the note that 'independently verifiable' is intended to rule out reasoning that can only be assessed by the same AI system that produced it, a clarification requested by seven different examiners in Michaelmas Term 2024. The highest grade band, Distinction with Provenance, has been awarded six times in the programme's history.

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I. Purpose, Audience, and Academic Status

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Assessment and Grading Framework — Epoch-Aligned Criteria is issued for students, examiners, moderators, and academic boards. It consolidates rules, expectations, and procedures that are academically material to progression through the University. The document is not exhaustive of every possible scenario; no serious academic regulation ever is. It is, however, intended to be sufficiently complete that a diligent reader can understand the normative structure of the institution without requiring a private translator from the Registry.

The scope of the guide includes grade bands, assessment criteria, moderation, verified reasoning standards, and consistency of academic judgment across programmes. These matters are grouped together because students experience them together. Universities often separate academic regulations from practical realities and then act surprised when students fail to perceive the hidden coherence between attendance, assessment, support, authorship, progression, and professional conduct. Fitzherbert has chosen the more candid path of documenting those connections directly.

Nothing in this document displaces the Charter, Senate regulations, or formally promulgated departmental rules. Where conflict appears, the higher authority prevails, but the conflict itself must be reported to the Academic Standards Committee. The University has become increasingly unwilling to tolerate situations in which two valid-looking documents issue incompatible commands and the burden of reconciliation is quietly transferred to the least powerful reader.

II. Core Requirements and Conditions of Good Standing

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Students governed by this document are expected to satisfy the following core requirements: criterion-referenced marking, moderation compliance, verified reasoning evaluation, and documented rationale for high-stakes decisions. These requirements are cumulative rather than decorative. A student may be intellectually gifted and administratively non-compliant, or administratively immaculate and academically unconvincing. The University records both conditions separately because experience suggests they produce different forms of difficulty and therefore require different interventions.

Good standing is defined as the concurrent maintenance of academic eligibility, procedural compliance, and honest authorship. This formulation was adopted after the University realised that earlier versions of its regulations assumed these states naturally travelled together. They do not. A student may be passing modules while misrepresenting authorship, or may be impeccably honest while failing to meet minimum progression thresholds. The document therefore insists on a multi-dimensional understanding of standing rather than a single flattering average.

The Verified Reasoning Dimension was introduced because eloquent incorrectness had become statistically too common to ignore and politically too embarrassing to euphemise. The University recognises that some readers regard such notes as unduly specific. They are specific because Fitzherbert now writes regulations with the benefit of memory, and memory has proved less sentimental than institutional branding materials.

III. Teaching, Assessment, and Verified Intellectual Work

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Teaching and assessment under this framework are designed to measure understanding rather than exposure. Attendance alone does not constitute engagement, submission alone does not constitute authorship, and polished prose alone does not constitute reasoning. These propositions may appear obvious, yet the University continues to find them operationally necessary. The increasing fluency of AI-assisted output has not made assessment impossible; it has merely made imprecision in assessment no longer survivable.

Students must therefore preserve evidence of process where required by module, programme, or examiner instruction. Evidence may include outlines, notes, drafts, model interaction logs, source annotations, code provenance, or oral defence materials. The requirement is not intended to create administrative theatre. It exists because verified intellectual labour increasingly depends on the capacity to distinguish between a result that is merely impressive and a result that is educationally attributable.

Programme teams retain discretion to vary assessment methods, but any variation must remain legible to students in advance and reviewable afterwards. Hidden criteria, retroactive standards, and unadvertised penalties are inconsistent with the University's conception of academic justice. Fitzherbert has occasionally fallen short of this standard and has therefore made the standard more explicit rather than less.

IV. Student Support, Advice, and Corrective Interventions

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Support structures available under this framework include services provided by module teams, external examiners, quality assurance staff, and boards of examiners. Students are expected to use these services before a difficulty becomes a narrative of inevitability. The University is willing to provide support, extensions where regulations permit them, and structured interventions where risk is identified. It is less willing than in previous decades to accept the proposition that a predictable difficulty became unmanageable only because no one guessed in time what the student had not disclosed.

Corrective interventions may include academic skills plans, supervised study arrangements, authorship reviews, attendance contracts, wallet and credential remediation sessions, or referral to specialist support. These measures are not punishments, though they may feel administratively intimate. Their purpose is to restore viable academic participation before more severe decisions become necessary. The University prefers prevention to attrition, even if prevention produces more paperwork.

Where a student contests an intervention, reasons must be supplied and an appeal route explained. Fitzherbert has found that students accept demanding standards more readily when the standards are accompanied by intelligible process. The University has also found that some staff accept appeal rights only in theory. This document is written partly to improve that situation.

V. Progression, Awards, and Institutional Record

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Progression decisions are made on the basis of academic performance, compliance with programme conditions, and the integrity of the submitted work. No student acquires an entitlement to progress merely by having reached the end of a term. Progression is a judgment recorded against published criteria, moderated where appropriate, and retained in a form that can survive later scrutiny by examiners, appeals panels, professional bodies, and the graduate's future self.

Award records, whether physical, digital, or on-chain, derive their legitimacy from the underlying academic decision. The credential is evidence of the judgment, not a substitute for it. This point has acquired renewed importance in an era in which students understandably pay more attention to the portability of credentials than to the minutes of the board that authorised them. Fitzherbert encourages the former interest while requiring the latter record.

Academic records generated under this document are retained according to University schedule and may be reviewed by the Academic Standards Committee where patterns of inconsistency, unexplained grade movement, or authorship concern arise. Retention is not merely defensive. It is one of the few ways an institution can prove, years later, that it meant what it said when it certified someone's knowledge.

VI. Review, Amendment, and Student Notice

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the Academic Standards Committee is responsible for reviewing the continuing adequacy of this document. Review takes place annually and additionally at points of regulatory strain, technological change, or material confusion in application. The University regards confusion in application as a genuine diagnostic event. If readers repeatedly misread a rule, the problem may lie not only with the reader but with the institutional habit of writing as though ambiguity were a mark of sophistication.

Material amendments must be published with a notice explaining what changed, why it changed, and to whom the change applies. Retrospective application is exceptional and must be justified. Students are not required to admire the amendment process, but they are entitled to know whether the rules under which they enrolled are the rules under which they are now being judged.

This edition is therefore offered as a practical academic instrument: formal enough to guide decisions, explicit enough to constrain them, and candid enough to admit that the University is governing real students under real conditions rather than idealised subjects in a prospectus. Fitzherbert considers candour an underused academic virtue and has attempted, here, to employ it more consistently than is traditional.



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