

## Marking and Moderation Practices: Definitions and Guidance

### 1 Definitions

#### Anonymous Marking

The identity of students is hidden from the markers in order to avoid any deliberate or inadvertent bias.

#### Moderation

This is the process of ensuring that assessment criteria have been applied consistently and fairly, normally involving second marking of a representative sample. Within this document, moderation refers to internal moderation. Guidance on external moderation by external examiners can be found in the Guidelines for Examiners appendix of the QA Handbook.

#### Second Marking (Seen)

Two markers mark the assignment but the second marker has access to the first marker's comments and/or mark/grade.

#### Second Marking (Blind)

Two markers mark the assignment independently with no access to each other's mark/grade and comments.

#### Universal Second Marking (Seen)

Two markers mark all assignments but the second marker has access to the first marker's comments and/or marks/grades.

#### Universal Second Marking (Blind)

Two markers mark all assignments independently with no access to each other's marks/grades and comments.

### 2 Guidance

#### 2.1 Anonymous Marking

As outlined in the Academic Regulations, anonymous marking should be carried out for all written assignments to ensure that the marking process is objective and to avoid any bias (whether deliberate or inadvertent). The only exception to this is written work submitted for work placement activity and the PGCert Academic Practice (Higher Education) programme as the naming of placement/work locations and roles in assignments will often lead to the identification of the student by default.

All other assessed activities should be marked anonymously where practical.

Examples of assessed activities which are not expected to be marked anonymously include oral examinations, individual and group presentations, productions and assignments which have been assessed by staff who have acted in a supervisory role.

Formative assessment which does not contribute towards the overall module mark is not expected to be marked anonymously.

## **2.2 Approval of Marking and Moderation Practices**

Programmes have the flexibility to choose marking and moderation practices that are relevant to the demands of their disciplines, the nature of the work being assessed and the resources and structures of marking teams.

The marking and moderation practices chosen must build in the minimum requirements outlined below and be consistent within all modules of the programmes (where possible) in order to ensure fairness and equity in the marking process. The arrangements must be clearly publicised to students via the programme and module handbooks. The templates provided with the Assessment Policy should be used for this purpose.

## **2.3 Minimum Requirements**

The following requirements must be incorporated into a programme's marking and moderation procedure:

- Moderation of a sample at Levels 5, 6 and 7 (and Level 4 of Foundation Degrees and the first Level 4 cohort of a new undergraduate honours degree programme) must be undertaken with the second marker having access to marks and comments for all assessments in the sample. A minimum sample of 10% must be chosen, which includes an even spread from the top, middle and bottom of the marking scale;
- All borderline fails, including those at Level 4, must be moderated;
- All final dissertations/research projects must be blind second marked (except in exceptional circumstances where for example only one marker has the relevant subject expertise required to blind mark the work. In such cases, the Programme Director may approve a request for the work to be moderated).

## **2.4 Moderation**

The purpose of moderation is to provide an internal check on the marking to ensure that the marking criteria are applied in a fair and consistent manner and that marking within and between modules is consistent.

Moderation will generally involve a second marker checking a sample of assessments, along with the first marker's marks and comments, with a view to verifying the overall standard of marking and the application of marking schemes. It might be deemed more appropriate for the second marker to provide a grade rather than a mark.

Moderation is particularly appropriate in circumstances when the first marker is the only member of the programme team with expertise of a specific subject area. This can often occur in programmes with a small teaching team.

The process and degree of moderation may be influenced by other factors. For example, sampling may be more intensive for assessments of tutors who are new to the University, for modules with an unusual profile of student performance, for new programmes or for large modules with a team of markers (see 2.7 below for guidance on team marking). Programmes teams running modules with cohorts of less than 10 students may wish to consider using universal seen second marking.

While it is not compulsory, moderation of Level 4 assessment is encouraged. However, assessment from Level 4 of Foundation Degrees and the first Level 4 cohort of a new undergraduate honours degree programme must be moderated in line with the minimum requirements outlined in 2.3 above.

For non-written assessment, such as presentations or practical assessments, programmes are expected to put processes in place to ensure that moderation can take place and this should be indicated to students. Such processes may include a roving second marker (for practical assessments), video or audio recording. The External Examiner should be consulted about the processes used for moderating non-written assessment as he/she will need to moderate work once internal marking and moderation is completed.

## **2.5 Resolving Differences after Moderation**

It is expected that inconsistencies and variations between markers will occur. However, the mark awarded by the first marker should be recorded as the final mark unless moderation highlights a pattern of significant discrepancies between the two markers.

In instances of significant discrepancies, the Programme Director should be notified. Further action must then be taken with approval of the Programme Director. This should normally be one of the following:

- The first marker reviews the marks for all assessments in the module in light of the comments from the second marker. An additional sample should be moderated following this review;
- All work is universally second marked;
- A third marker moderates the same sample as the second marker. The third marker will then make a recommendation to the Programme Director taking into account the views of the first two markers. The Programme Director will then make a decision on the marks, which is deemed to be final, and these marks are reported at the Programme Examination Board.

Where there is disagreement in terms of the general consistency of marking, for instance if the first marker has marked too harshly or too generously, the two markers can negotiate to adjust the marks accordingly for all students (not just those in the sample). If the markers are unable to agree on the percentage mark to raise or lower the cohort by, the Programme Director should be notified and implement an appropriate course of action, which may include universal second marking or the allocation of a third marker to moderate the sample.

Marks for individual students should not be changed after moderation, except in cases of arithmetical errors or when marking schemes have not been correctly applied.

The External Examiner is expected to moderate work to ensure consistency of marking and therefore should not make changes to marks for individual students. Only in very exceptional circumstances should the External Examiner be asked to act as a third marker. As with internal third markers, the External Examiner should be asked to make a recommendation to the Programme Director, who will then make the final decision on the marks.

It is vital that the process used to resolve any differences and the final outcome is fully documented in order to be transparent and to demonstrate, if necessary, that the outcome was reached in a fair and systematic manner. A moderation report should be produced to outline this process. The report should be made available to the External Examiner.

## **2.6 Universal Second Marking (Seen or Blind)**

As outlined above, universal second marking can be used as a method of resolving significant discrepancies following moderation of a sample of first marked work. Programmes can choose whether to use blind or seen universal second marking and this choice may be influenced by a variety of factors including the expertise of the markers (e.g. if the second

marker does not have detailed knowledge of a specific subject area, seen marking may be preferable) and the markers' experiences and preferences.

Universal second marking can be used instead of moderation if deemed appropriate by the programme team. Universal blind second marking must normally be used for dissertations and final research projects (see 2.7 below for further details).

If differences occur between the two markers during the universal second marking process, marks for individual students may be changed as all students will have had their work second marked in the same manner. The two markers will be expected to discuss and negotiate an agreed mark.

For universal seen second marking, the second marker may wish to record their comments on a separate feedback sheet. For universal blind second marking, the markers should record their comments and marks separately and then compare and agree on final comments and marks which can be recorded on one feedback sheet.

Students should always receive one agreed final mark, but markers should keep a record of mark differences, how these were resolved and the final outcome. This enables an audit trail to be kept and used in the event of a student complaint or appeal. While students cannot appeal against the academic judgement of a marker, they can appeal on the basis of potential irregularities in procedure.

## **2.7 Blind Second Marking**

Particularly when there are a team of markers, it is considered good practice to blind second mark a small sample at the beginning of the marking process. The markers can then all meet to discuss the sample and resolve differences before continuing with the remainder of the marking. If this method is used, a sample should be moderated (conforming to the minimum requirements outlined in 2.3 above) once the marking has been completed. This sample should include at least 10% of the work marked by each individual marker.

All dissertations/research projects must be blind second marked, except in cases when only one marker has the relevant subject expertise required to blind mark the work. In this instance, the Programme Director may approve a request for the work to be moderated. This should be avoided if at all possible.

### Marking and Internal Moderation: Flow Chart for Process

