SECTION 13: MODERATION

Please note that Schools are responsible for moderation arrangements both in the UK and at branch campuses.

Please also refer to the full policy in relation to External Examining published in the University’s Code of Practice on the External Examining of Taught Programmes.

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13.1 INTERNAL MODERATION

13.1.1 All marking which counts towards a formal mark for awarding or progression should be moderated appropriately internally. Such moderation should be sufficient to give reasonable assurance that the marking is accurate to common standards applied to shared understandings of the criteria, and that the marking at the boundaries of classification bands is accurate. In terms of the investment of staff effort, the moderation process should be commensurate with the weight of the assessment task and the size of the cohort.

13.1.2 Double marking of the whole cohort is a suitable method of moderation for cohorts of eight or fewer, for work which is automatically marked by a panel of two or more assessors or for assessed work of sufficient weight and significance to warrant the workload (some major final part dissertations, for example).

13.1.3 Otherwise, where possible, moderation of a sample should be arranged. Various approaches to sampling can be adopted but the main criteria for selecting an appropriate method are that the sample should be sufficient for the purpose of moderation, and administering the sample should be simple and easily achieved within the time scale. The sample should enable the moderator:
- to establish that marking is accurate to common standards applied to shared understandings of the criteria; and
- to confirm that marking at the boundaries of each classification band is accurate.

13.1.4 The sample should contain a meaningful proportion of the total candidates, which enables the purposes of moderation to be achieved. It is suggested that a minimum of eight candidates might in most cases be appropriate with:
- a number of exemplars from each class which represents the distribution of the cohort’s marks across that band
- all failed candidates
sufficient First Class or Distinction candidates to illustrate the range from lowest First Class/Distinction mark given to highest

any individual candidates the first marker finds significant difficulty in marking.

13.1.5 Where double-marking of a sample is not possible (notably those which take place in real time such as oral presentations or field work activity), some other form of moderation should take place, subject to the two conditions of being sufficient for and commensurate with the assessment task. Alternative forms of moderation which might be considered include:

- Recording (video or audio) and moderating a sample of the recordings;
- Assessors’ notes (and possibly photographs) which explain how the marking criteria were applied and moderating a sample of the notes;
- Co-operative staff development, where staff carry out sample assessments in pairs or groups to establish a shared understanding of the criteria and the standards to apply;
- Comparison with peer assessment, where the staff assessment is compared (for example, by rank order) with peer assessment. (It should be noted that University policy requires that peer assessment per se is not to be used for a formal mark; the formal mark must be determined by an appropriate member of staff. What is suggested here is the use of peer assessment as one check on the reasonable accuracy of the marks of staff, not its use to produce an actual mark.)

It should be noted that such methods are work intensive and do not require excessive frequency. They should be carried out regularly and sufficiently often to provide an adequate check, but not necessarily every year. They could usefully be combined with other staff development – the mentoring of a new lecturer, for example.

13.1.6 For each assessment, the Module Convenor (in collaboration with the relevant Programme Director, where appropriate) shall propose a suitable method of moderation to be approved by the School Director of Teaching and Learning who will report on moderation processes to the External Examiners. The External Examiners have the right to comment on and suggest changes to moderation processes.

13.1.7 If more than two markers are involved in marking an assessment, appropriate arrangements for moderation across the cadre of markers should be agreed in advance and a report on the outcomes and process provided to the relevant School Director of Teaching and Learning and made available to the External Examiner responsible for the module.

13.1.8 Statistical comparison of mark distributions for modules may be a useful tool in the moderation process.

13.1.9 Unless it is impracticable, the marking, selection of the sample and moderating should be made while the candidates remain anonymous.

13.1.10 Moderation is essentially an iterative process depending on the kind and degree of variation between marker and moderator. If there is no significant difference, the marks can be simply agreed. If there is systematic variation throughout the range, moderator and marker must negotiate an agreed shift in the marking and all the work remarked and re-moderated until no significant difference remains (a second moderator may be called in to assist). If significant disagreement is not widespread but only occurs for occasional individuals, marker and moderator should negotiate an agreed mark for each such individual on a case by case basis (again a second moderator may assist).

13.1.11 The outcome of moderation should normally be that a single, internally agreed mark for each module is recommended to the External Examiners. The moderation process must be adequately documented: a record must be kept in respect of each module indicating:

- the pieces of work which have been moderated internally and those which have been moderated externally
- how moderation was undertaken
- any action taken as a result of moderation
- the rationale for those actions
13.1.12 Some Schools indicate the work which has been moderated in a column on a mark spreadsheet, or include on the coversheet for the individual piece of work a field for the moderator’s comments.

13.1.13 The internal moderator should explicitly confirm that the full range of the first class band has been used, where appropriate.

13.1.14 Where a piece of work has been referred to a third marker, following an irreconcilable difference between the first and second markers, the third marker should prepare a brief report on the resolution of the mark.

13.1.15 Records of internal moderation must be made available to the External Examiner.

13.2 EXTERNAL MODERATION

13.2.1 The University requires that the standard and consistency of the marking of assessments which contribute directly to an award be confirmed by the appropriate External Examiners.

13.2.2 External Examiners have the right of access to all assessed work. In practice, in most cases External Examiners will necessarily concentrate on a sample of assessed work. The School Director of Teaching and Learning or a member of staff designated by the School Director of Teaching and Learning (for example, a Programme Director) should seek the agreement of the External Examiners as to how the sample is selected, bearing in mind that, in the first instance, the same principles as for internal moderation should determine the selection of the sample, but that, in the case of external moderation, consideration should be given to candidates’ profile of marks and indicative overall classification as well as to marks for individual modules.

13.2.3 In considering candidates’ profile of marks and indicative overall classification, External Examiners may wish to give consideration to: (a) those candidates who fall within the borderline and who fail marginally to fulfil one or other of the criteria for promotion; (b) those who fall marginally short of the threshold overall average which qualifies for inclusion in the borderline and who have fulfilled one or other of the criteria for promotion; and (c) candidates whose profile is marginal and sufficiently unusual to give rise to concerns about the security of the implied classification. Statistics from previous Sessions indicate that the numbers of students who fall within these categories for any programme will be small.

13.2.4 For the undergraduate Part 1 Examination, External Examiners would be expected to consider a sample which allows them to moderate the full range of marks, and to attend particularly to the pass/fail borderline and the borderline at the 30% threshold. It is expected that the sample may be smaller than the samples for the Part 2 and Part 3/4/Final Examination.

13.2.5 The School Director of Teaching and Learning (or other designated member of staff) should seek to establish whether External Examiners wish for access to assessed work which might not be readily available (e.g. coursework), and should make appropriate arrangements to accommodate such requests.

13.2.6 External Examiners are asked to comment on the monitoring of assessment and to report that moderation procedures were satisfactory.
13.3 TIMING OF MODERATION IN RELATION TO AWARDING AND PROGRESSION DECISIONS

13.3.1 Marks must be agreed, following internal and external moderation, before awards or progression decisions are determined.

13.3.2 This demands a two-stage external examining process – first the confirmation of all marks and then awarding. The major problem is that with more flexible, modular programmes agreement of some marks may depend on external examiners outwith the programme. Since it would not be reasonable to expect External Examiners to attend two meetings within a short space of time, it is expected that module marks will, where possible, be moderated by post in advance of the period in which Programme Examiners’ Meetings are held. In those instances where a student’s marks have not been moderated, a final decision on the recommended award should be deferred. This imposes tight constraints on the moderation process.