

# SECTION 13: MODERATION

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

'Moderation' refers to the arrangements that are put in place to assure the proper application of the assessment criteria, including consistency of marking. The moderation process will typically consist of various steps, including a form of second marking (see below for the different types), possibly some sampling of student work, and confirmation of marks. Section 13.1.6 gives suggestions for moderation arrangements for types of assessment where second marking is not possible.

Types of second marking are:

- **double marking** where each marker makes a separate judgement and in the event of disagreement a resolution is sought;
  - **open marking** where the second marker is informed of the first marker's mark before commencing;
  - **blind marking** where the second marker is not informed of the first marker's mark;
- **review marking** where the second marker/moderator reviews the accuracy and appropriateness of the marking, and brings any issues to the attention of the first marker.

Second marking can apply to the whole cohort (full second marking) or to a sample selected according to defined criteria (sampled second marking). Second marking is an area where practice between disciplines necessarily varies, reflecting differences in the type of assessment task and the submission media. An approach suitable for the discipline, assessment task and submission media is encouraged.

Note that the term 'moderator' is mainly used below in preference to second marker to ensure consistency with other University policies and guidance. Where the stand alone term 'marker' is used, this indicates the first marker.

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 arrangements 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 arrangements should be commensurate with the weight of the assessment task and the size of the cohort.
- 13.1.2 Good practice to support internal moderation arrangements includes:
- a. Early publication of dates of: submission, feedback of marks, meetings of marking teams, and any dates relating to resubmissions, for example, at the start of the academic year. If this is possible across a programme, 'bunching of deadlines' for staff and students can also be identified.
  - b. Early publication of marking teams for each assessment task, identifying first, second and third markers ensures staff are aware of the assessment tasks they are marking and/or involved in moderation arrangements. Pairing experienced with inexperienced markers as first and second marker can support professional development.
  - c. Activities that can support marking teams develop shared understanding of marking criteria and common standards include:
    - i. Conducting calibration activities with a small sample of selected scripts very early in the marking period. The scripts are blind marked by all markers and a calibration meeting is held to discuss and agree a final mark. A summary of the judgments is circulated to all markers to inform subsequent marking.
    - ii. Staff development activities are carried out for staff new to the marking team where moderated scripts from previous cohorts are considered. This can be done before the assignment submission deadline. Blind marking of the scripts prior to a meeting allows any questions to be brought to the meeting. Experienced markers new to the marking team should also be included.
    - iii. Having a portfolio of moderated scripts from earlier cohorts available for all markers can assist understanding of marking criteria and the common standards.
    - iv. 'Face-to-face' moderation meetings including experienced staff are invaluable for those staff new to a marking team or inexperienced as agreeing the common standards is a socially constructed process.
- 13.1.3 Second marking of the whole cohort (full second marking) 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).
- 13.1.4 Otherwise, where possible, second marking 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 ensuring appropriate application of criteria and consistency of marking, 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.
- 13.1.5 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
  - some failed candidates

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- 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.
- 13.1.6 Where second-marking of a sample is not possible (notably those which take place in real time such as oral presentations, performance 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 moderation arrangements 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.)
- 13.1.7 For each assessment, the Module Convenor (in collaboration with the relevant Programme Director, where appropriate) shall propose suitable moderation arrangements 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 arrangements.
- 13.1.8 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.
- 13.1.9 Statistical comparison of mark distributions for modules may be a useful tool in the moderation process but is not sufficient in itself.
- 13.1.10 Unless it is impracticable, the marking, selection of the sample and moderation arrangements should be made while the candidates remain anonymous.
- 13.1.11 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 third marker 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 third marker may assist).
- 13.1.12 The outcome of moderation should normally be that a single, internally agreed mark for each module is recommended to the External Examiners.
- 13.1.13 The moderation arrangements 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
  - (in the case of internal moderation only) confirmation that the full range of first class/distinction marks has been used, where appropriate.

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- 13.1.14 The work that has been moderated will be noted when using Electronic Management of Assessment while some Schools will 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. Example forms are included as appendices.
- 13.1.15 The internal moderator should explicitly confirm that the full range of the first class band has been used, where appropriate.
- 13.1.16 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.
- 13.1.17 Records of internal moderation arrangements must be made available to the External Examiner.
- 13.1.18 Internal moderation arrangements are not required to be completed within the 15-day turnaround time. Please refer to the *Policy on providing feedback to students on their performance*.
- 13.1.19 Specific requirement relating to University of Reading Malaysia (UoRM):
- 13.1.19.1 All work from the first intake of a new programme at UoRM must be read and marks checked by the moderator regardless of the number of students enrolled. This applies to both coursework and exams.
  - 13.1.19.2 If a new module is delivered for the first time but it is not the first intake of students on the programme, then the moderation applied is increased appropriately.
  - 13.1.19.3 Subsequent to the first delivery of each module, students at UoRM may either:
    - a) be treated as part of the UoR cohort for moderation purposes and will be subject to the schedule above, if a coursework assignment is identical across campuses (i.e. the essay questions are the same at both campuses); or
    - b) when assessments differ significantly in wording, or timing, the two groups of students will be treated as different cohorts and their work moderated separately. When UoRM work is moderated separately to UoR work, this may be done internally at UoRM rather than sent to the UK.
  - 13.1.19.4 For exams taken at both a branch campus and in the UK, the module convenor is normally responsible for moderating exam scripts marked by other markers at both campuses. Another member of UoR staff is usually allocated to moderate work that is first marked by the module convenor.
  - 13.1.19.5 For exams taken at a branch campus only, moderation will normally be completed within the branch campus. However, for the first delivery of each module on a new programme, all scripts will be scanned and sent to the UK for moderation. Thereafter, future exams will be moderated within the branch campus rather than in the UK. All scripts must be available to view at the external exam board, therefore, even if moderation is completed at the branch campus, scripts will be scanned and sent to the UK.

## 13.2 ADDITIONAL ASSURANCE FOR SPECIFIED MARKS

- 13.2.1 Given that specified marks are critical to a student progressing from one Part to the next, or passing or failing a final award, the University seeks additional assurance in respect of these marks.

### Levels 4-6

- 13.2.2 Prior to 2017/18, marks of 29 and 39 were not permitted as the final module mark for a module at Levels 4-6. Where a module mark, calculated from its constituent elements, computed as 29 or 39, the School was required to review the work contributing to the mark and determine, after consideration of the relevant criteria, whether a mark of 28 or 30, or 38 or 40 was more appropriate.
- 13.2.3 With effect from 2017/18, the policy has been amended. As previously, Schools are required to give specific consideration to module marks of 29 and 39, and are required to review the work contributing to module marks of 29 and 39. If the consequence of the review is that the module mark is increased, Schools should record the module mark as 30 or 40, as appropriate, and equally amend, as appropriate, relevant sub-modular marks. If the module mark does **not** increase as a consequence of the review, the mark of 29 or 39 is now allowed to stand and should be recorded as the module mark; it should no longer be amended to 28 or 38.
- 13.2.4 In respect of Finalists, with effect from 2018/19, the School should also, prior to classification, identify any student for whom a mark of 34 in a final year module has a specific bearing on their classification, and the work contributing to that mark should be reviewed and the procedure indicated above followed *mutatis mutandis*.

### Level 7

- 13.2.5 With effect from 2018/19, Schools are required to give specific consideration to module marks of 39 and 49 at Level 7, and are required to review the work contributing to module marks of 39 and 49. If the consequence of the review is that the module mark is increased, Schools should record the module mark as 40 or 50, as appropriate, and equally amend, as appropriate, relevant sub-modular marks. If the module mark does **not** increase as a consequence of the review, the mark of 39 or 49 stands.
- 13.2.6 Prior to classification, where a Part 3 student is taking a Level 7 module and achieves a mark of 34 or 39, the procedure indicated in the previous section should be followed.

## 13.3 EXTERNAL MODERATION

- 13.3.1 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.
- 13.3.2 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.
- 13.3.3 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.

- 13.3.4 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.
- 13.3.5 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.
- 13.3.6 External Examiners are asked to comment on the monitoring of assessment and to report that moderation arrangements were satisfactory.

## **13.4 TIMING OF MODERATION IN RELATION TO AWARDING AND PROGRESSION DECISIONS**

- 13.4.1 Marks must be agreed, following internal and external moderation, before awards or progression decisions are determined.
- 13.4.2 This implies a two-stage external examining process – first the confirmation of all marks and then awarding. Given the flexible, modular structure of 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 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.