



LEARNING AND TEACHING COMMITTEE
1 June 2011

MODERATION AND SECOND MARKING

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Introduction

There is currently a variety of practice (and of nomenclature) around moderation and second marking within the University. This guidance is intended to set out good practice in this area though the extent to which this can be achieved in practice may be limited by resource constraints. The guidance is intended to apply to all summative assessments (the position for formative assessments is discussed at the end).

When does the policy apply?

As noted in the following section, the principal aims of moderation and second marking are to ensure that appropriate standards are being applied in assessment and that they are being applied consistently across the cohort of students being assessed. In some cases it may be possible to achieve these aims without the process of moderation or second marking set out later. Examples of this might include multiple choice examinations and assessments where it is possible to use highly prescriptive marking schemes. Where a decision is taken that the form of assessment used and the approach to marking it means that appropriate standards of marking and consistency can be achieved without using the processes described later there must be a clear rationale for this decision.

In addition there may be cases where it is difficult to carry out the processes described below, for example assessment of presentations, performances, laboratories or tutorial performance. For these assessments there will normally be significant difficulties in carrying out moderation activities, for example it is clearly not possible to record all tutorials in a course for review by an internal moderator or an external examiner. Where moderation in the sense of reviewing a sample of the work assessed is impossible or impractical then two steps should be taken. First, the criteria for making the assessment should be clearly articulated and discussed with an external examiner before the assessment is undertaken for the first time. Ideally, those involved in the assessment should meet to arrive at a shared understanding of the criteria and how they should be applied. Second, after the grades have been received the course coordinator should review the grades awarded by each marker and where these appear to be significantly out of line with grades awarded by other markers should discuss this with the marker concerned and then make any necessary adjustment to the grades. In cases where it is possible to involve more than one marker in the process of assessment, for example by involving a second marker in assessing a student presentation, then this should be done and an agreed mark reached for the assessment. It may also, in some cases be practicable to record all, or a sample, of a particular type of assessment which can then be moderated.

Finally, there may be cases where the contribution of an individual assessment to the overall course grade is very small and the resource required to carry out processes of moderation and second marking would be disproportionate.

Regardless of whether moderation or second marking as described below are carried out, it will be necessary to ensure that processes are in place for ensuring that grades are

accurately recorded and that any calculations involved in arriving at a grade have been correctly carried out.

Moderation and second marking

The QAA Code of Practice contains some general guidance as follows:¹

Internal moderation is important in assuring that examiners apply assessment criteria consistently, and that there is a shared understanding of the academic standards students are expected to achieve. Evidence of moderation is an important feature of internal procedures. Different methods of internal moderation are more or less appropriate for particular situations. In some circumstances, moderation may be limited to sampling a representative number of scripts from a cohort of students, perhaps with emphasis on borderline cases. In other cases, moderation may involve double, or second, marking.

It also suggests a number of factors to be taken into account in formulating policy, including:²

- when double or second marking should be used and what approach should be taken, for example, whether or not the second marker normally has access to the first marker's comments and/or marks and highlighting the importance of demonstrating that double or second marking has taken place
- the methods to be used when assessments from larger groups are sampled by internal or external examiners
- the processes governing and recording any internal moderation and verification of marks and the procedure to be followed when an internal or external moderator disagrees with the original marks

The guidance set out below takes account of this rather general guidance and separates out (a) assessments in PGT programmes and those which contribute towards a final degree classification for honours and (b) other assessments

Definitions

Double marking

Assessments are independently marked by more than one marker, neither has access to the grades or the comments of the other.

Second marking

This involves independent marking of an assessment by more than one marker. The second marker will have access to the comments of the first marker and to the grades awarded by that marker.

Moderation

This is really a process of review to check consistency of grades awarded for an assessment, normally through sampling the assessment. This may involve some second marking and will require some additional procedures (e.g. in respect of selection of the sample and resolving disagreements, see below. An important aspect of moderation is

¹ QAA, *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Assessment of students*, p 17.

² QAA, *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Assessment of students*, pp 17-18.

checking that feedback has been given consistently by all markers and that any minimum requirements in terms of feedback have been met.

Best practice in moderation

1 Non-honours undergraduate assessments

Every individual summative assessment which forms part of the assessment scheme for a course must be moderated.

The process of moderation will depend to some extent on how each particular assessment is marked. Where it has been marked by one marker, then a sample of the marked assessments should be reviewed by another marker, who should also have access to a complete list of the grades awarded for the assessment. The sample should consist of 10% of the marked assessment (subject to a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 25) *plus* all of those assessments which have been graded at E1. The sample should cover the whole range of grades awarded by the initial marker.

Where marking is shared between a number of different markers moderation should involve two processes. First there should be an initial discussion involving those who are undertaking the marking. This could take place before marking has started and be focussed on an outline answer and marking plan. Alternatively, the meeting could take place after a small number of assessments have been graded by each marker and considered by the person with overall responsibility for marking the assessment. The second stage in the moderation process will involve a moderator considering a sample drawn as before. This sample should include assessments marked by each of the initial markers.

Both processes of moderation can result in disagreement between the initial marker and the moderator which may take one of a number of forms:

- there may be minor disagreements in isolated cases; or
- there may be a consistent disagreement pointing in one direction; or
- the disagreement may reveal an apparent variability in the standards adopted by the initial marker.

The procedures described below anticipate the possibility of agreement being reached as to what is to be done at this stage with resolution of continued disagreement considered in a later section.

Minor disagreements involve a difference of no more than two secondary bands in the grades awarded for an individual question³ (even if it goes across the primary band boundary).

Where there are only one or two of these minor disagreements there should be a discussion with the initial marker and, in individual cases the grade may be adjusted with the basis for the agreement on the mark awarded being noted. If discrepancies are not minor a third person⁴ should be brought in to help in the process of resolving the dispute.

In cases where there is a consistent disagreement in one direction,⁵ a further sample should be selected and reviewed. If this discloses the same consistent variation then there should be a discussion with the initial marker and agreement should be reached on a course of

³ Or, consequential to differences in individual question grades, in the grade for the assessment as a whole.

⁴ For example the course coordinator if he/she is not already involved in the marking, or a third marker.

⁵ Whether or not this disagreement is minor as defined above.

action, which may involve all of the assessments marked by the marker concerned being adjusted as suggested by the consistent variation (e.g. increased by one secondary band).

Where there is variation between the marking of the moderator and that of the initial marker which does not involve consistent variation in one direction a further sample should be reviewed by another moderator. If this suggests a similar pattern all of the grades awarded by the initial marker must be reviewed by him/her in light of the feedback from the two moderators.

2 Honours and taught postgraduate assessments

Unless these take the form of multiple choice examinations (which must still be checked) all summative assessments in this category must involve some degree of second or double marking.

In the case of coursework and examinations this should involve second marking of a sample of the work. This sample should be 10% (or at least 10 and including all borderline fails¹) of the assessments except where a single piece of coursework (for example a project or dissertation) constitutes the whole assessment for a particular course. Where this last applies best practice suggests that the coursework should be double marked as should the dissertation, project, etc. that forms the independent work required for an honours or masters degree. At the very least these types of assessment should, if practicable, be second marked with a 100% sample. Where there is disagreement between the markers, an attempt should be made to resolve this by discussion.

3 Resolving disagreements

There should be an initial attempt to resolve differences and agree on grades between the moderator and the initial marker (or between the two markers involved in marking a presentation). If this is not possible then the course coordinator (or, if he/she is one of those involved in the marking/moderation process, the assessment officer) should seek to establish agreement or, if this is not possible, take a decision on which grades should be awarded. In such cases the sample seen by the external examiner should include some of those assessments where there was disagreement and the external should be asked for their views on the resolution adopted. The final decision on grades is, of course, for the Board of Examiners in light of the advice of the external examiner.

Recording of the process

It is important that the moderation process is recorded in some way. This may take various forms, for example:

- (a) a moderator writing on non-honours assessments that have been moderated; or
- (b) a marker keeping a list of grades and comments in the case of honours or masters assessment.

Where there is disagreement this should be recorded, as should the process by which the disagreement was resolved and the outcome of this. If agreement was not possible the steps taken, for example reference to the external examiner, should be recorded.

Purely Formative Assessment

This guidance does not apply to formative assessment. However, where formative assessments are marked by more than one person it is important that processes are put in place to ensure consistency of marking and of feedback so that:

- (a) students are reassured as to the reliability of the grade awarded; and
- (b) students are treated fairly in terms of quality of feedback.

¹ Where the student cohort is less than 100.