Policy and Guidance on Moderation and Scaling

Purpose and Objectives

1. This policy and guidance document has three specific objectives:

   a. To clarify the University core requirements on moderation and scaling practices and provide a framework to ensure consistently impartial and equitable marking practices;

   b. To designate specific responsibilities for moderation and scaling to local academic units;

   c. To provide clear guidance on suggested moderation and scaling practices and to establish effective practices where appropriate.

Scope

2. 'Moderation' applies broadly to a range of processes whereby assessment tasks, assessment 'component' marks and/or module marks are scrutinised to ensure that the assessment criteria are applicable and consistently applied and that there is a shared understanding of the academic standards students are expected to meet. In a narrower sense, 'moderation' is also used to distinguish between two types of shared grading: moderation, in which samples of work are validated by a second reader; and second marking, in which all pieces of work are marked by a second reader. This document addresses 'moderation' both in the broadest sense, as a range of processes, and as a specific form of shared grading. The University's Policy on Moderation and Scaling supplements the requirements outlined in the [Regulations for Taught Programmes](#).

3. This policy and guidance applies to undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision and to modular and non-modular programmes. Please note that references to modules below are also intended to refer to non-modular units of study. The policy requirements on assessment tasks and 'component' marks apply to all summative assessments that contribute to modules that count for award classification purposes (subject to the limiting clauses noted below). They do not apply to formative assessments. The requirements on module marks apply to all modules, including those that are pass/fail. Exemptions from the requirements established by this policy may only be granted by the relevant Dean.

Responsibilities

4. Academic units are responsible for devising and maintaining the local implementation of this policy. Relevant Deans/Chairs of Faculty Education Committees are responsible for reviewing local moderation and scaling policies.

5. The duty to moderate assessments and to scale or calibrate marks resides with the unit that owns the module. Only the owning unit can adjust marks, although other programmes may use discretion in determining degree classifications or progression.

6. Markers and moderators may be aware of individual circumstances impacting on the completion of assessment tasks, including dissertations and research projects. Academic units must decide how all markers and moderators will be informed. Regardless of impact on individual students, mitigation should only occur in accordance with the existing University regulations and procedures, and individual impact should not be mitigated for at the point of marking and moderation.

Policy Requirements

Moderation of Assessment Tasks

7. **Internal moderators must review drafts of all summative assessment tasks that individually account for ≥ (greater than or equal to) 6 credits (e.g., 30% of a 20 credit module).** It may also be good practice to review drafts of lesser-weighted tasks and tasks in pass/fail modules. Such internal moderation is intended to ensure the appropriate design of assessment tasks and largely to remove the need for scaling at a later point.

8. **External examiners should review and evaluate draft examination papers and other coursework tasks that contribute significantly to students' degree results in honours stages. The selection of assessment tasks to be reviewed and the date(s) by which such drafts will be received should be agreed between the Chair of the Board of Examiners and the external examiner(s) at the beginning of each academic year.** Academic units have scope for negotiating a selection of tasks with external examiners, but they should acknowledge that external scrutiny can improve or clarify all types of assessment tasks and that coursework should be considered equally with exam papers. The following areas should be taken into consideration:

   a. Assessment tasks worth ≤ (less than or equal to) 6 credits (e.g., 30% of a 20-credit module) need not be reviewed individually, although it is good practice for the external examiner to see a sample of such drafts.

   b. An external examiner may not need to review assessment tasks that have been reviewed in previous years.

   c. It may not be possible or necessary to review tasks for certain types of assessments (e.g., oral exams, performances, projects), although external examiners should be briefed about them.

9. See the external examiner policy for additional information about the role of external examiners in assessment procedures.

Moderation of Assessment Components:

10. **All summative assessments that individually account for ≥ (greater than or equal to) 6 credits, plus pass/fail assessments should be moderated (by sample) or double marked to confirm the fairness and validity of marking processes and standards.** It may also be good practice to moderate (by sample) lesser-weighted assessments. The mechanism for moderation will necessarily depend on the type of assessment involved and may include

'checking' (in the case of objective tests), the moderation of a sample of exam scripts/submitted work, and/or double marking. For oral exams, interviews, performances and studio work, two assessors should undertake assessment (and/or provided with a recording) to ensure fairness in the moderation process.

11. **All dissertations and other appropriate pieces of work (as defined by the policy of the academic unit) must be blind double marked.** Blind double marking is defined as the marking of an assessment by two separate markers, in which the second marker cannot see the comments or mark given by the first marker. The rationale for blind double marking is not the length of the work, but its individualised nature, and academic units must decide which assessment tasks are characterised in this way. In the case of creative work and other instances in which blind double marking may cause practical difficulties, double marking or team marking would be acceptable.

12. **Although students should normally receive only agreed marks and not evidence of moderation, academic units should be transparent in their procedures and provide students with timely explanations of moderation and/or scaling processes.** All internal moderation should take place within the University working day turnaround time and before agreed provisional marks are returned to students. Students must be informed, however, that provisional marks are subject to additional review and potential moderation prior to Boards of Examiners. Under the Data Protection Act, students do have the legal right to request and obtain any comments made on their work, including comments made by a moderator or second marker.

13. **The scaling of marks on an assessment component must be considered by the module leader and the Chair of the Board of Examiners if marks fail to reflect student performance adequately and/or fail to map onto the standard University marking scale. All scaling should be applied to the entire cohort affected; normally, this will be the cohort taking a given module, but it might be a specific subset of that cohort (e.g. in the case of circumstances affecting only one of a number of exam rooms).** Scaling is distinct from calibration, defined as the regular and systematic numerical adjustment of marks to ensure that they map onto the University marking scale (i.e., when raw marks total to a number that does not accurately reflect student performance on the marking scale).

14. The need for scaling might arise from an issue in the assessment process (e.g., an error or ambiguity in a question) or if the assessment turns out to be easier or harder for candidates than anticipated. The need for scaling will typically be detected if the marks as a whole appear to be too high or too low; however, scaling is not always linear, and a discrepancy may appear only at one end of the scale. Scaling should usually take place before provisional marks are returned to students (see #5 above), and all instances of scaling must be reported to the External Examiner before the Board of Examiners meeting. If the module leader and the Chair of the Board of Examiners cannot agree on the scaling of marks, or if the module leader also serves as Chair of the Board of Examiners, the question should be referred to at least one other senior colleague (e.g., the Degree Programme Director).

15. During Board of Examiner meetings, the Chair must be mindful of all mark adjustments and mitigation in place to prevent an individual student or whole cohort being awarded multiple adjustments or mitigation for a single assessment task or module mark.

Moderation of Module Marks

16. **Academic units must have procedures in place to review performance both historically and across modules taken in a given year.** Such procedures should include the investigation of any anomalies within a specific module or any unusually high or low mark distributions in a given cohort, as well a general consideration of any concerns raised in the marking process. Academic units should note where anomalies have occurred due to emergency or exceptional situations. Module Moderation Boards typically have responsibility for this review (if they are held), although academic units may choose to use other mechanisms provided that the review takes place systematically and that decisions are formally recorded.

17. **Academic units must moderate and scale all module marks before releasing them to other programmes. For this reason, moderation procedures must be scheduled to conclude before the date set annually by the Exams Office.** This core requirement enables Boards of Examiners to proceed with records of all relevant marks.

Local Monitoring of Moderation Procedures

18. **Academic units must ensure that there are written records of all moderation and scaling, including any notes from markers, any explanation of how disparate marks have been reconciled (if appropriate), and any minutes from Module Moderation Boards (if held).** Video/audio recordings of virtual meetings of Module Moderation Boards and Boards of Examiners may be undertaken. Written/video/audio records of moderation and scaling should be made available annually to all external examiners.

19. **Academic units must develop local policies on moderation and scaling, to be reviewed by the relevant Dean/Chair of Faculty Education Committee, published in Degree Programme Handbooks and on the VLE, and supplied to the relevant external examiner(s).** Local policies and procedures on moderation and scaling will be monitored by external examiners and through Learning and Teaching Review.

Guidance Notes:

Question 1: What should an internal review of draft assessments entail? When should the moderation of draft assessments take place?

Internal moderation of draft assessments should provide an enhancement role in improving the presentation and structure of coursework and examination scripts. Internal moderation should also check, where appropriate:

- that the assessment tests students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes;
- that the wording of questions and/or prompts is clear and unambiguous;
- that visuals (e.g., figures, images, etc.) are appropriate and properly incorporated;
- that there is a suitable range of difficulty, and that the assessment is likely to discriminate between candidates' ability levels;
- that marks are likely to map onto an appropriate distribution range;
- that the standards are appropriate to the level and type of assessment;
- that there are no errors in formatting and/or content.

Moderation of draft assessments should occur in enough time to make necessary changes before the assignment is set for students. The module leader should make a final check after printing, if appropriate, to ensure that there are no errors.

Question #2: How should a sample of component work be selected for moderation?

The selection of a sample of work for moderation depends on the type of assessment and the size of the student cohort. It is recommended that at least 10% of the work is moderated, with a minimum requirement to review 10 pieces of student work per assessment. In the case of cohorts with 10 or fewer students, it may be appropriate to moderate all pieces of work rather than a sample. When the first marker is a new member of staff who is not accustomed to University marking practices, it may be appropriate to increase the sample size.

The sample should be stratified so that moderators review work across the full range of marks. All marginal fails and borderline marks should also be reviewed.

Question #3: Should Level 4 work be moderated (if it does not count toward the final degree classification)?

Moderation of Level 4 component marks need only consider marginal fails, so as to ensure the fairness of the pass/fail boundary. However, Level 4 module marks should be reviewed historically and across modules, as described in requirement #10 above.

Question #4: Can moderators change students' component or module marks?

Where an entire cohort of student work is double marked, it is legitimate for component marks to be amended. Units should have a process for managing the agreement of marks between markers. Where moderation occurs only through sampling, it is not acceptable to change the marks of the sampled work (as not all students would have their work reviewed). If the

moderator believes that the first marker's marks are not appropriate to the level of student work, scaling and/or complete remarking should be considered.

Module Moderation Boards and Boards of Examiners cannot change individual students' component marks or module marks unless an error in calculation is found. If inconsistencies in marking are found, MMBs may recommend scaling and/or remarking of an entire set of student work.

Question #5: What information should local policies contain?

Local policies should, at minimum, address how the ten core requirements will be interpreted and implemented by the academic unit. It may also be appropriate to provide additional guidance specific to particular modules, stages, and/or pieces of work. Academic units may also wish to include marking norms. It might be useful to students to circulate the ten core requirements, as a single page document, on the VLE or in assessment instructions.

Question #6: How does the process of scaling work?

The process of scaling applies to elements of assessment and not to module marks. While some academic units routinely calibrate student component marks, few units scale marks on a regular basis. The module leader and Chair of the Board of Examiners should agree scaling, if necessary, before marks are released to students – so as to prevent confusion. However, it may be necessary to scale marks after work is released; in these instances, students should be appropriately informed as to why and how their marks were changed. Students need not be provided with precise numerical adjustments, but they should be given an overview of the process and the rationale behind it. All scaling must be agreed between relevant module leaders and the Chair of the Board of Examiners before the Board of Examiners meeting. If an agreement cannot be reached, or if the module leader in question is also the Chair of the Board of Examiners, the question of scaling should be referred to another senior colleague (e.g., the Degree Programme Director).

Academic units should establish appropriate processes for scaling that take into consideration expected mark distributions (based on historical precedents and the known abilities of the cohort). It may be appropriate, upon review of marks across modules and over time, to establish a pre-set mark range; scaling would then be considered when the marks for an assessment failed to fall within that range.

Scaling will not always be linear, as when distorted marks appear at the top or bottom of the marking scale but not both. Although scaling should always be systematic, this may not necessarily involve linear changes throughout the marking scale.

In the case of very small cohorts (<15 students), statistical comparisons and pre-set ranges are likely to be invalid. In such cases, if marks appear to be irregular, all student work should be moderated/remarked.

Question #7: What is a 'Module Moderation Board' and is it a requirement?

Module Moderation Boards are not a requirement, and as such, they may be organised in a variety of ways. For example, 'boards' may be attended by the entire body of the Board of

Examiners or by the Chair of the Board of Examiners and a few select colleagues. The external examiner may or may not attend.

The Module Moderation Board (or equivalent – if it is otherwise named) is responsible for the moderation of module marks and should review performance across modules (historically and across an academic year), identify statistical anomalies or data problems.

If a Module Moderation Board is not held, then the academic unit must still have procedures in place to uphold Requirement #910: the review of module marks historically and across modules taken in a given year.

Question #8: How is evidence of moderation and second marking logged?

As the policy stipulates under paragraph 11, Academic Units are to ensure that there are written records of all moderation and scaling, including any notes from markers, any explanation of how disparate marks have been reconciled (if appropriate), and any minutes from Module Moderation Boards (if held). Records of moderation and scaling should be made available annually to all External Examiners. As this process comes under the School Moderation and Scaling Policy, evidencing may differ between academic units.

Often a form is completed for every piece of coursework or examination that is moderated, and is provided to the External Examiner together with the work. Some examples of good practice can be found here.

Additional Information on the role of Module Moderation Boards

1. The MMBs role is the moderation of cohorts, not the moderation of marks for an individual student. It is important that decisions on cohorts are not influenced by the consideration of individual students.

2. Academic Units can choose to set up a body, for example an Exam Review Board, to review the performance of individual students. This could for example, be used to identify students who may be finding the course difficult. As with MMBs the University does not require Exam Review Boards, or equivalent bodies, to be established.

3. Where Module Moderation Boards and Exam Review Boards exist these are not permitted to make any recommendations on progression, award and classification. These are matters for the Board of Examiners and such decisions must be taken in line with rules for the Board of Examiners.

4. Academic Units may find it useful to incorporate Module Moderation Boards and Exam Review Boards into a single meeting, if for example, the meetings have the same membership. If this is the case there must be a clear demarcation between the roles of the two Boards.

5. If a programme decides to hold a pre-Board of Examiners in order to establish where Board of Examiners decisions are required, for example to help guide external examiners, such meetings must be conducted in line with the rules for Board of Examiners and must be conducted anonymously.

6. Programmes or academic units should not convene meetings to discuss named students in the context of stage or final degree mark lists.

7. Boards of Examiner do not make decisions on setting assessments aside as this is a matter for the PEC Committee. The PEC Committee does not make decisions 'subject to the agreement of the Board of Examiners', for example the Board of Examiners does not confirm PEC Committee decisions on first attempts.

Definitions

Board of Examiners – These are responsible for considering the outcomes of assessment on programmes to make decisions on progression, award and classification for individual students.

Progression Boards – These are considered to be formal Board of Examiners decisions are made on the progression, award and classification of individual students.

Exam review board - This may be convened to review the performance of individual students but cannot make any decision in relation progression, award or classification. It could, for example, be used to identify students who may be finding the course difficult.

Pre-exam Board – This may be convened in order to establish where Board of Examiners decisions are required. It must be conducted in line with the rules for Board of Examiners and must be conducted anonymously. It could be used, for example, to help guide external examiners.

Module Moderation Board – These are responsible for the moderation of module marks and should review performance across modules (historically and across an academic year), identify statistical anomalies or data problems. The MMBs role is the moderation of cohorts, not the moderation of marks for an individual student.

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