



# Moderation Policy

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## 1 Background and context

Moderation is a key element of the summative assessment process and is undertaken to ensure that the assessment outcome is fair and reliable, providing assurance that marking is of an appropriate standard and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently. This policy directly relates to the Office for Students (OfS)<sup>1</sup> Conditions of Registration, in particular B: Quality, reliable standards and positive outcomes for all students and the advice and guidance from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)<sup>2</sup>. The outcome of any stage of the marks moderation process will be an agreed set of marks to proceed to the next stage of moderation or to the relevant examination board. 'Agreed' in this context refers to agreement that marking has been carried out to the appropriate standards, which have been applied consistently and equitably across the range of marks in relation to the criteria set for the assessment task.

This policy outlines the processes and principles of moderation in place at Northumbria University.

### 1.1 Moderation:

- 1.1.1 Is particularly concerned with reliability meaning that 'as far as possible markers acting independently of each other but using the same assessment criteria would reach the same judgement on a piece of work' (QAA, 2012).
- 1.1.2 Ensures that the assessment process has been carried out with rigour, probity and fairness.
- 1.1.3 Is complemented by processes which assure validity including the design, setting and approval of the assessment tasks (to measure achievement of module and programme learning outcomes) and the identification of assessment criteria which align to grade descriptors.
- 1.1.4 Provides an opportunity to engage with the quality of student feedback which will monitor and inform enhancement of assessment and feedback practices.

## 2 Setting and Moderation of Assessment Tasks

- 2.1 An assessment task is a piece of summative assessment such as an assignment/presentation brief or examination paper.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/conditions-of-registration/initial-and-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance>



- 2.2 The External Examiner will not normally approve level 3/4 assessment tasks but such tasks will be subject to the internal approval process described below. Otherwise, External Examiners must be fully consulted on all assessment tasks and marking schemes. All summative assessment tasks<sup>3</sup> (including referral activities) must be approved by External Examiners before being issued to students. This does not preclude agreement of a particular assessment in principle (if it is not possible to provide the detail of the assessment when approval is being sought) or sign-off of assessment tasks for a fixed period of time.
- 2.3 The approval of assessment tasks<sup>4</sup> should be informed by the following principles:
- 2.3.1 Assessment tasks are aligned with the learning outcomes of the Module.
  - 2.3.2 Assignment/presentation briefs and examination papers are checked to ensure unambiguous questions and to correct typographical/grammatical errors.
  - 2.3.3 Assessment task instructions are expressed clearly with particular attention being given to having the correct student guidance on examination papers.
  - 2.3.4 Word limits and penalties for course work are communicated.
  - 2.3.5 Students are provided with grade descriptors and marking schemes/criteria in assignment/presentation briefs.
  - 2.3.6 Assessment design has minimised opportunities for plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct.
  - 2.3.7 Feedback process and timeframe for return of work is clearly stated.
  - 2.3.8 Alternative assessment arrangements required as a result of provisions under the Equality Act 2010 are followed.
- 2.4 Assessment tasks should be internally reviewed against the above principles prior to being sent to External Examiners who should have a minimum of 10 working days to approve assessment tasks.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that all multiple choice questions (MCQ) should have been tested and approved.

<sup>4</sup> Via the e:Vision platform or form MOD1: External Examiner Approval of Assessment Tasks (Coursework and Examinations) which can be accessed via the [Staff Guidance page](#)



- 2.5 Ultimately, the Deputy Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor (DFPVC) ensures that appropriate arrangements are in place to approve assessment tasks as outlined above, which will be evidenced using the University's online e:Vision platform or moderation template.

### **3 Moderation of Sampled Assessed Work**

- 3.1 Once initial marking has been undertaken a sample of all assessed work at all levels, with the exception of dissertation/projects, will be subject to open/check marking.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.2 All dissertation/projects will be second marked on a comment/mark concealed basis.
- 3.3 As appropriate, a sample of assessed work will be made available for External Examiner scrutiny. The External Examiner will not normally approve level 3/4 or referral assessment samples but such tasks will be subject to the internal approval process described below. Otherwise, External Examiners must be fully consulted on all assessment samples at first sit.
- 3.4 A transparent moderation policy will be evidenced using the University Moderation Template<sup>6</sup>, which will contribute to programme, faculty and institutional monitoring, in addition to the External Examiner's report. This will demonstrate the fairness, rigour and equity of the assessment process to stakeholders.
- 3.5 A statistical analysis of module marks will be considered as part of the moderation process with any relevant reflections reported to the Programme Assessment Board (PAB).
- 3.6 The possible outcomes of the internal moderation process are outlined in section 3.8.9.
- 3.7 It is acknowledged that there are challenges with this moderation process; for instance large cohorts and teams of markers, assessment types such as practice placement assessment, which may require alternative approaches to moderation. These situations are addressed in the principles which follow.

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<sup>5</sup> A moderation process where the moderator, having been informed of the first marker's mark, determines whether that mark is appropriate, repeating the process for all scripts included in the sample.

<sup>6</sup> Please note that there are different templates for standard/dissertation modules, and modules delivered at partner institutions where staff are employed specifically to deliver modules and undertake marking as available via the [Guidance Web Page](#).



### 3.8 Internal Moderation

- 3.8.1 A standard sample of assessments will be selected for internal moderation based on the square root of the number of students taking the module, with a minimum sample size of six per module delivery.
- 3.8.2 The basis of selection of the sample will be transparent to the moderators and integral to the University's Moderation Template; a full student cohort list will be provided with the sample. Normally the sample will be agreed between the marker/Module Tutor and the Internal Moderator.
- 3.8.3 The assessed work will be open/check marked, where the internal moderator is informed of the first assessor's marks and determines whether the marks awarded appropriately reflects the standard of work and that the marking criteria have been consistently applied.
- 3.8.4 The sample will normally include marked scripts from each of the classification bands, it is not necessary to include all borderlines and all fails.
- 3.8.5 Where a team of markers undertake assessment, marked assessments from all first markers must be included in the standard sample. Consideration will need to be given to large cohorts with multiple markers, as to the number of scripts from each marker that will contribute to the sample. This may result in a larger sample being selected.
- 3.8.6 For large cohorts, where there is more than one marker, a sample of work will be internally moderated before all marking is completed. This will assure the standard and consistency of marking and pre-empt time delays in the assessment process, which might occur if extensive remarking was to be required.
- 3.8.7 Where a module is delivered by more than one teaching team, or in more than one location, a separate sample should be moderated for each delivery.
- 3.8.8 Northumbria staff will undertake further internal moderation, once staff at collaborative partner institutions have marked and internally moderated assessed work within their organisation.
- 3.8.9 The outcomes of the internal moderation process will be:
  - i. Moderator confirms marks in which case no further action will be taken.
  - ii. Moderator identifies a consistent discrepancy of 5 marks above or below resulting in adjustment of the whole cohort or, in the case of multiple markers, those scripts marked by that member of staff.
  - iii. Moderator identifies discrepancies greater than 5 marks in both directions requiring remarking of all scripts by a third marker, the process being overseen by the Head of Department.
  - iv. Moderator confirms consistent and acceptable standards in written feedback provided to students.



- v. Completed University Moderation Template, which will detail reasons for any adjustments of marks that may have occurred due to moderation.
- 3.8.10 The internal moderation process will not result in a change to the mark of an individual student unless it occurs in the context of the outcomes detailed above.
- 3.9 External Moderation
- 3.9.1 External moderation<sup>7</sup> will be undertaken for first sit assessment work at level 5 and above, but may also be required at level 3 and 4 where modules contribute directly to an award (rather than being required solely for progression) or to meet requirements of professional bodies.
- 3.9.2 The same internally moderated sample of work will be externally moderated by an External Examiner. Exceptionally an External Examiner may ask to see additional work, or even the full module set if they deem it necessary for effective moderation.
- 3.9.3 The outcomes of the external moderation process will be:
- i. The External Examiner confirms the module marks.
  - ii. The External Examiner recommends that a set of marks be scaled, either upward or downwards. Recommendations will normally be for simple scaling, but if the size of the sample allows it, more complex scaling may be proposed.
  - iii. The External Examiner recommends the correction of marks that have been calculated incorrectly, where both internal and external markers are in agreement.
  - iv. The External Examiner confirms consistent and acceptable standards in written feedback provided to students.
  - v. The External Examiner confirms that the process of internal moderation was clearly identified.

It will not be appropriate for an External Examiner to recommend small adjustments to individual marks awarded in a sample of work. If however, the External Examiner believes that significant adjustments are necessary to individual marks the validity of the assessment process is called into question. It is anticipated that such an outcome will be extremely infrequent. If it occurs, the Deputy Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor (DFPVC) should be notified and re-evaluation of the marks either of the whole cohort, or part of the cohort within a specified marks range identified by the External Examiner, should be undertaken with details of the process negotiated to the satisfaction of the External Examiner.

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<sup>7</sup> Form MOD3: Moderation Template (All Module Assessments) and Form MOD2: Internal Moderation of Partner Marks can be accessed under Assessment Moderation Forms and Policy on the Assessment Guidance for Staff page - [here](#).



## **4 Moderation of Dissertation and Projects**

The principles described above will not provide sufficiently robust moderation for dissertation/project modules and so the principles outlined below will be followed.

- 4.1 All dissertations/projects will be second marked on a mark/comment concealed basis.
- 4.2 Second markers will be carefully chosen to limit the number of dissertations/projects, which any one pair of staff can co-mark, and to provide where possible a chaining of markers such as that A marks with B, B marks with C, etc.
- 4.3 To ensure the transparency of the process the first and second markers will formally record their independent assessments in advance of their meeting to negotiate an agreement. The basis of the agreement reached will be formally noted and made available to the External Examiner.
- 4.4 External Examiners are not asked to examine more than a standard sample of dissertations/projects but they will be asked to confirm in the External Examiner's report that the process of internal moderation was clearly evidenced.

## **5 General Moderation Principles**

- 5.1 It should be noted as with internal moderation, the purpose of external moderation is not to recommend adjustments to individual marks awarded in a sample of work, but to assure standards and consistency overall. External Examiners are not expected to arbitrate on internal disputes over marks resulting from internal moderation. These should be resolved prior to external moderation. Only in exceptional circumstances, with permission of the Deputy Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor (DFPVC) would an External Examiner be expected to arbitrate concerning awarded marks.
- 5.2 It is not expected that internal moderators/External Examiners will add comments to the feedback sheet. In exceptional circumstances, when a first mark has to be adjusted, a new feedback sheet will be used.
- 5.3 There will be a transparent evidence/audit trail of the process of internal and external moderation, which will be recorded using the standard University Moderation templates and platforms, which will include a clear articulation of reasons for any marks adjustments.
- 5.4 In addition to confirming the standard and consistency of marking, it is expected that internal and external moderators will comment on the quality of feedback provided by the first marker.
- 5.5 It is expected that a schedule, mapping the moderation milestones will be agreed. This will include the process by which students' work will be made available to the External Examiner, taking into account whether scripts will be delivered by post/electronically or during attendance at the University prior to the PAB.





- 5.6 Oversight of the assessment/moderation process will be achieved through:
- 5.6.1 The annual monitoring of completed External Examiners' reports by Quality and Teaching Excellence informing a report to Academic Board.
  - 5.6.2 Faculty monitoring of completed University Moderation Templates as part of Annual Programme Monitoring and Periodic Review requirements.
- 5.7 Whilst multiple choice papers cannot be moderated in the same way as other forms of assessment, certain quality assurance processes will be employed including:
- 5.7.1 All multiple choice questions will have been tested before students take papers.
  - 5.7.2 All multiple choice papers will have been checked for accuracy and instructions to students before students take papers.
  - 5.7.3 The process for awarding marks/calculating the final mark will have been checked (for instance when marks are deducted for wrong answers).
  - 5.7.4 The marking method e.g. OMR will have been tested.
  - 5.7.5 A statistical analysis of module marks will be considered as part of the moderation process with any relevant reflections reported to the Programme Assessment Board (PAB).
- 5.8 All forms of assessment including practical, oral or practice placement assessments, are subject to the same level of internal and external moderation. However, moderation processes<sup>8</sup> may need to be adapted to accommodate these alternative approaches to assessment. Where variations from standard University practice are required these should be subject to formal approval by the Deputy Faculty Pro-Vice Chancellor (DFPVC), following consultation with the External Examiner and notified to the relevant Faculty Committee.

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<sup>8</sup> Ideally, these will have been discussed and documented as part of the programme/module approval process.