POLICY FOR THE VERIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT AND STANDARDISATION AND MODERATION OF MARKING

1 INTRODUCTION

This policy applies to all taught modules delivered at the University[1], except where there are specific exceptions due to Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements. The policy sets out the University's approach to verification of assessment tasks and the standardisation and moderation of marking. The policy should be read in conjunction with the operational guidance provided in Annex 2.

Verification of assessment tasks and the standardisation and moderation of marked tasks are the key processes by which the University maintains academic standards by assuring the appropriateness of assessment, and the accuracy of marking and grading decisions. This policy ensures alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

See also the following Annexes to this Document:

Annex 1   Collaborative Partners and Policy for the Verification of Assessment and Standardisation and Moderation

Annex 2   Operational Guidance to support implementation of the Policy for the Verification of Assessment and Standardisation and Moderation of Marking

2 POLICY STATEMENTS

The following statements apply to student assessment that will receive a percentage mark, pass/fail mark or grade band.

1   All assessment tasks should be verified internally before being published to students.

2   New or substantially changed assessment tasks that contribute to the classification of an award should normally be verified by an external examiner before release to students.

3   All student work should be marked by an appropriately experienced member of staff.

4   Where there are multiple markers on a module, a standardisation exercise should be undertaken to ensure consistency between markers.

5   All first-sit assessed student work should be internally moderated.

6   The Module Leader will ensure that internal moderation across all markers on the

---

[1] Details relating to modules delivered by collaborative partners are provided in Annex 1

module takes place.

7   The Module Leader will ensure that internal moderation across all student cohorts on the module takes place.

8   An appropriate representative sample of first-sit assessed student work that contributes to the classification of an award should be externally moderated.

9   Assessed work, feedback and provisional marks may be returned to students prior to external moderation being completed. All marks are subject to confirmation by the relevant Assessment Board. The 'subject to confirmation by the Assessment Board' status of marks should be made clear to students.

10   Referral and deferral work submitted by students does not need to be externally moderated unless there is a PSRB requirement to do so.

11   Only failed referrals should be internally moderated.

12   Prior to the Departmental Assessment Board, the provisional statistical grade profiles of modules, individually and by level for each subject/course, should be reviewed in order to identify any issues relating to the performance of the students and/or standards of marking.

13   Any recommendations for changes to marks, e.g. scaling, should be documented and presented to the Departmental Assessment Board with support from the External Examiner.

14   There should be clear and documented evidence that internal and external moderation of assessed student work has taken place. (This will usually take the form of information provided in the moderation report for the module.)

15   The requirements set out in the 'Collaborative Partners' annex to this policy should be met for modules delivered by collaborative partners (see **Annex 1**).

16   For Integrated End Point Assessment (EPA) of Apprenticeships, where the University is the EPA Organisation, Annex 2 should be read in conjunction with the University's End Point Assessment Policy, the requirements of the Designated Quality Body and with particular regard to the requirements of the specific Apprenticeship Standard and Assessment Plan published by the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education.

Policy Guidance: Detailed operational guidance, including definitions of key terms, to support the implementation of this Policy Statement is provided in **Annex 2**.

COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS AND POLICY FOR THE VERIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT AND STANDARDISATION AND MODERATION OF MARKING

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This policy applies to all taught modules delivered at the University's collaborative partners[2] and sets out the University's approach to verification of assessment tasks and the standardisation and moderation of marking. It should be read in conjunction with the requirements set out in the University's policy for verification, standardisation and moderation.

1.2 For the purposes of this paper collaborative partners are defined as publicly or privately funded educational organisations either in the UK, EU HEA or worldwide. The policy also applies to companies where the University has accredited and recognises assessed work undertaken by employees for SHU credit.

1.3 The 'collaborative annex' to the main Moderation policy does not apply to NHS partnerships, local government, social work or other health-related organisations (i.e. non-HE providers) where the assessment of clinical practice is used as part of the overall assessment regime of a professionally accredited ('licence to practice') award. In such cases the normal University policy on moderation applies as the University and its staff will retain full control over the marking of academic work.

1.4 This policy ensures alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

2 MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

2.1 It is expected that partner organisations have in place their own approach to internal verification and standardisation / moderation (by their own staff) which is commensurate with the University's policy on moderation.

2.2 Partner arrangements will be reviewed by the University at partner approval, subsequent validations of new awards and at Collaborative Periodic Review. It will also be considered by the collaborative course leader at University and by the external examiner(s) appointed by the University.

2.3 Details of the specific verification, marking and standardisation / moderation procedures must be included in the relevant Operational Handbook for the provision.

2.4 The University will appoint external examiners to review, usually on a sample basis, assessed student work. External examiners are expected to visit the partner and meet with students at the partner location <u>at least once</u> in their 4 year tenure.

---

[2] See main Policy Statement covering modules delivered at and by the University.

2.5   External examiners will be expected to see evidence of internal moderation by partner staff and will be asked to comment upon the effectiveness of this. External Examiners do not routinely comment on Level 4 work unless such work substantively contributes to the award (e.g. Foundation Degree, HND/C, some diplomas and certificates).

2.6   Relevant University academic staff will **second mark** (see definitions below), student work at the partner. This is an integral part of assuring standards as a new course commences at a partner organisation and the scale of the second marking will, normally, reduce considerably after the first year of operation providing the outcomes of marking and other quality metrics (external examiner comments, statistical analysis of student achievement, student feedback, etc.) are in line with expectations. For further guidance on this issue, see below.

3   THE SCALE AND EXTENT OF SECOND MARKING

3.1   Second marking of student work by University academic staff at collaborative partners will normally take place at the highest level of study. For postgraduate courses and level 6 degree top-up awards this simply means all modules within such programmes.

3.2   For full 3 or 4 year degree courses, Foundation Degrees and other sub-degree provision the following applies:

a)   If the first intake is only at one level (either 4 or 5) then that is where second marking occurs.

b)   In the second year of operation, second marking will follow the first cohort of students so that it always occurs at the highest level being delivered. For example, in the first year of operation of a new Foundation Degree, students enter only at the start of Level 4 and the second marking at the end of the year will be on the level 4 modules. In the second year of operation this first cohort will progress to level 5 and a new cohort will join level 4 - second marking will only occur at level 5. A second example sees a Foundation Degree commence with students joining at both level 4 and level 5 and in this case the second marking would be at level 5.

3.3   The scale of the sample for second marking is determined by whether a course is new and whether it has been running successfully for a period of time (referred to here as 'Steady State').

3.4   However, in certain specific instances where quality concerns arise, this will necessitate second marking for the entire cohort. In such cases this would be determined according to a risk assessment and a requirement for second marking.

3.5   The following table is indicative but should guide practice on the scale and extent of second marking, wherever practical.

Table 1: Indicative Sample Sizes for Second Marking, based on cohort size

Module cohort size	Year 1 of operation	Years 2 to 3 of operation	Year 4/ Steady State operation	Notes
1 to 20	100%	50%	25%	Giving a **maximum** of 20 pieces of work per assessment task reducing to 5 in year 4
21 to 50	40%	20%	12%	Giving a **maximum** of 20 pieces of work per assessment task reducing to 6 in year 4
More than 50	20%	10%	8%	Giving a **minimum** of 10 pieces of work (up to a maximum of 30 pieces of work) per assessment task reducing to 4 in year 4

3.6 The sample should reflect the full range of marks for that particular assessment component.

3.7 The mechanism for the second marking should be agreed by the relevant Department Board in discussion with the partner organisation[3].

3.8 Moderation 'events' are seen as good practice and are recommended as one of the most efficient approaches to building a successful partnership between the course teams.

3.9 As shown in the table above, Year 4 represents a 'steady state' for a successful course and is the default expectation of the University.

4   WHEN ISSUES/CONCERNS ARE IDENTIFIED

4.1 Where the second marking reveals issues or concerns with the marking at the partner organisation, this must be addressed immediately and the Faculty and Academic Quality and Standards should be notified of the situation.

4.2 The same applies to any critical comments or feedback from external examiners about the standard of marking at the partner organisation. Any issues with marking standards at a partner organisation will be reviewed in detail and, where appropriate, an action plan agreed with the partner to prevent recurrence. Where serious concerns are raised, second marking may be required <u>across all levels of the cohort</u>, with engagement from the external examiner and with the student marks being appropriately scaled prior to their ratification by the relevant Departmental Assessment Board (DAB).

---

[3] Academic Quality and Standards can assist in reaching agreement between the University and the partner organisation if required.

4.3 Where there are or have been issues the proportion of sampled second marking will remain at the current level for the next year/cohort. The actual proportion will be determined by a robust 'risk assessment' of the problem(s) and the action plan in place. Once the relevant Department Board is convinced that the issues have been fully resolved then the proportion of second marking can be returned to the 'Steady State' value shown in the table above. Such instances will be highlighted at Collaborative Periodic Review and will be fully investigated.

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY FOR THE VERIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT AND STANDARDISATION AND MODERATION OF MARKING

1   INTRODUCTION

This document provides detailed guidance to support the operation of the University's Policy for the Verification of Assessment Tasks and the Standardisation and Moderation of Marking.

2   DEFINITIONS

2.1.   **Verification** ensures that the form and content of assessment tasks and briefs are appropriate, fair and valid in terms of standards, will effectively assess the achievement of learning outcomes and present an appropriate level of challenge to students.

2.2.   **Marking** involves the academic judgement of students' submitted assessments against predetermined criteria and the provision of a mark (percentage, grade band or pass/fail grade).

2.3.   **Standardisation** activities are employed to ensure the consistency of marking in modules where there are multiple markers.

2.4.   **Moderation** is employed to ensure that academic standards are appropriate, that marking is regulated within agreed norms or against predetermined marking criteria across a module/course. It also ensures that the assessment outcomes for students are fair and reliable. It is undertaken internally and externally. Moderation can be undertaken by reviewing a sample of student work, or by second marking. Second marking results in a single, agreed mark.

2.5.   **Moderation by reviewing a sample of student work** - The role of the moderator is to check that first marking has been carried out correctly, that mark schemes have been properly applied, and that the total mark is arithmetically correct for a sample of student work.

2.6.   **Moderation 'Events'** - In these events a group of assessors from the collaborative partner and the University will all independently mark a sample of pieces of student work. The work is then shared and markers will compare and discuss the outcomes in order to establish that all assessors (partner staff and University staff) have clarity regarding the University's expectations for what constitutes a 'good' piece of work and to ensure that all markers are applying the agreed criteria consistently. This type of activity can be used in addition to other types of standardisation / moderation.

2.7.   **Second marking** is where a second mark is allocated to a piece of work by a second internal marker. This is a thorough second marking of student work and may be carried out blind (where the second marker does not have access to the marks and comments of the first marker) or sighted (where the second marker

can view the marks and comments of the first marker). Second marking of the whole cohort is sometimes referred to as 'double marking'. Second marking results in a single, agreed mark.

2.8. **External moderation** is a check / audit of a sample of marked work by an appointed external examiner.

3 VERIFICATION OF ASSESSMENT TASKS

3.1 Assessment tasks should be verified internally before being published to students. This is to ensure assessment tasks are consistent, that tasks are appropriate to testing the module learning outcomes and that marking criteria and feedback strategies are clear and appropriate.

3.2 Verification should be undertaken by an experienced member of academic staff with the appropriate expertise.

3.3 Local arrangements for verification will apply and will vary according to subject area and discipline.

3.4 New and substantially changed assessment tasks that contribute to the classification of an award should normally be verified by an external examiner.

3.5 A record should be maintained, overseen by the Department Assessment Board, to provide evidence that verification has been completed.

4 TYPES OF INTERNAL STANDARDISATION AND MODERATION ACTIVITY

4.1 **Standardisation of Marking** For example, a group of markers all independently mark a sample of pieces of student work and compare and discuss the outcomes in order to establish that all markers are applying the agreed criteria consistently. Following the activity, the markers continue to mark student work in the normal way. Marking standardisation exercises such as this should be used in addition to moderation/second marking.

4.2 **Moderation by Review / Audit of a Sample** Moderation may be limited to the review / audit of a sample of a representative number of pieces of assessed work across the marking range from a cohort of students. The role of the moderator in this is to check that first marking has been carried out correctly that mark schemes have been properly applied and that the total mark is arithmetically correct for a sample of student work.

4.3 **Second Marking** is where a second mark is allocated to a piece of work by a second internal marker. Second marking may either be carried out blind (where the second marker does not have access to the marks and comments of the first marker) or sighted (where the second marker can view the marks and comments of the first marker). In blind second marking both markers record their marks and feedback separately and then compare marks and resolve differences to produce an agreed mark and feedback.

5   MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERNAL STANDARDISATION / MODERATION OF MARKING

5.1   Departments are required to determine, manage and record the type of marking, standardisation and moderation that is in operation in all the modules within their academic portfolio.

5.2   Departments are also required to maintain a single formal published statement of standardisation / moderation procedures that is regularly reviewed. This statement should be published in order to inform students, external examiners and others about the arrangements for assuring the accuracy of marking and grading decisions as they relate to different types of assessment.

5.3   All first-sit assessed student work that will receive a percentage, pass/fail or grade[5] should be internally moderated. This may be limited to the review of a representative sample across the marking range, or it may involve the second marking of the work of the whole cohort.

5.4   Internal moderation is normally undertaken, in collaboration with the module leader, by a member of academic staff with appropriate expertise in the discipline area.[6]

5.5   Where student work is moderated by sampling a representative sample of student work, incorporating a sample from all grading bands, will be reviewed by the internal moderator.[7]

5.6   Along with viewing students' work, moderators are required to view the marks for the whole cohort, assessment briefs and marking criteria to ensure they have a holistic view of student assessment.

5.7   Where student work that has been second marked is also subject to moderation, the internal moderator will have sight of the marks allocated by the first and second marker and also any feedback or comments that have been made to students.

5.8   The internal moderator should give a clear indication that moderation has occurred and the outcomes of internal moderation should be recorded in a brief internal moderation report. The moderation report should be made available to the external examiner(s).

---

[5] i.e. the grade bands used in grade based assessment

[6] In large modules this may be carried out by the module leader if there are a number of markers in a module team. Note this would require oversight of module leaders marking.

[7] The internal moderator may view evidence captured, for example, on video, audio or screen-casting software

6   SAMPLE SIZE

6.1   The module leader is responsible for ensuring that the sample is representative of the different markers that contributed and different student cohorts that have taken the module.

6.2   The sample must include examples of low, middle and high work within each classification band. Where the cohort is lower than 15 in total, all student work should be included in the sample. This will normally comprise 3 pieces of work from each of the classification bands.

6.3   For large module cohorts which will produce more than 150 pieces of assessed student work, the sample size should normally comprise no more than 25 pieces of work.

6.4   External examiners should have access to all student work on request, though the minimum level of scrutiny should equate to the requirements for sampling provided above.

7   RESOLVING   DIFFERENCES   FOLLOWING   INTERNAL   MODULE STANDARDISATION / MODERATION

7.1   Any differences between markers that are identified through internal standardisation/moderation should be resolved through consultation between modules leaders and moderators, if necessary through a third marker. External examiners should not be used to adjudicate internal disagreements.

7.2   When all the student work for a cohort has been second marked then individual marks may be changed through agreement between the two markers. Any changes must be documented.

7.3   If the student work has not all been second marked then changes to individual marks cannot be recommended by the internal or external moderator, unless changes are a result of minor error for example if the marks on the front of an exam script have not been added up correctly.

7.4   Internal or external moderators may recommend a re-mark of the entire cohort of student work for part or all of the assessment.

7.5   All marks for a cohort may be scaled, up or down, as a result of the internal and external moderation process. In such circumstances the proposal must be approved by the external examiner and confirmed at the Departmental Assessment Board. Further details are provided below.

8   SCALING OF MARKS

8.1.   Scaling is the adjustment of marks carried out on an assessment task so that

the marks can better reflect the achievement of the students. The purpose of scaling is to ratify anomalies in mark distribution that arise from unexpected circumstances.

8.2. Scaling of marks is a position of last resort once all other methods of moderation have been exhausted; therefore it is expected to only be done in exceptional circumstances.

8.3. Outlined below are the key principles regarding the scaling of marks. These principles should be adhered to in any decision to scale marks.

8.3.1. Scaling should take place before marks are finalised, and only after all other moderation mechanisms have been ruled out.

8.3.2. If scaling is to take place it should be applied at task level only, not at module level.

8.3.3. Scaling should be applied fairly to all students taking the assessment, and must not unfairly benefit or disadvantage a subset of students (i.e. failures or high passes). Any scaling function applied to a set of marks must not reverse the rank-order of any pair of students at task level, nor place any student in a failure position at module level.

8.3.4. Scaling must not be applied to assessments for which a zero mark has been awarded for non-submission, or a capped mark for In Module Retrieval or as a result of an Academic Conduct Panel sanction.

8.3.5. The assessment design for any module that has its marks scaled should be reviewed in order to reduce the chance that scaling will be necessary in subsequent years.

8.3.6. Decisions regarding scaling will be made at the review of reports meeting for recommendation to the Departmental Assessment Board.

8.3.7. The relevant external examiners should always be consulted about the process.

8.3.8. The raw marks, the rationale for scaling, the impact on marks, and proposed actions to ensure scaling is not necessary in future years, should be clearly presented to the Departmental Assessment Board for ratification. For ratification to be confirmed the proposal should be approved by the external examiner.

9   EXTERNAL MODERATION

9.1 External examiners are not required to moderate assessed work at levels which do not contribute to the calculation of the intended award (e.g. level 4 for honours degree students), unless there is a specific Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirement.

9.2 For Foundation Degrees and HNC or HND awards, external examiners are

required to moderate assessed student work at level 4 as this contributes to the classification of these awards.

9.3 In all cases, external examiners have an advisory role in respect of all matters relating to the curriculum and assessment and may request to see all assessment instruments and student work, irrespective of level.

9.4 External moderation of student work normally takes place by making work available in advance to external examiners. External moderation may also be undertaken by the external examiner via an on-site moderation visit prior to the Assessment Board.

9.5 External examiners should be provided with all relevant information to inform the external moderation process. This will include a copy of the module descriptor and module handbook/assessment brief, marking criteria and, prior to the Assessment Board, a copy of the module marks and a summary of the module statistics.

9.6 The module leader should include a summary of the internal and external moderation process and any recommendations from the internal and external examiner in the annual module review.

9.7 External examiners should not be used as 'third markers' or to moderate disagreements between two internal markers. In instances of internal disagreement between the first and second markers or the internal moderator, then a third internal marker should be used to resolve the situation.

9.8 As the external examiner will only moderate a sample of work, even if the whole cohort has been second marked, no further changes to individual marks can be made. However in exceptional circumstances the external examiner may request that the entire cohort is re-marked.

10 RETURN OF FEEDBACK AND PROVISIONAL MARKS TO STUDENTS

10.1 Assessed work, feedback and provisional marks may be returned to students prior to external moderation being completed. As this will happen before marks have been confirmed by the relevant Assessment Board, students should be advised that marks are provisional and are subject to confirmation.

10 MODERATION OF REFERRED AND DEFERRED STUDENT WORK AND IN-MODULE RETRIEVAL

10.1 As all first-sit student work will have already been internally and externally moderated, and the same marking criteria employed for referrals and deferrals, it is not necessary to send referral and deferral work to external examiners.

10.2   All failed referrals must be internally moderated.

10.3   Since internal moderation of student work will have been undertaken for the first submission, further internal moderation for in-module retrieval is not required.

11   EVIDENCE OF MODERATION

11.1   **Internal Moderation:** there must be clear evidence that internal moderation of assessed student work has taken place. Evidence of internal moderation should be provided to external examiners using a standard proforma along with a brief moderation report which summarises the process and its outcomes.

11.2   **External Moderation**: there must be clear evidence that external moderation of student work by external examiners has taken place. External Examiners should, normally through the moderation report for the module, receive confirmation that internal moderation has been completed, to be provided together with samples of students' work.

11.3   At the Departmental Assessment Board each course leader should confirm that modules have been internally and (where applicable) externally moderated, and delivered in accordance with the definitive document.

11.4   The External Examiner, through their annual report, will be asked to confirm that the moderation process has been followed and issues raised by the external have been satisfactorily resolved. This will be a standing item on the Departmental Assessment Board agenda.

Approved by the Academic Board, June 2016 (minute AB/16/40 refers)

Revised May 2018 (approved by University Teaching Quality Committee)

Revised February 2024 (approved by University Teaching Quality

Committee)