

Moderation Code of Practice

Approved by the Academic Regulations Committee

3rd December 2020



Introduction

Moderation is a process separate from marking and provides assurance that assessment criteria have been applied appropriately, reflecting the shared understanding of the markers. It can, where appropriate, enable comparability of outcomes across academic subjects, for instance, in recognising that students may be studying more than one subject. Moderation focuses on the marks awarded to the full set of assessed work for a task, module or course, in the context of the academic standards for the award.

1. Purpose

This Code of Practice sets out a number of parameters and minimum requirements with regard to internal moderation, which must be followed by all Schools for validated University of Birmingham and University College Birmingham Awards.

2. Definitions

2.1 Internal Examiner(s):

The internal examiner is the person or persons who mark and assign a grade to students assessed work.

2.2 Moderation

Moderation refers to a process that forms part of quality assurance in terms of assessment. It is integral in ensuring compliance with QAA March 2018, *The Revised Quality Code for Higher Education* to ensure 'threshold standards for its qualifications are consistent with the relevant national qualifications frameworks. Providers are required to ensure external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent.'

Moderation refers to a range of processes conducted by an academic member of staff (ie. an Internal Examiner) to ensure that assessment tasks, assessment criteria and marking are accurate, fair, appropriate to the level of the assessment, consistent across markers and comparable with equivalent assessments. Moderation is a quality assurance process that contributes to the continuous improvement of assessment practices and to sharing good practice among colleagues.

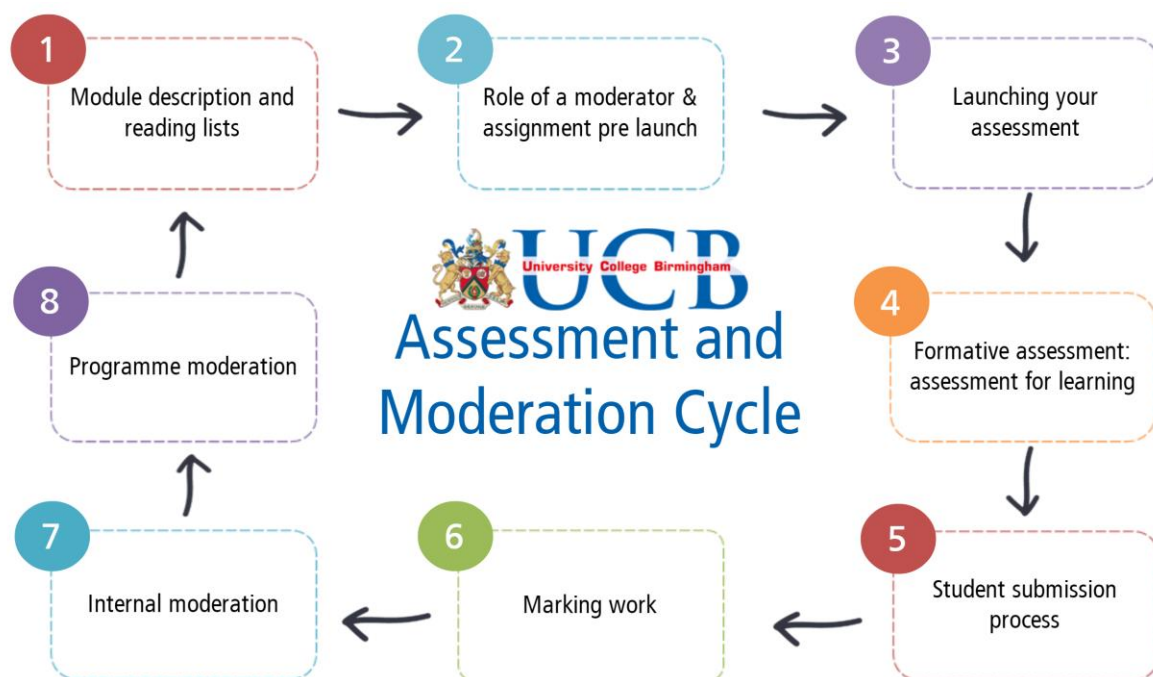
For the purpose of this Code of Practice the term moderation is the process undertaken to ensure that assessments are fit for purpose and that they enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the module(s)'

In addition to the checking of the accuracy of marks recorded, it is necessary to have a process of internal moderation carried out by academic staff of the University and a subsequent process of external moderation carried out by External Examiners. This Code of Practice should be read alongside the following which detail the role of External Examiners:

- [External Examiner Code of Practice](#)
- [External Examiner Guide for Staff](#)
- [External Examiner Guide for Students](#)
- [Guidance for External Examiners](#)

3. The Assessment and Moderation cycle

The over-riding purpose of this cycle is to ensure that the academic standards for each award of credit or a qualification is rigorously set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is equitably judged against this standard.



The Assessment and Moderation Cycle can be accessed here:

https://portal.ucb.ac.uk/assessment-cycle/story_html5.html .

3.1 When is moderation needed?

For all work submitted for summative assessment at levels 5, 6 and 7, which has been marked by an internal examiner and that contributes to the achievement of credit or a qualification, moderation must take place for each assessment where the individual component of the assessment contributes more than 10% to the module mark. Level 4 is not normally moderated; however, new awards and partnership delivery may require moderation at this level to ensure appropriate practices are embedded. Apprenticeships resulting in the award of higher education credit would be subject to moderation to ensure currency and compliance with Ofsted.

Where programmes carry associated professional accreditation, moderation practices will also consider the requirements of the authority.

Apprenticeship programmes will be moderated in accordance with the relevant awarding body requirements.

3.2 What forms of moderation are required in different circumstances?

There are three methods of moderation used by Internal Examiners, defined and used as follows:

Method of moderation	Definition	Application
Single marking plus non-blind sampling	Where a specified sample of the range of assessed work is reviewed by a member of academic staff other than the first marker (or team of markers) to assess the standard and consistency of the marks and feedback allocated by the markers, with reference to the marking criteria	Sampling is likely to be used for the majority of types of assessment.
Non-blind double marking	Where ALL pieces of work are marked by two or more markers, and the marks and annotations of the first marker are available to the second marker/s.	<p>Required for all undergraduate and Master's level projects and dissertations and other substantial, individualised pieces of work.</p> <p>Recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •for modules at levels 5,6 and 7 which are assessed by a single piece of assessment*. •where first markers are less experienced, or where there are several first markers and consistency may be an issue.

Method of moderation	Definition	Application
Blind double-marking	Where ALL pieces of work are marked by two or more markers, but the marks and comments of the first marker are not available to the second marker/s.	Not required but strongly Recommended for assessments where it might be difficult to ensure the anonymity of the candidate (e.g. projects).

*Where the only assessment for the module is an examination composed of multiple essay questions, moderation can be conducted by sampling (see below)

Apart from the requirements noted above, for all other assessments, Schools should determine the most appropriate form of moderation, taking into account the nature of the assessment, the contribution made to the module mark and the overall contribution of the assessment to the degree classification or to the achievement of the award (determined by the level and credit value of the module)

3.3 Examinations

When moderating marks from examinations, Schools should determine whether moderation should be carried out either:

- a) at the level of individual questions within an examination paper (i.e. the mark awarded for each separate, substantive question); or
- b) at the level of the paper as a whole (i.e. the overall mark for the examination).

Where different questions within an examination paper are marked by different markers, it is necessary for moderation to take place at the level of the question. Where there is a single marker for the examination paper, it may be appropriate to moderate the marking for the paper as a whole.

3.4 Coursework

The same principles apply to moderation of coursework assessment; if the overall mark for the coursework element of a module is derived from the aggregation of marks for a number of different and distinct components which have been marked by different markers, it is recommended that each 'component mark' be moderated separately, unless each individual component of assessment does not contribute more than 10% of the mark for the coursework element. If the components of the coursework assessment are all marked by the same marker, it may be appropriate to moderate the overall mark for the coursework element.

3.5 Practical assessments

For practical assessments such as presentations, oral examinations, clinical or any other practically-based assessments which individually contribute more than 10% to the overall module mark and where marking takes place at the time of the assessment, it is recommended that moderation takes place at the time of the assessment, by having more than one Internal Examiner present. Where this is not feasible, there should be a formal record of how the mark was determined, with reference to the marking criteria, and also, wherever possible, an audio/visual/digital recording of the assessment, which can be used for moderation purposes.

4. Allocation of moderation duties

Moderation can be carried out by a team of staff or by an individual. The allocation of moderation duties will be approved by the Executive Dean of School or nominee. The moderator/s should have a good understanding of the general discipline, but may not necessarily be an expert in the subject of the assessment being moderated. For all types of moderation, the moderator/s must be provided with the relevant marking criteria and statistical data and may also be provided with a model/outline answer, in order that s/he can fulfil the role properly.

5. How to carry out sampling

Although only a sample of work will be reviewed it is necessary that the moderator has access to an appropriate sample of marked assessments in order to start the moderation process. Moderation can begin before all assessments are marked, where the Moderator feedback could enhance the feedback/markings of the rest of the batch. However, the Moderator will need to have access to ALL pieces of marked assessment before completing the Moderation process.

In order to be able to select a sample for review:

Stage 1

- a) Determine whether moderation is required if the assessment constitutes less than 10% of the module mark.

- b) Review the range of marks provisionally awarded for the assessment.
(Other relevant statistical information may also be considered, if available, such as the mean mark, some indication of variation (e.g. standard deviation), and comparative data for previous years (see Module Review statistical data for appropriate academic year <https://portal.ucb.ac.uk/documents/statistics> and for other similar types of assessment at the same level within the programme)

- c) Determine the total number of pieces of work submitted for the assessment which is subject to moderation.

- d) Determine the level of the assessment (e.g. Undergraduate, or Master's level).

Stage 2

Determine the sample for review in accordance with the following criteria:

- a) The sample must be across all markers and representative of the full range of marks, including some fails, where they occur.
- b) The sample must meet the minimum sample size, as follows :

Number of pieces of work in the cohort	Minimum sample to be reviewed
100 or more	Square root of the total rounded up
Between 10-99	10 pieces of work
Below 10	All pieces of work

Note: a greater sample size than the minimum may be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- If the statistical information indicates a significant disparity between the marks awarded by different markers for a particular assessment or within a module, or where the marks awarded by a single marker appear to be unusual in any way (e.g. a particularly high or low mean mark; marks out of line with the normal distribution for the assessment / module etc.)
- Where there is a large number of first markers
- Where the marker is a new or inexperienced member of staff
- If the assessment is taken by students from a range of programmes, in order to include examples from students on the full range of programmes.

Stage 3 – what to look for

When reviewing the sample of work, the moderator should be looking for trends or anomalies in how the marker has marked the work and should not make adjustments to the marks awarded for individual pieces of work. It is inequitable to change the marks for only the sample reviewed. Guidance on anomalies is provided in stage 7, process 3 of the Assessment and Moderation Cycle.

6. Outcomes of all methods of moderation:

When all the pieces of work subject to moderation have been awarded marks by the first and second marker or moderator/s, the marks should be reviewed by both markers. Markers are unlikely always to agree exactly on the appropriate mark to be awarded for a piece of work, particularly in discursive subjects. Therefore, it is necessary to decide when the difference between the marks awarded by the first and second markers, or moderator/s, is considered to be of sufficient significance to warrant further action. The margin of difference between both should be set by the PVC (Curriculum, Teaching and Learning) at the start of each academic year.

6.1 Actions

The outcomes of the review of marks awarded by the first and second marker or moderator/s, and the action which should be taken, will fall into one of the following categories:

Outcome of moderation	Action to be taken
a) The marks of the first and second marker/moderator/s are consistently in agreement, differing by no more than 5% for all of the reviewed work; or by no more than 5% for the large majority of the reviewed work and by no more than 10% for a small number of pieces of assessment (e.g. 1,2 in a sample of 20).	Where sampling has been carried out: No further action is required and the marks of the first marker are approved as the confirmed marks for the sample and the rest of the cohort. Where double-marking has been carried out: The marker and second marker / moderator/s should discuss the reasons for the marks they have awarded, and agree that the confirmed marks will be: (a) the full set of marks awarded by the first marker; (b) the full set of marks awarded by the second marker; or (c) an agreed set of alternative marks (e.g. the average or a weighted average of the two marks)

Outcome of moderation	Action to be taken
<p>b) The marks of the first and second marker/moderator/s differ by 10% or more for a larger number of the pieces of assessment which have been reviewed (e.g. 5 or more in a sample of 20)</p>	<p>Where sampling has been carried out:</p> <p>The marker and moderator/s should discuss the reasons for the marks they have awarded, with reference to the marking criteria. This may lead to one of the following outcomes:</p> <p>(a) If the marks of the first marker are agreed to be appropriate, they may be adopted as the confirmed marks for the whole cohort;</p> <p>(b) If the differences between the marks of the first marker and moderator are consistently in the same direction and of a similar amount, it may be decided to adjust the marks of the whole cohort by an agreed proportion or number of marks;</p> <p>(c) If the first marker and moderator are unable to reach an agreement on the marks to be awarded, or if the scale and direction of differences of marks awarded by first marker and moderator vary across the sample the full set of work should be marked by the moderator, and the marks then agreed via the process for agreeing the outcomes of double-marking (below).</p> <p>Where double-marking has been carried out:</p> <p>The first marker and second marker should discuss the reasons for the marks they have awarded, with reference to the marking criteria, and agree one of the following outcomes:</p> <p>(a) that the full set of marks awarded by the first marker be adopted as the confirmed marks; or</p> <p>(b) the full set of marks awarded by the second marker be adopted as the confirmed marks;</p> <p>(c) that the average or a weighted average of the marks awarded by the first and second marker be</p>

	<p>adopted as the confirmed marks; or</p> <p>(d) the marks of the whole cohort may be Adjusted by an agreed proportion or number of marks; or</p> <p>(e) a mark is agreed for each piece of assessment.</p> <p>Exceptionally, if the first and second marker are unable to agree on a course of action, then a third (internal) marker or moderator should be consulted.</p>
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Note: External Examiners are not appointed to resolve grade disputes.

6.2 Adjustment of marks

Adjustment is the process applied to assessments within modules in the following circumstances:

- i) When the marks awarded by a first and second marker/moderator differ by broadly the same number and most or all of the differences are in the same direction.
- ii) Where an error has been identified with one particular question in an assessment; this problem can be overcome by modifying the marking scheme for the question or by excluding the question from the assessment, with the mean mark for the assessment and for the module calculated on the basis of the remaining components of the assessment.
- iii) Where a mean mark for an optional component of a module differs by more than an agreed level from the mean of all the optional components taken together; the agreed level will be determined by the module team.

Adjustment of marks cannot be applied when the same assessment is taken by students at more than one level (e.g. level 6 and level 7) by adjusting the marks

according to the level of the student; the marks awarded should be the actual marks achieved in the assessment. Adjustment can be applied to the awarded marks within a level of assessment.

The adjustment of marks can take place for work where either sampling or double-marking has been carried out. An agreed adjustment of marks is applied to all students for the assessment. All instances of mark adjustment should be agreed by the Executive Dean of School and reported to the External Examiner(s) and recorded in the minutes of the Board of Examiners' meeting. Any concerns identified regarding the assessment process or other aspects of the module should be investigated as part of the annual Module Review process.

6.3 Scaling of marks

Scaling is a process which may be employed, on an exceptional basis, to enable the mean mark for a given module to fall within expected ranges derived from:

- i) previous student performance over an appropriate time period (e.g. 3-5 years);and/or
- ii) the range of mean marks in that particular year for all modules taken by a given cohort of students.

After completion of the moderation process for each module, and any resulting adjustments to marks have been made, the range of mean marks for all modules within a year of study that contribute to the final award should be reviewed. As part of this review process, Schools may determine expected ranges within which all mean module marks for a year of study should lie, derived from i) and/or ii) above. The range of expected mean module marks may differ between degree programmes and Schools but in each case will be based on the evidence of student performance. After investigation of any module with a mean outside the expected range derived from i) and/or ii) above, the marks can be either:

- (a) confirmed, if the marks awarded are deemed to be a fair and accurate reflection of student performance on the module in comparison with performance on other modules in the same year of study; or

(b) Scaled, if the marks awarded are deemed not to be a fair and accurate reflection of student performance in comparison with performance on other modules in the same year of study. Scaling should take place using an appropriate algorithm, agreed with the External Examiners, such that the mean is changed by the least amount to lie within the expected range.

The key principles of any scaling of module marks are that the process is transparent, triggered only when the mean mark for a module lies outside of the expected range, and that the algorithm then applied is the minimum required to bring the mean within the expected range. As such, scaling is envisaged to be a rare event. Instances of scaling should be discussed with, and approved by the Executive Dean of School and the External Examiner(s); full justification on academic grounds must be provided. Where used, scaling should be recorded in the School's annual review report, along with actions taken to address underlying issues.

7. Recording evidence of moderation

It is necessary for Schools to submit evidence to the Assessment and External Examiners Officer or the Postgraduate and Block Administrators (as appropriate) to demonstrate that internal moderation has taken place e.g. recording details of the particular pieces of assessment which have been selected within the sample for review; recording comments on the script/piece of work, or separately. N.B. Schools should note that GDPR and University Data protection rules enable students to access any comments on their assessed work made by Internal or External Examiners. Comments should be professional and constructive. Normally this evidence will be shown on the Internal Moderation Sheet.

8. Information for Students

Students should be provided with an explanation of the purpose of moderation of assessment, for example in a School / Programme Handbook and with reference to

this University Code of Practice. on Moderation should be made available as a matter of course to all External Examiners.

Students should not normally be provided with evidence of the moderation process applied to their own work submitted for assessment (e.g. comments of moderators, or provisional marks awarded); they should only receive the final agreed mark for their piece of work. However, students do have a right under GDPR and University Data protection rules to request to see the details of how the moderation process was applied to their piece/s of work by submitting a Request to Access Examiners' Comments; any moderator's comments and provisional marks awarded will be disclosed, although students are not entitled to receive copies of actual examination scripts or texts.