

Guide for Schools on the Moderation of Assessment

This *Guide for Schools on the Moderation of Assessment* can be used in conjunction with Heriot-Watt University's *Policy on the Moderation of Assessment*. While Schools are required to adhere to the University's Policy, the use of this Guide is not mandatory.

The Guide is designed to assist Schools in reviewing, and revising as appropriate, their own processes in order to meet the requirements of the University Policy. The Guide has been produced in response to a request from several Schools for the provision of information to supplement, and to help Schools in implementing, the University Policy.

The Guide is structured according to the "Framework for School Moderation Procedures" section with the University policy, namely: (1) School Policy Statement; (2) Scope of School Moderation; (3) Roles and Responsibilities; (4) Reporting Procedure; (4) Communication of School Process

1. School Policy Statement

The University Policy states that each School must have its own policy on moderation of assessment. It is suggested that each School policy starts with a policy statement or key principle.

2. Scope of School Moderation

Moderation of assessment takes place at the key stages of the assessment process, ie design of tasks and marking of assignments (including consideration of results). The accompanying diagram summarises the various steps at the design and marking stages.

The School policy statement can set out the range of assessments which are subject to moderation (eg assessments associated with all qualifying courses; Stage Three assessments where the Ordinary degree is an established exit route).

The types of moderation being applied may vary within a School, depending on the complexity of the programme, eg UK-campus only or offered in multi-location/mode formats.

Moderation: Design of Assessments

a) Moderation usually starts at the assessment design stage. The principle aspects considered at this stage are a review of:

- compatibility of assessments with learning outcomes
- equivalence across all locations and modes where different forms of assessment will be used (*where applicable*)

Other matters which might be reviewed at the design stage might include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• over-arching approach to assessment• new and revised assignments• assessment criteria• marking schemes• model answers• the balance between assignments within courses and across each stage of a programme• consistency across subject areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• consistency with former assessments (in terms of standards)• consistency with SCQF/MQA level• suitability of tasks, questions etc• consistency across the various individuals contributing to the assessment design process• accuracy of translation (<i>where applicable</i>)
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- b) Moderation at the design stage may be undertaken by the Course Team or Programme Team, and, for the purposes of continuity, may also include staff involved in moderation of the marking. Where appropriate, it is good practice to involve staff at all campuses. The moderation process can be signed off by an individual such as the Programme Leader. Schools may choose to seek external comments on proposed assessments from, for example, External Examiners and/or Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies.
- c) Where it is intended to offer different forms of assessment in different locations/modes, those assignments which contribute to the final mark/grade may need to be scrutinised and compared to ensure that the same learning outcomes are being tested and the criteria and marking schemes are equivalent.

Moderation: Marking of Assessments

- d) The key activities of moderation process at the marking stage include:
 - i. Sampling of marked assessments (*see below*)
 - ii. Additional marking of borderlines and fails
 - iii. Double marking of dissertations, major projects/designs or presentations
 - iv. Adjudication by another marker where there are significant differences between the marks given by two or more assessors
 - v. Evaluation of consistency where multiple staff members have contributed to the marking
 - vi. Review of marks/academic standards across courses within a programme
 - vii. Review of marks/academic standards across the same course delivered in different modes and/or locations and/or languages
 - viii. Review of marks/academic standards across the same course/programme over a number of years
 - ix. Overview of marking of assessments undertaken by particular staff groups: new staff members (both probationary and those new to HWU) at all campuses; Approved Teachers/Tutors/Markers; staff at different institutions for joint (or dual) awards
 - x. Consideration of special circumstances which may have affected the performance of a group of students¹
 - xi. Overview of the School's approach to considering the special circumstances of individual students³
- e) Schools can specify the range and roles of individuals and groups involved in the moderation of marking. Examples of posts/remits are given in Section 3, but others may contribute, such as Course Leaders, Year Co-ordinators/Directors of Studies.
- f) Moderation of marking of assignments is carried out by members of academic staff other than the first marker, such as a second experienced assessor or the teaching team for the course. Thereafter, as per the University Policy, the Chief External Examiner will undertake a review of the School's moderation process as a whole.
- g) In the case of multi-mode, multi-location programmes, moderation is likely to include double-marking of a sample of assignments and a moderation meeting (real or virtual) to review consistency of standards.

¹ See *Policy on Mitigating Circumstances in relation to Assessment*. <https://www.hw.ac.uk/services/docs/mc-policy.pdf>

Sample

- h) Each School can determine an appropriate sample of completed assessments to be moderated, including assessments which:
- i. are drawn from, and reflect, the whole range of marks, particularly borderlines, firsts and fails;
 - ii. incorporate a representative sample of each type of assessment activity where different assessments have been used in different locations/modes;
 - iii. include samples from different locations (branch campus, ALP), different modes (IDL, part-time) and different languages, where the same assessment has been used;
 - iv. feature samples of assessments marked by Approved Teachers/Tutors/Markers
 - v. include a range of assessments marked by a new/inexperienced staff member;
 - vi. include at least some of the assessments which will be sent to External Examiners.

Adjusting Marks

- i) It may be necessary to reconsider the whole range of marks and, as a consequence, change marks. Various forms of adjustment may be used, provided that these are applied to the range of marks and to all relevant students, not just those in the moderation sample. Examples of adjustment include: adding/subtracting a fixed percentage to/from marks, scaling marks by a constant factor, widening or reducing the span of marks, or a combination of these.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Within the School, it is recommended in the University Policy that the Director of Learning and Teaching be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the School's moderation policy. As per the University Policy, externality is provided by the Chief External Examiner.

Schools can specify in their own policies that individuals involved in managing and evaluating the effectiveness of moderation activities are independent as far as possible from the staff who contribute to the design and marking of assessment and staff involved in moderation. Typically, this independence can be provided collectively by the Director of Learning and Teaching, the Exam Board, by the Chief External Examiner and by the External Examiners, but may also include the Programme Leader, Academic Head or Year Co-ordinator.

Individuals or groups who have been tasked with moderating the design and/or marking of assessment are likely to be responsible for moderation across all variants of a programme (and not just the UK-campus version).

This section sets out a suggested remit for the key individuals involved in the School's moderation activities and processes. Schools are able to construct their own roles and responsibilities as befits their purpose.

a) School Moderator(s)

- School moderation processes can be overseen at the School level by the Director of Learning and Teaching. At the discipline/subject level, a senior individual is likely to undertake the role of moderator, such as the Programme Leader, Teaching Group Convenor or the Academic Head (of discipline).
- The role of the moderator(s) may vary according to the level at which she/he undertakes moderation-related activities, eg the Director of Learning and Teaching may focus on the effectiveness and implementation of the School-wide process. At the subject level, the moderator's role may be to form a view as to the appropriateness of the marks allocated to students, and where there are any concerns, to discuss issues with the assessors.

b) Exam Board²

- The Exam Board has ultimate responsibility for evaluating the effectiveness of the School's moderation processes as implemented at the discipline/programme level.
- The Exam Board may discharge this responsibility by considering the moderation reports and record, in the minutes, that the moderation process has been properly carried out.

c) External Examiner

- As per duties of appointment, each External Examiner has an overview of the moderation process in relation to the specific programme to which they have been appointed.

d) Chief External Examiner

- As per duties of appointment, the Chief External Examiner has responsibility for oversight of the implementation and effectiveness of the entire School moderation process across all its provision (including multi-location/mode programmes)³

e) Academic Staff Members

- When a contribution to the design and/or marking of summative assessment is undertaken by Approved Teachers, Approved Markers or Approved Tutors, it is recommended that internal moderation be carried out by academic staff of Heriot-Watt University.
- If a new staff member is contributing to the design and/or marking of summative assessment, it is recommended that moderation be undertaken by a more established staff member. This moderation applies to new staff at all campuses.

4. Reporting Procedure

a) Moderator (s)

- As per the University Policy, the moderator(s) will provide a report on moderation processes. Typically, the report will be provided for the Exam Board. Topics to be covered in the report may include (as appropriate to the programmes being reviewed):
 - the extent to which marking schemes and assessment criteria were applied accurately, consistently and fairly;
 - any instances where adjustment of marks was required;
 - in the case of multiple variants of a course, any variability between modes and locations (and languages);
 - any significant discrepancies between markers;
 - variability in/equivalence of marking and marks profile across time (academic standards);
 - the effectiveness of the marking undertaken by: new staff members; staff at locations other than the home campus; Approved Teachers/Tutors/Markers
 - how the moderation process was carried out;
 - commentary on the effectiveness of the moderation process;
 - any recommendations for future offerings of the course, such as: the forms of assessment or the assessment criteria; the marking of assessment; the award of marks/grades.

² The term "Exam Board" has deliberately been left undefined - it is up to each School to determine which Board (Award, Progression, Assessment) is the most appropriate forum for receiving reports on moderation.

³ The University's *Remit and Criteria for Chief External Examiners* provides Schools with the flexibility to appoint one or more Chief External Examiners, as suits the extent and nature of the multi-location/mode provision.

- It is recognised that timescales between the conclusion of marking, processing of results and meetings of the Award/Progression Exam Boards might preclude the production of a detailed moderation report. Schools can determine the most effective means by which an Exam Board can be informed of the effectiveness of the internal moderation process – this might be through a School-wide report by the Director of Learning and Teaching or reports from individual Programme Leaders.

b) Exam Board

- The Exam Board records, in the minutes, that the moderation process has been properly carried out. This record may be in the form of a statement to the effect that “The Board of Examiners confirmed that the School policy on moderation had been adhered to”.

c) External Examiner

- In the annual External Examiner report, each External Examiner comments on the implementation of the moderation process in relation to the specific programme to which they have been appointed⁴.

d) Chief External Examiner

- The Chief External Examiner provides a commentary on his/her oversight of the implementation and effectiveness of the entire School moderation process to the Board of Examiners (to be recorded in the Minutes of the Board) and in the annual Chief External Examiner Report.

5. Communication of School Process

All staff involved in moderation need to be made aware of their role in relation to moderation and any associated responsibilities in terms of reporting. Schools may choose to do this by whatever means they deem appropriate, eg staff handbook; information on intranet; briefing session.

At the time of appointment, the University will provide External Examiners and Chief External Examiners with information on their responsibilities in relation to moderation. Schools are invited to supplement this generic overview with specific requirements, particularly ensuring that Externals are fully aware of their role in evaluating moderation processes on multi-location/mode programmes. Schools may choose to do this through a meeting with Externals, but may also provide information in writing.

Students can be informed about relevant aspects of the School's moderation process, particularly in relation to consideration of progression and final award results.

The School process needs to be transparent and clear to all stakeholders.

Academic Registry
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⁴ The External Examiner has to comment, in the report template, on a range of topics which can be grouped collectively under the overall heading of "moderation", eg equivalence between different versions; equity of treatment of students; comment on standards in relation to previous years; assessment of all learning outcomes.