



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

GUIDANCE FOR DEPARTMENTS ON THE INTERNAL MODERATION OF SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT TASKS AND ASSESSED WORK

This guidance has been produced by a working group of the Quality and Standards Committee following consideration of the Quality Assurance Agency's Code of Practice Section 6, covering the assessment of students, and in response to common issues identified through internal teaching quality review and the external Subject Review process. Section 6 of the QAA Code of Practice is available online at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section6/default.asp>.

1. PRINCIPLES

The guidance has been formulated with reference to Precept 2 of section 6 of the Code, which states that institutions should:

publicise and implement principles and procedures for, and processes of, assessment that are explicit, valid and reliable.

And also Precept 7 which states that institutions should:

have transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and for moderating marks.

The purpose of this guidance is to establish further principles and suggestions for good practice to assist departments in order to meet the expectations of the Code of Practice. In the context of this guidance, moderation is intended to refer to a range of activities which provide confirmation that, at all stages, summative assessment (i.e. assessment on which the award of credit is based) has been conducted with accuracy, consistency and fairness. External moderation also plays a key role in this process and the role of the external examiner is outlined in the University's Code of Practice for External Examiners of Taught Courses. However, ensuring that assessment is effectively conducted should ultimately be a collective departmental responsibility to be exercised through the operation of rigorous internal moderation procedures.

The effectiveness of departmental assessment procedures, including internal moderation, will be evaluated periodically via the University's Periodic Review with reference to this and other associated assessment guidance. A wide range of assessment practices are in use across the institution, reflecting the diversity of subject pedagogies, and every attempt has been made to accommodate this diversity in the guidance. It is expected that departments will apply this guidance in a way which is most appropriate to the nature of their assessment strategies and it is therefore recognised that departments may demonstrate alternative practices in some respects which are better suited to their subject pedagogy, in order to meet the principles outlined in the guidance.

Reference should also be made to the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/content/1/c6/04/83/65/lta-strategy2.pdf>) which includes a series of 9 Principles of Assessment which apply to all assessment activity.

2. GUIDANCE

2.1 The Design of Assessment Criteria

- (i) The development and dissemination of appropriate assessment criteria is a key element of effective assessment procedures, including moderation. Assessment criteria describe the key characteristics of differing standards of performance, these standards being usually defined by marking or classification bands.
- (ii) The use of assessment criteria has the following aims:
- To provide students with a clear and explicit understanding of the standards they are expected to achieve in relation to the marks/grades awarded. By relating feedback to the assessment criteria, students should also be able to appreciate how they can improve the standard of their performance in future (for further information see the University's Guidance For Departments on Providing Academic Feedback to Students).
 - To provide a common reference point on which academic judgement can be based thus promoting consistency in the exercise of academic judgement by both the individual marker and between different markers.
- (iii) In order to achieve these aims, effective assessment criteria should have the following characteristics:
- They should broadly relate to the demonstration of the knowledge, understanding and skills set out in the intended learning outcomes, achievement of which is being assessed.
 - They should be understandable to students and included in information provided to students, e.g. student handbooks.
- (iv) Even with the most well-developed assessment criteria, there is a subjective element to their application resulting from varying interpretations (for example, the meaning of terms such as 'critical thinking') and the attachment of differing weightings of importance to criteria. It is therefore recommended that departments attempt to develop a common understanding of the meaning and application of assessment criteria through regular review and discussion amongst all those involved in their use, including students.

2.2 The Design of Assessment Tasks

It is expected that the assessment method(s) associated with a module (or defined block of teaching in the case of a non-modular programme) are agreed at department level as part of an overall assessment strategy. However, the department should also operate a process for confirming the appropriateness of the design of specific tasks (e.g. examination paper or assignment/project brief). This might be carried out either amongst paired colleagues, within teaching teams or by a departmental body e.g. Teaching Committee. However organised, the aim of this double-checking should be to ensure that:

- Each task is a valid means of providing students with an opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the module.
- The questions or instructions are clearly worded and contain no ambiguities as to what students are expected to do.
- The assessment workload is appropriate to the credit value of the module being assessed, particularly if there are to be multiple components to the assessment.

- The time-scale allowed for completion of the task is reasonable.
- All students can reasonably be expected to have access to the resources required for completion of the task.
- Where appropriate, there is a clear marking scheme confirming correct answers or key features of model answers and if applicable directions where and how marks are to be apportioned according to performance in specific questions or against specific assessment criteria.

2.3 MARKING/GRADING

- (i) The process of summative assessment should involve internal moderation wherever practical to ensure that the initial judgements/marks have been arrived at accurately, consistently and fairly in accordance with the assessment criteria/marketing scheme. The method of moderation may vary, and it is for the department to determine the most appropriate method for the type of assessment. However, common forms include:
- Checking that the mark or grade awarded by the first marker is appropriate in accordance with the assessment criteria/marketing scheme. This may result in the moderator either agreeing the mark/grade or suggesting an alternative.
 - Second marking (also referred to as double marking) the work in order to confirm the first mark – the first mark is known to the second marker.
 - Blind second marking which means that the first mark is not known by the second marker, this has the advantage of the second marker not being influenced by the first mark and arguably provides more accurate verification when both markers arrive at the same conclusion.
- (ii) Departments should have a documented policy and procedures for internal moderation, which is provided to all staff involved in the assessment process. The key elements of the information should also be included in student handbooks.
- Identification of the method of moderation to be used according to the type of assessment. The method of moderation should be appropriate to the potential for divergence between markers created by the nature of the assessment. Where anonymous marking is not in use, moderation should be particularly robust, for example, blind second marking of dissertations (see also the University's Revised Statement of Procedures for the Anonymous Marking of Examinations).
 - Particular arrangements for moderation of practical assessment such as oral examinations, presentations, music or drama performance, laboratory work etc. It is good practice to record the outcomes against the assessment criteria as the assessment is taking place or as soon as possible afterwards. Audio/visual recording of the assessment might also be undertaken or alternatively, moderation may take place simultaneously by having a panel of examiners present, including an external examiner if possible. If an external examiner cannot be present, s/he should approve the arrangements under which the assessment takes place. Where opportunities for effective moderation of practical work are limited, the weighting given to this form of assessment in the overall programme assessment strategy should be carefully considered.
 - The basis for sampling assessed work for moderation where a large cohort has been assessed. As well as determining an appropriate sample size to be representative of the size of the cohort, the criteria for sampling should ensure that the full spread of marks is

represented but may include a higher proportion of work which has been first marked as a fail or at the borderlines between marking/grading bands. There should also be clear criteria for remarking all the work if there are found to be sufficient inconsistencies or inaccuracies within a sample.

- Particular arrangements for moderation of work that is first marked by those who may be less familiar with the assessment process/the use of the department's assessment criteria. This might apply to postgraduate research students, postdoctoral research associates, part time tutors or any new members of academic staff. These arrangements might include blind second marking rather than second marking and/or moderating a larger sample of their marking than usual for established members of staff.
- The procedure for resolution of significant disagreements between first markers and moderators.
- Ensuring that there is an appropriate mix of moderating partnerships. For example, the same two people do not always moderate each other's work and the marking/grading of less experienced staff is moderated by experienced staff.
- The comparison of marking across modules as well as within modules in order to highlight possible inconsistencies.
- Providing and retaining evidence to demonstrate that internal moderation has taken place either through comments made on the script or recorded separately. In either case, internal examiners should always bear in mind that under the 1998 Data Protection Act, students are able to request access to comments made by internal or external examiners in relation to the assessment of their academic performance (NB: access is to the comments and not the assessed work itself). Any comments recorded should always be professional and constructive.

2.5 STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- (i) Departments are responsible for ensuring that all staff and any postgraduate research students involved in marking and moderation are adequately prepared for this activity, particularly those with less experience or who are new to the department.
- (ii) A range of resources on assessment are available through the Staff Development Unit's SOLAR library (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/development/solar>).
- (iii) LeTS (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/lets/>) runs professional development activities and links to relevant information. Resources may also be found via the Learning and Teaching Exchange (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/lete/>).
- (iv) Attention is also drawn to the information, case studies and valuable guidance on assessment available from the Higher Education Academy (<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/ourwork/learning/assessment>).