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

1. Overview

This guidance is consistent with the QAA Quality Code’s chapter on assessment (Chapter B6 Assessment of Students and Recognition of Prior Learning (October 2013)) and sets out the principles and key considerations for establishing procedures for internal moderation of summative assessments.

QAA Quality Code, Chapter B6 states that all UK Higher Education Institutions are expected to fulfil the following with regard to assessment in general:

*Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.*

And specifically with respect to marking and moderation:

*Processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.* (Indicator 13)

In the context of this guidance, moderation refers to the 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. **Departments should therefore have clearly articulated procedures for internal moderation which are shared with both staff and, in an appropriate form, with students. These will vary from department to department but should be consistent with this guidance and other related assessment guidance.**

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.
2. Detailed 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. The Learning and Teaching Toolkit has advice on ways to do this.

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/markng 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/markng 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 Statement of Procedures for the Anonymou 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 Support and Development

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.

Some useful resources on assessment for staff

• The Learning and Teaching Toolkit
• The Higher Education Academy also has useful guidance and resources on assessment.

Learning and Teaching Services
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