Guidance on moderation

What is moderation?

Moderation is a process separate from the marking of assessments, which ensures that an assessment outcome (eg mark and / or grade) is fair, valid and reliable, that assessment criteria have been applied consistently, and that any differences in academic judgement between individual markers can be acknowledged and addressed. It ensures consistency in marking within cohorts and across time. In the context of more objectively marked work, moderation may take the form of procedural checking rather than academic judgement. Moderation occurs before External Examiners review the operation of the marking and internal moderation process.

When is moderation required?

Moderation is required for all components of summative assessment, irrespective of the level of the work or the credit weighting of the assessments. University of Edinburgh regulations for moderation are flexible and recognise that moderation should be appropriate to the subject area, the type of work being produced, and the credit weighting of the work.

Moderation is not required for assessment that is purely formative (ie the result does not contribute to the overall result for the course), although it is good practice to operate processes to ensure consistency of marking and feedback of formative assessment.

University regulations on moderation

This guidance is intended to assist staff to meet the University's regulations on moderation, which are set out in regulation 31 of the Taught Assessment Regulations:
http://www.ed.ac.uk/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment

Who is responsible for organising and supervising moderation?

The Board of Examiners is responsible for determining the form of moderation for each component of assessment, and for ensuring the appropriate operation of moderation processes.

Course Organisers are responsible for organising and supervising the moderation processes for the assessments for their courses.

The Course Organiser appoints one or more member(s) of academic staff (a 'moderator') to undertake the moderation activities for each assessment. The moderator should not be a first marker for the assessment.

Ensuring markers and moderators understand the moderation arrangements

It is good practice for the Course Organiser to meet with those involved in the marking and moderation process in advance of marking to ensure everyone understands how the processes will operate, who is responsible for which aspects of the process, and to arrive at a shared understanding of how the criteria should be applied. Where it is not practicable to meet, for example because some of those involved in the marking and moderation processes are physically remote, it can be valuable to discuss these issues by correspondence.

Markers and moderators should aim to reach a consensus regarding marks and grades. The Course Organiser should however communicate to markers the process for resolving any disagreements. Where appropriate, the moderation may also include moderation of feedback to students.

Methods of moderation

There are two main methods of moderation – Sampled Second Marking, and Double Marking.

The University requires Schools to Double Mark any single item of assessment equivalent to 40 credits or more. Unless their professional bodies require it, Schools are encouraged to use Sampled Second-Marking rather than Double Marking for smaller items of assessment, since the staff time involved in Double Marking will usually outweigh any benefits.

1. Sampled Second Marking

Sampled Second Marking involves one or more first markers marking all students' assignments for a component of assessment, and a moderator reviewing these marks for a specified proportion of students' assignments.

The Course Organiser should determine and state the proportion and minimum number of assignments to include in the sample in advance, taking account of advice from their Board of Examiners and the information that the School has provided students on the course / programme regarding moderation processes. A minimum sample size of 10% of the total number of assignments, and a maximum sample of 50 assignments is recommended. For courses with small cohorts (eg 20 or less), a sample of five to ten would be appropriate. The sample should include examples of fails, and assignments on each grade borderline (ie 2% above or below the grade boundary). Where the marking has been conducted by a team of first markers, the sample should include assessments marked by each of the first markers.

The moderator should review the first markers' marks and comments for the sample, and check that marking for the sample is consistent with the relevant common marking scheme, grade descriptors and marking criteria. If a team of first markers is involved, the moderator should also check that they are all taking a consistent approach. If the moderator is not satisfied that the marks are appropriate, they should discuss them with the marker(s) concerned and then make any necessary adjustments to the marks and associated feedback. Where the moderator identifies a systematic issue regarding the marking, any adjustments or remarking should be applied to all relevant students (eg all the students who attempted the assessment, or all the students marked by a particular marker), not just those in the moderation sample.

2. Double Marking

Double Marking involves a first marker (or team of first markers) and the moderator (second marker) marking all students' work. There are two types of double-marking – Independent Double Marking, and Second Marking.

a. Independent Double Marking

This involves the first marker(s) and moderator independently marking all students' work – so that the first marker(s) marks and feedback are not available to the moderator, and vice versa. The first marker(s) and moderator then discuss any discrepancies between their

marks and agree a final single mark. The marker(s) and moderator can average their own marks to assist them to agree a single final mark. Averaging should however only be used if there is a difference of no more than 5% between the first marker's and moderator's marks.

> ### b. Second Marking
> This is where a first marker (or team of first markers) marks the work and produces feedback. The work is then passed to the moderator (second marker) who looks at the work and the first marker's proposed marks and feedback. If they are in agreement about the mark and feedback, then moderation ends. If not, the first marker(s) and moderator would discuss the work and try to reach a consensus decision regarding the mark, using the same options

Moderation where marking schemes are highly structured and objective
In the context of more objectively marked work, moderation may take the form of procedural checking rather than academic judgement. The degree of checking should be proportionate to the weighting of the assessment.

Checking computer marking
Where marking is undertaken by computers (for example, for Multiple Choice Questions), the Course Organiser should put manual checks in place to confirm that the software is functioning correctly. Item analysis statistics should also be reviewed to check for any anomalies e.g. mis-keyed correct answer.

Moderation where assignments are not physical products
In cases where assessment does not involve production of written work or other physical artefacts (e.g. assessment of presentations, performances, laboratory or other practical performance), moderation should be incorporated by the moderator either being present at the time that the assessment is observed or by having access to an audio or video recording of the event.

Moderating across related courses
Boards of Examiners are responsible for reviewing marking and moderation arrangements, and the outcomes of students' assessments, across related courses (for example, Honours level courses in a subject area) in order to ensure that assessment criteria have been applied consistently. For example, a Board of Examiners could review mark profiles for courses with similar components of assessment and similar student cohorts. In the event that apparently similar courses lead to substantially different mark profiles, the Board of Examiners should investigate whether the differences are justified. If any differences in mark profiles are not justified, the Board should consider remarking the relevant course.

What to do in the event of disagreement between the marker(s) and moderator
Averaging may be used if there is a difference of no more than 5% between the first marker's and moderator's marks. In the event that the marker(s) and moderator are not able to agree final marks, the Course Organiser would identify a second moderator to independently review the relevant assessments and the first marker's and moderators'

marks and comments, and to seek to resolve the disagreement (and, if necessary, to determine appropriate outcomes for the assessments). Where it is necessary for a second moderator to resolve disagreements, the School should include the relevant assessments and information regarding the moderation process and resolution in the sample seen by the External Examiner, so that the External Examiner can comment on how these processes operated. External Examiners should not normally be asked to intervene in resolving individual cases in the event of markers and moderators disagreeing.

Moderation when tutors and demonstrators are involved

Typically, Course Organisers will organise more robust moderation processes when marking is undertaken by tutors and demonstrators, for example by having a larger sample than would normally be the case. Face to face sessions should be scheduled to ensure a shared understanding of how the criteria should be applied.

Maintaining records of the moderation process

It is important to for Schools to maintain records that show how the moderation process has operated, including showing the rationale for decisions in relation to individual marks / grades, including any decisions that marks or grades should not be altered. For example, some Schools use moderation forms to provide a record.

The Course Organiser is responsible for ensuring the appropriate arrangements are in place to record the moderation process.

After the moderation and Board of Examiner processes have concluded, the School should delete the records in line with the University's retention schedule.

Approved by Senate Curriculum and Student Progression Committee
28 September 2017

Minor text updates October 2019.

Professor Susan Rhind, Assistant Principal (Assessment and Feedback), with input from Dr Neil Lent (Institute for Academic Development) and Tom Ward (Academic Services)