

# Double-Blind Marking and Moderation Policy

**This document includes the variances to the Policy which were approved for the period covering the Covid-19 pandemic.**

This policy sets out the University's requirements and processes for double-blind marking and moderation. The policy is aligned with the QAA's *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*, chapter B6 'Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning'.

## 1. Scope of the Policy

- 1.1 The policy applies to summative assessments on both undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and specifies the University's minimum requirements. The University recognises that discipline differences or differences in assessment tasks mean that some Schools may wish to carry out more extensive scrutiny of marking than that prescribed by the policy. Where this is the case, the mechanism to be adopted must be approved by the relevant School Programmes Committee following discussion at department level. The importance of robust double marking and moderation processes including the appropriate use of double-blind marking is recognised not only for promoting consistency in marking against approved criteria but also as a means of reassuring students, external examiners and other relevant external stakeholders.
- 1.2 Adjustments to this policy have been agreed for exceptional use only to ensure that fairness of marking and overall standards continue, and marking standards operate in the best interest of students. This policy applies to undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes (including MRes Programmes and the taught element of iPhDs).
- 1.3 This policy should continue to be followed wherever possible. The number of assessment tasks and the assessment load that students have been asked to undertake during the period affected by the Covid-19 pandemic should, if possible, have been minimised to support student and staff well-being. In addition, many assessments are now formative. These changes should result in an overall reduction in the volume of marking required in most subject areas.
- 1.4 If it is not possible to follow normal processes during this period, approved adjustments, in line with the following principles, are set out under each section of this policy in red.
- 1.5 **Principles**
  - Any exceptions to this Double-Blind Marking and Moderation Policy should be formally agreed by the Deputy Head of School (Education).
  - Where adjustments to this policy are agreed, no module's marking should rely solely on the judgement of one marker.
  - During this period, priority, if necessary, for double-blind marking should be given to research projects/dissertations or other significant pieces of work (see paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7).
  - If circumstances prevent double-blind marking taking place, then double marking may be permitted. If circumstances prevent double marking taking place, then first marking with enhanced moderation may be permitted.

## 2. Glossary of Terms

<b>Double-blind marking:</b>	Each marker marks the work independently, formulating their own judgement, and neither is aware of the other's assessment decision when determining their own mark.
<b>Double marking:</b>	Two markers mark a piece of work and agree a final mark (or marks). The second marker can see both the mark awarded and the comments made by the first marker.
<b>First marking:</b>	<b>In exceptional circumstances, a marker first marks the work before it is moderated following an enhanced moderation process.</b>
<b>Adjudication:</b>	A process whereby a third marker determines the final mark in cases when the first two markers cannot agree. The third marker takes into account all available evidence, including the marks awarded and comments made by the two markers.
<b>Moderation</b>	An independent moderator or moderation team scrutinises the marks awarded, on a sample basis, to verify that the marks are appropriate and consistent in relation to the assessment criteria for the particular piece of work and the FHEQ level. Where moderation identifies a systematic issue or issues, the process for adjusting marks is defined below.
<b>Enhanced moderation:</b>	<b>An enhanced moderation process to ensure consistency of marking when the normal application of double-blind, or double marking cannot take place. Moderation must include a larger sample of work than normal to determine the correct application of the assessment criteria by the first marker(s) and to identify any differential trends across the first marking.</b>
<b>Scaling</b>	The process of applying an arithmetic adjustment to the marks obtained during the marking process, so that the marks which result after scaling is applied more accurately reflect student learning and achievement against the assessment component or module learning outcomes.

## 3. Double-Blind Marking

- 3.1 Any research project/dissertation which is marked by the supervisor, must be double-blind marked.
- 3.2 Where the assessment for any module worth more than 10 ECTS (20 CATS) consists of a single piece of work, it must be double-blind marked.
- 3.3 Likewise double-blind marking must be used for any sufficiently weighted component of a larger module such as an essay contributing 51% of the marks for a 20 ECTS module. A single piece of work may be, for example: a dissertation, essay, portfolio or report, a composition, or a single performance.
- 3.4 **Markers should continue to follow the process for double-blind marking wherever possible. If it becomes impossible to carry out double-blind marking for a piece of work, the matter must be discussed with the Deputy Head of School (Education) in the first instance.**
- 3.5 **If circumstances are such that double-blind marking will be prevented, most likely due to a depleted workforce, then double marking may exceptionally be considered and permitted. Any request to move away from double-blind marking must be made on a module by module basis, by the module or programme lead to the Deputy Head of School (Education) to ensure a consistent approach across the School is taken. Each request will be considered on an individual basis. The outcome will be reported to the Board of Examiners and to School Programmes Committee.**
- 3.6 **To ensure rigour of marking and to protect the University's overall standards, priority for double-blind marking, where required, will be given in the order set out below:**
  - 3.6.1 **Undergraduate programmes:**
    - a) **Research projects/dissertations or other significant pieces of work contributing to final classification of awards;**

- b) Other Level 6 work (or Level 7 for integrated masters);
- c) Level 5 work;
- d) Level 4 work, which does not contribute to the final award.

### 3.6.2 Postgraduate Taught programmes

Priority for double-blind marking should be given to research projects/dissertations or other significant pieces of work contributing to final classification of awards.

- 3.7 Set out below are the most likely circumstances in which it may be agreed to step back from double-blind marking and move to double marking.

#### 3.7.1 Significant levels of:

- staff sickness (with Covid-19 or other illness);
- staff who are on formal Domestic or Compassionate Leave;
- staff who are unable to work at normal capacity and have agreed flexible working arrangements with their line manager;
- staff, particularly in the School of Health Sciences and Faculty of Medicine who are also NHS clinicians and who are now dedicating more time to their NHS role;
- staff who have chosen to volunteer for the NHS to support the national and regional response to the Covid-19 crisis.

- 3.8 For examination scripts, double-blind marking is not expected though moderation is required (see section on Moderation below).

## 4. Double-blind marking process

- 4.1 The two markers should share their marks and feedback with each other after they have completed their independent marking. Where their two marks differ by 6 percentage points or less, either:

4.1.1 the average mark rounded up to the nearest integer should be awarded

4.1.2 the two markers should agree the final mark.

Where two marks differ by more than 6 percentage points, the two markers should always agree the final mark to be awarded and record the basis on which the final mark was reached (see 4.3 below).

- 4.2 Where no agreement can be reached, an experienced colleague should be appointed as a third marker/adjudicator by the Director of Programmes. They would not be required to mark the work 'blind' although they might choose to do so i.e. prior to looking at the marks and feedback from the first two markers. Having reviewed all available evidence, the third marker/adjudicator determines the final mark to be awarded. To ensure that there is adequate oversight, a list of all such cases should be provided to the external examiner, who can then scrutinise the assessment and adjudication process.

- 4.3 Where a mark is agreed following discussion between markers, a short note of the discussion should be given to the SAA Assessment Team to accompany the agreed marks and feedback, indicating the basis on which the final mark was agreed.

- 4.4 Feedback given to the student should include either:

4.4.1 the final agreed mark and joint feedback OR

4.4.2 the final agreed mark with all sets of markers' comments and the brief note about how agreement about the final mark was reached.

The approved module profile should state which of these two feedback mechanisms is to be used.

## 5. Double marking

- 5.1 In instances where the specialist nature of the subject matter means that double-blind marking would not be practicable, double marking with the second marker seeing evidence of the outcomes of first marking will be acceptable as an alternative. Where this applies, the details of the marking practice being followed should be approved in advance by the School Programmes Committee.
- 5.2 Where there are teams of markers marking a batch of assessments, or less experienced markers, there may be a double marking process to ensure consistency across the team. This is important to identify and remedy any systematic variations. The process may involve a review of the marks profile by cohort, pathway, or subject area. Alternatively, a panel of experienced markers may check the marking for all items of work, or a sample. Module Leads, in conjunction with Programme Leaders and Directors of Programmes, should determine whether such an exercise is required and select the approach that is most appropriate for the particular batch of assessments.
- 5.3 In exceptional circumstances, double-blind marking may be replaced by double marking. The circumstances for moving from double-blind marking to double marking must first be approved by the Deputy Head of School (Education) in line with the guidance provided in paragraphs 3.4 – 3.7 above. If double marking is approved, the process as set out above must be followed.

## 6. First marking with enhanced moderation

- 6.1 If assessment would usually have been double-blind marked, but circumstances prevent double-blind marking and double marking, then first marking with an enhanced moderation process may exceptionally be permitted. Before a decision is made to move to this method, the Deputy Head of School (Education) and Chair of the Board of Examiners must discuss the circumstances, taking into consideration the order of prioritisation in paragraphs 3.6 and 3.7. This decision will be reported to the next Board of Examiners.
- 6.2 First marking with enhanced moderation is no different to first marking with moderation, except that the extent of the moderation is raised to cover a minimum of 50% of assignments in each degree class, or across the range of marks where the degree is not classified, as well as all fails. Completion of first marking will be followed by an increased level of moderation to ensure the marking process was robust and standards of marking can be assured. The enhanced moderation process is outlined in paragraphs 8.12 – 8.14 below.

## 7. Moderation

- 7.1 Moderation should be carried out for all summatively assessed work. Moderation of each assessment component may be undertaken separately, or all assessed work relating to a module may be moderated together. It should be carried out by a moderator or moderation team from the University of Southampton. All moderators must have appropriate experience of marking and previous exposure to the moderation process. No moderator should moderate work that they originally marked or double marked.

## 8. Moderation process

- 8.1 A sample of work should be selected for review. This will include the work of all students who have failed the component and a 5% sample from each degree class or across the range of marks where the degree is not classified. An examination should be treated as a single component for the purposes of moderation, rather than each examination question. It is, however, the responsibility of the Module Lead to report any anomalous sub-components, such as an optional examination question with unusually high or low marks, to the moderator/moderation team. For those modules with small numbers, a sample greater than 5% should be used to cover all classifications awarded. This must include at least one script or piece of work from each degree class where this exists.
- 8.2 Moderation at module level should be completed prior to the responsible Pre-Board. Where double marking or moderation is applied at component level this should, where feasible, be completed prior to the release of component marks to students, or otherwise prior to the responsible Pre-Board.

- 8.3 The moderator is asked to confirm that the final module class is consistent with the University Descriptors for that level or any more local guidance such as an approved set of assessment descriptors by level. Alternatively, for a failing student, they are asked to confirm that the student has not met the module learning outcomes, and the more general descriptors provided at University and national level. If the work has not already been double marked, they will also want to assure themselves that the marking is in line with the marking scheme.
- 8.4 Except where arithmetic aggregation has been automated, this must be double checked as part of the moderation process. Moderation should also confirm that all pages in the sample have been marked, for example that they have been annotated using red ink, and that all marks in the sample have been correctly transcribed.
- 8.5 Evidence of moderation will be provided to the external examiner. This could consist of samples of moderated work, the completion of a moderation form, or lists of student numbers that allow the external examiner to locate the relevant pieces of work.
- 8.6 If the moderation process identifies concerns about the marking standards of the sample or has identified a systematic error in marking or marks processing, this should be communicated to the Module Lead and/or Director of Programmes, as appropriate. The Module Lead will then review the work, consider the concerns raised, discuss the issue with the marker(s), and respond to the moderator(s) to indicate what action they intend to take, if any. Appropriate actions include re-marking with the original scheme, re-marking with a new marking scheme, adjusting the weighting of (sub-)components, or scaling (see section 8 below). Where the proposed action may adjust marks this must occur in a systematic and considered way so that all affected work is treated equally and not just the moderated sample.
- 8.7 The moderation report and Module Lead's response should be documented and communicated to the external examiner and Pre-Board so that they may decide whether to accept the response or require further action. If concerns are raised by the external examiner or at the Pre-Board, then these must be considered again at the Board of Examiners before the final marks are ratified.
- 8.8 When marks are returned to students prior to the Board of Examiners, this must be with the caveat that they are provisional until they have been ratified by the responsible Board of Examiners. Students should be notified of any subsequent changes to their unratified marks in a timely fashion.
- 8.9 Moderation should be applied as described above to each new batch of student work even in cases such as referrals or repeats where the same assessment may be repeated in a later year or within the same year.
- 8.10 A module may include some smaller components of assessed work which cannot be moderated efficiently. These items might be, for example, worksheets which are marked quickly and returned to students, smaller presentations, or assessed laboratories. Such components may be omitted from the moderation process provided the following principles are satisfied:
- 8.10.1 the moderator(s) review the same assessment components for each student in the sample,
- 8.10.2 these components enable the moderator to confirm that the final module class is consistent with the relevant descriptors and outcomes.
- 8.11 In the case of major presentation/performance assignments, either a sample should be moderated at the time of the event or the presentation/performance arrangements, the marking sheet and criteria should be approved in advance. Alternatively (or additionally) the presentation/performance could be recorded to allow for subsequent moderation<sup>1</sup>. Where a sample is to be moderated, this should include a selection from all markers to ensure alignment with the agreed marking criteria.
- 8.12 **In very exceptional cases, where double-blind or double marking has not been possible, a marker or team of markers will have been identified by the Module Lead to first mark all pieces**

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<sup>1</sup> \* In Schools where student performances are recorded, this must be clearly indicated in the student handbook. In addition, the School must email students in advance of the performance to remind them that it will be recorded. Recording must not be carried out by another student and the recording itself must be retained in line with the University's Retention of Assessment Material and Student Records Policy. Recordings must not be used for any purpose other than assessment and the quality of the recording must not influence the assessment.

of work (see Section 6). Following completion of first marking, an appropriate moderator should be appointed. The examinations officer should have oversight of the enhanced moderation process. No moderator should moderate work for a module in which they were involved in marking. The aim of the process is to ensure consistency of marking and to be able to verify that the marks awarded are appropriate and consistent in relation to the assessment criteria for the piece of work and the FHEQ level. If the moderation process identifies a systematic issue or issues, the process for adjusting marks should be followed as set out in this policy.

8.13 The enhanced moderation process will involve the moderator having exposure to larger samples than normal of work that has been first marked, in order to determine the correct application of the assessment criteria by the first marker(s) and to identify any differential trends across the first marking. There should be opportunities for discussion between the first marker(s) and the moderator before final marks are agreed prior to the Pre-Board. All other aspects of the standard moderation process will still apply.

8.14 The sample size when completing enhanced moderation will be:

8.14.1 the work of all students who have failed the component;

8.14.2 a 50% sample from each degree class or across the range of marks where the degree is not classified.

8.14.3 *for a module in which they were involved in marking*

## 9. Scaling

9.1 Scaling should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances and should take place before marks are finalised but after other moderation mechanisms have been ruled out. Scaling should be carried out in accordance with the University's Scaling Policy in the Quality Handbook.

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