UEA
University of East Anglia

LTC17D153

Title:	***Review of Policy on Internal Moderation and Double Marking***
Author:	Dr Clive Matthews, Academic Director of Taught Programmes
Date:	12 June 2018
Circulation:	LTC – 20 June 2018
Agenda:	LTC17A006
Version:	Final
Status:	Open

Issue

5 yearly review of the University's Policy on Internal Moderation and Double Marking following last LTC review of 2013 (see LTC12D120 (15 May 2013) and LTC11D107 (25 July 2012)).

Recommendation

The recipients are asked to:

(1) Approve in principle the new Policy on the Moderation of Assessment with especial reference to
    (a) the introduction of Assessment-Moderation
    (b) the mandating of Assignment Briefs;
    (c) the Marking-Moderation of all summative assessments;
    (d) the changes to sample size.
(2) Recognise that, if approved, the Policy will not come into effect until 2019-20;
(3) Provide guidance on which version of 4.1 should be adopted;
(4) Recognise that there is still work to be done around the writing of guidance documents and the working through of implementation issues;
(5) Approve the need for a University Policy on Assessment Design.

Resource Implications

On the face of it the new Policy has a number of increased resource implications. These, however, are hard to calculate since a number of the proposals have been cited by Academic colleagues as good practice which has already been implemented by themselves or in their Schools. Further, where the practices have not yet been implemented, it should only take an assessment cycle before most of the requirements will be in place with only minimal changes required in subsequent years.

Risk Implications

The danger of not adopting the major requirements of the new Policy – mainly the introduction of Assessment-Moderation and the use of Assignment Briefs – is that the University risks reducing its ability to enhance standards around assessment and feedback within an Institutional framework. Some aspects of the new Policy, especially the use of Assignment Briefs, are expected to have a positive impact on all questions on Assessment and Feedback in the NSS, a current weakness and, hence, risk for the University.

Equality and Diversity

Recommendations that Assessment Design and Development should ensure that assessments do not penalise those who come from different cultural backgrounds should have positive equality and diversity implications. Similar comments apply to the introduction of assignment briefs which may be expected to produce significant benefit for those groups with protected characteristics.

Timing of decisions

Assuming approval is agreed for the new Policy on the Moderation of Assessment, it is expected to take effect from 2019-20. In the meantime there is need to develop a University Policy on Assessment Design, a guidance document on Moderation of Assessment Policy, another on Assignment Briefs and a need to work through some of the implementation issues of the Policy with a Task and Finish Group.

Further Information

Dr Clive Matthews, Academic Director of Taught Programmes, clive.matthews@uea.ac.uk, (ext: 3430)

Background

The review of the Regulations on *Internal Moderation and Double Marking* included within the University's General Regulations was initially conducted by a Working Group (with the Academic Director of Taught Programmes (ADTP) as Chair) with academic representation from each Faculty, administrative representation from across the University and representation from uea(su). The ADTP reviewed some 46 Moderation Policies from other UK HEIs and 6 from Australian institutions to identify any areas where UEA might currently be lagging. Following the work of the Working Group, the resulting initial draft was placed on OneDrive for comments from the Working Group. The draft was also circulated to Faculties for further comment which produced a large amount of feedback from Associate Deans, FLTQCs, individual Teaching Directors and a number of Heads of School. The finalised version before LTC has taken into account all received feedback and implemented significant parts of it where possible.

It is generally acknowledged in the pedagogic literature that assessment is the single most important determinant of student learning behaviour. As Bloxham and Boyd (2007: 3) express it in the first paragraph of *Developing Effective Assessment in Higher Education: A Practical Guide*:

> Research and experience tell us very forcefully about the importance of assessment in higher education. It shapes the experience of students and influences their behaviour more than the teaching they receive. The influence of assessment means that there is 'more leverage to improve teaching through changing assessment than there is in changing anything else' (Gibbs & Simpson 2004-5: 22) ... to a large extent assessment activity in higher education is *the* learning activity. (emphasis added).

In addition the provision of high quality feedback to students has been shown to accelerate learning, optimise the quality of what is learned and raise individual and collective attainment.

Discussion

The Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) UK Quality Code for Higher Education expresses the central importance of assessment and feedback in *Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning*. The indicators of sound practice outlined in Chapter B6 require effective procedures for:

(a) designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing appropriate assessment and feedback strategies for modules and programmes (Indicator 8);

(b) implementing rigorous assessment and feedback policies and practices, ensuring that the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this (Indicator 13);

(c) evaluating how academic standards are maintained through assessment practices (Indicator 18).

UEA, in line with all other Universities, addresses (b) through a Policy on marking "moderation". Since LTC's approval in 2013-14, (c) has been accommodated through the introduction of an Annual Review of Assessment and Moderation (the precise details of which are likely to change within the new Quality Review Framework being developed). The major change in the new *Policy on the Moderation of Assessment* is the proposal to close the QAA loop by integrating (a) into the University's "moderation" cycle. The resulting framework is common within Australian HEIs.

As indicated in the previous section, earlier drafts of the Policy produced considerable amounts of detailed feedback by colleagues. A particularly telling comment was that these drafts read as a combination of Policy and Guidance. The version now before LTC has attempted to excise the guidance elements from the Policy. A proper guidance document is, unfortunately, not yet completed. What has been provided, however, is a document (see Appendix 2) which acts both as partial guidance and a commentary on the Policy paragraph by paragraph. This has been found to be the most appropriate way to address the wide range of feedback received and provide some insight into the considerations which lay behind some of the decisions whilst writing the Policy.

Attachments

Appendix 1: *UEA Policy on the Moderation of Assessment*
Appendix 2: Commentary on *UEA Policy on the Moderation of Assessment*

APPENDIX 1

UEA Policy on the Moderation of Assessment

1.   **PREAMBLE**

1.1   Chapter B6: *Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning* (2013) of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education states that assessment is not a linear process but "an ongoing cycle through which staff design, set, mark, engage in dialogue about performance, review and develop assessments." The Quality Code's Expectation about student assessment is that an institution's policies, regulations and processes result in "equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment ... which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought".

1.2   Indicator 4 of Chapter B6 states that all staff involved in assessment processes must possess the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake their roles including appropriate training or development opportunities. The result should be a shared understanding (a "Community of Practice") amongst Academic and Teaching Teams[1] of appropriate assessment practices within a particular academic discipline and standards (including the types of evidence that demonstrate differing qualities of student performance).

1.3   The means by which much of the shared understanding of assessment develops is through the framework of expectations laid out in the University's Policy on the Moderation of Assessment. The Policy applies to all taught programmes of study leading to an award by the University or an award of credit.

1.4   "Moderation" refers to a holistic process designed to ensure the appropriate quality of summative assessment tasks[2] with respect to the stated learning outcomes of the course or module, including the valid and consistent judgement of student performance on these tasks. This is intended to assure the quality and integrity of the University's certification of student achievement. In line with Indicator 10 of Chapter B6 the process of moderation is intended to ensure that all students for all assessments have equivalent opportunities to equitably demonstrate the learning outcomes related to a particular assessment and to have these demonstrations justly recognised.[3]

---

[1] "Teaching Team" is used to refer to those directly involved in the delivery of a particular module. "Academic Team" is used to refer to the Teaching team as well as the broader constituency of Course Directors, Teaching Director, Moderators and other individuals with an interest in the particular modules. External Examiners may also be considered part of the Academic team (see 2.6).

[2] Although the focus of the Policy is on summative assessment tasks, teaching teams and Module Organisers should also reflect on whether formative tasks are consistent with the precepts of the Policy.

[3] Within the Policy:

1.5   Aside from quality assurance, the process of moderation crucially contributes to the continuous enhancement of assessment practices in order to improve the quality of student learning opportunities within the University.

1.6   In light of the cycle of assessment described in 1.1 the Policy assumes a moderation process consisting of a co-ordinated set of practices directed at the following three broad stages of the assessment cycle:

   (a)   *Assessment Design and Development* ("Assessment-Moderation"): occurring before the assessment is released to students;
   (b)   *Marking and Grading* ("Mark(ing)-Moderation"): occurring before the return of the marks to students;
   (c)   *Review and Evaluation* ("Review-Moderation"): occurring after the marks have been returned to students.

   The outputs of Review-Moderation will subsequently inform the assessment design and development phase in iterations of the cycle in future years.

1.7   It should be recognised that the process of moderation does not necessarily provide an absolute assurance of the veracity of a particular assessment task or the marks awarded but is designed to deliver as high a level of confidence as possible for all stakeholders (students, staff, the University, employers and the wider public) in the high quality of the assessment practices of the University.

1.7   The Policy permits a degree of discretion amongst Module Organisers and Academic Teams to determine the forms of moderation most suitable to particular assessments within their discipline. Where a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory body, however, requires more stringent conditions than those specified by this Policy, the former take precedence.

1.8   The Module Organiser is responsible for ensuring that Assessment-Moderation and Marking-Moderation is properly carried out.[4] Review-Moderation forms part of Internal Quality Assurance/Quality Review Framework.

   (a)   "assessment" is used to refer to the general process whereby academic staff form judgements as to the extent that students have achieved the learning outcomes of a course, a module or piece of work in a module undertaken by a student;
   (b)   "assessment task" refers to any item of assessment (whether examination, course test, coursework, presentation, etc.); on occasion an assessment task, where the context is clear, may be referred to simply as an "assessment" for stylistic variation;
   (c)   "assignment" refers to assessment tasks usually undertaken by the student(s) in their own time with an associated submission deadline.

[4] In some circumstances a suitable alternative person shall be responsible (for example, in the Norwich Medical School this may be the assessment lead). Depending on circumstances, the Module Organiser or other responsible person may not be directly involved in the sampling or moderation process, but shall still be responsible for ensuring that it is done.

2. **ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT MODERATION**

2.1 The Assessment Design and Development stage of moderation ("Assessment-Moderation") focuses on the nature and description of all summative assessment tasks prior to their release to students. The central goal of Assessment-Moderation is to ensure that all module assessment tasks are transparent, valid, rigorous and as equitable as possible for all students.

2.2 The degree of scrutiny required for Assessment-Moderation is left at the discretion of the Teaching and Academic teams. Factors such as the inexperience of the Module Organiser, whether the assessment task is new or where similar tasks have received negative feedback in the previous years' Review-Moderation (including comments by External Examiners) are likely to require more rigorous moderation than longer-standing assessment tasks where there are only minor modifications year-on-year.

2.3 The moderator(s) involved in Assessment-Moderation, wherever possible, should not be part of the Teaching team in order to provide suitable external scrutiny.

2.4 The moderator(s) involved in Assessment-Moderation should possess sufficient discipline knowledge and experience to be able to offer appropriate and constructive comments on the proposed assessment tasks.

2.5 It is recognised that in some cases where there is insufficient subject knowledge outside of the Teaching Team, it may prove difficult for the School to provide moderators who are able to properly judge the subject content of the assessment task. The moderator(s) should, however, be of sufficient experience to be able to meaningfully explore with the Teaching Team broad content issues if not all specifics; in some cases it may be possible to ask the relevant External Examiner for their comments (see §2.6). It should be noted that, as outlined in §2.7, Assessment-Moderation is intended to scrutinise more than subject discipline content.

2.6 Assessment-Moderation should be guided by the precepts of the University's Policy on Assessment Design.

2.7 Once Assessment-Moderation has been satisfactorily completed, the assessment task(s) may be made available to the students.

3. **ASSIGNMENT BRIEFS**

3.1 In order that Assessment-Moderation can proceed appropriately, the Module Organiser will need to provide a written description of the assignment task. Such descriptions will be referred to as "assignment briefs". The assignment brief will eventually be released to the students as the core information point specifying the assessment-task.

3.2 An assignment brief simultaneously fulfils a number of different functions:

(a) it is the primary document for Assessment-Moderation;

(b) it provides an important aid for Marking-Moderation by outlining the precise nature of the assignment task and the assessment criteria;

(c) it provides a useful brief for Academic Advisers when discussing assessment performance and feedback with their Advisees;

(d) it is the core document provided to students specifying the details of the assignment's requirements and expectations, learning outcomes and marking criteria.

3.3 It is recognised that assignment briefs will take different forms depending upon the particular assessment task and the nature of the subject discipline.

3.4 It is a crucial part of Assessment-Moderation that the assignment brief is scrutinised from the perspective of the student regarding its content and communicative clarity.

3.5 The Module Organiser will ensure that students are provided with an assignment brief for all elements of summative assessment associated with the module. This should normally be provided at the earliest opportunity in advance of the submission date.

4. MARKING MODERATION

4.1 All summative assessments (including delayed first sits and reassessments), irrespective of the mode of assessment, from level 3 (Foundation Year) to 7 (Masters) will be Mark-Moderated irrespective of the percentage of their contribution to the overall module mark.

~~ALTERNATIVELY:~~ (not agreed by LTC)

~~4.1 All summative assessments (including delayed first sits and reassessments), irrespective of the mode of assessment, will be Mark-Moderated irrespective of the percentage of their contribution to the overall module mark. This only applies to levels which contribute to degree classification (i.e. 5 to 7). Failing marks at levels 3 and 4 will, however, need to be Mark-Moderated for purposes of progression.~~

4.2 The mark or grade awarded to any assessment task must reflect how well a student has demonstrated achieving the learning outcomes and other requirements of the task in accordance with the marking criteria as specified in the assignment brief. The returned work must also provide clear feedback to the student indicating how the mark was derived against the learning outcomes and marking descriptor as well as indicating how the student may improve on future assessments ("feedforward").

4.3 Marking-Moderation is designed to ensure that the assessment outcome (e.g. a mark or a pass/fail grade) is equitable, consistent with the assessment criteria and reliable (i.e. comparable judgments are made across the cohort) and with any differences in academic judgement between

markers both formally acknowledged and resolved.[5] Moderation of the feedback to the students is a crucial component of the moderation process which involves questions of quality assurance and, possibly, enhancement.

4.4   It is the role of the Mark-Moderator to ensure that the requirements of §4.2 and §4.3 are consistent with the information contained in the assignment brief (learning outcomes, mark descriptors, marking schema, etc.). Further consideration may also relate to generic feedback, model answers, etc. Mark-moderation should also include reflection on the overall distribution of marks for the assessment. Other statistical measures may be used where thought relevant and appropriate in assessing the students' performance on the assessment task.

4.5   The Mark-Moderator will complete and submit a report detailing the nature and outcomes of the moderation process.

4.6   Marking-Moderation for all assessments submitted by the appropriate deadline must be completed before the work is returned to the Hubs and, subsequently, the students.

4.7   Mark-Moderation of late submitted work is not required if this will delay return of the marks to students beyond the University's standard turnaround period.

4.8   Wherever possible Mark-Moderators should not have been involved in the first marking of the assessment task. They should also possess appropriate subject expertise and Higher Education experience (at least two years) in marking.

4.9   Although a Module Organiser may wish to keep a check on members of a team of markers during the course of marking, this does not constitute "moderation" in the sense of Marking-Moderation in this Policy.

4.10   Where specialised expertise is not available, the assigned Marking-Moderator should still be able to make judgements about the consistency of marking and the quality of the feedback but will need to be guided by the first marker's individual marks and subject-specific content in the feedback.

       In some cases it may be decided that external moderation may be needed to ensure quality assurance. If so, an application to the relevant Faculty Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning Quality should be made outlining the reasons. On approval, the School will appoint an external moderator with the required expertise. The marked assessment will be returned to the Hub/students within the normal deadlines but the marks will be deemed to be provisional until scrutinised by the external moderator. Copies of the work

---

[5] In the case of more objectively marked tasks, Marking-Moderation may only require an assurance of procedural regularity. Examples of such cases would include Multiple Choice Question tests or examinations or assessments where there is a clearly defined marks schema (for example in some forms of Mathematics assessment).

and the distribution of marks will be sent to the external moderator for review.

4.11   Pre-marking moderation (or standardisation) is considered best practice when more than a single first marker is involved with an assessment task in order to ensure that there is a shared understanding of how to apply the marking criteria to achieve consistency of marking across the team. Pre-marking moderation should also reach an agreement as to the quantity, style and focus of feedback provided to the students.

If pre-marking moderation is not practical, the Module Organiser may need to check consistency across the marking-team during marking.

4.12   Post-marking moderation, the main focus of this Policy, happens once the assessment task has been marked by the first marker(s) and is designed to ensure that the goals of equability, consistency and reliability in academic judgement have been duly met and to assess the appropriateness and quality of the feedback to the student.

4.13   Marking-Moderation may be classified along two dimensions:

(a) Whether the moderator is aware of original marker's marks, comments and feedback or not:

- **Blind double marking**: the two markers mark the work unaware of the other marker's mark, comments and student feedback. Through discussion the two agree a single mark and appropriate feedback.[6]
- **Second marking** (non-blind moderation): the moderator has access to the first marker's mark, comments and student feedback and verifies the equability, consistency and reliability of the academic judgement along with the quality and appropriateness of the feedback.

(b) The proportion of submitted assessments scrutinised:

- All submitted assessments moderated.
- A sample of assessments moderated.

4.14   In principle both dimensions of §4.11 can be combined so that either all or a sample of assessments may be blind double or second marked.

4.15   Where a subset of the overall submission is used for Mark-Moderation, the *minimum* sample size will be $\sqrt{n}$ (where n is the number of submitted assessments and $\sqrt{n}$ is rounded up to the nearest integer) in addition to all failing assessments. Aside from the fails, the sample should include examples from the full range of marks.

---

[6] With Blind Double Marking the notions of "first marker" and "moderator" do not apply although the overall process is one of Marking-Moderation.

4.16 Where marking is conducted by a team of markers, the sample shall be $\sqrt{n}$ for each member of the team.

4.17 Since Marking-Moderation cannot provide an absolute assurance of the veracity of academic judgements and since moderation comes with significant resource implications, Teaching and Academic Teams during Assessment-Moderation are advised to consider a "cost/benefit" calculation regarding the type of marking moderation which delivers the most reasonable level of confidence in the quality of the marking process given the required resource.

4.18 Special consideration needs to be taken over the moderation of assessment tasks which carry particular risks of being inequitable or inconsistent. In general it is for the Assessment-Moderation process to identify which assessments may be at risk and to determine the method of marking best suited to mitigate the issues.

4.19 For oral examinations and presentations, the first marker(s) and Mark-Moderator may each be in attendance at the assessment event. In such cases, marks will be awarded without consultation before discussion results in an agreed mark. If the moderator is not in attendance, a video or sound recording[7] of suitable quality made for post-event moderation will be required.

4.20 Where a station/item for an assessment by an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) or Objective Structured Practical Examination (OSPE) is double marked (i.e. two assessors are present at the station), further moderation is not required. Where an OSCE or OSPE is assessed by a single marker, a suitable moderation process should be in place; for example

    (a) identified individuals appointed to oversee and observe the assessment practice across a sample of stations and assessors;
    (b) video or sound recording[8] of a sample of stations for later review;
    (c) post-assessment analysis of assessor behaviour using relevant data.

4.21 Where an External Examiner is routinely scrutinising a module, the sample of scripts sent should normally include, at least, the moderated sample (or part thereof) along with the Mark-Moderator's report.

4.22 On occasion, the Mark-Moderator may find their judgements differ significantly from those of the first marker(s). Such discrepancies need to be carefully resolved through discussion between the marker(s) and Mark-Moderator in order to agree a final mark.

    4.22.1 Individual marks may only be changed if the individual submission has been Blind double marked or the complete set of submissions has been moderatated.

---

[7] NB students must consent to any recording.
[8] NB students must consent to any recording.

4.22.2　With respect to second marking of a sample where the moderator identifies significant differences with their own judgements (for example where there is a 10% or more variation between the original mark and that of the moderator in, at least, half of the moderated submissions or the averaged marks across the sample for the two markers is greater than 5% suggesting a consistent pattern of disparity) or an anomalous distribution of marks, the moderator can suggest remarking or a suitable adjustment of marks (scaling):

(a) for all submissions irrespective of they have been moderated or not, i.e. not for individual submissions (except where a pass is felt by the moderator to be a fail and there are implications for a student's fitness to practise);
(b) for all of the work by individual markers irrespective of they have been moderated or not (but not individual submissions);
(c) for sections within a submission for all submissions (e.g. where a problem is identified relating to one question on an examination paper).

4.22.3　If the markers cannot satisfactorily resolve their differences, an appropriate third party will adjudicate. The adjudicator should be an appropriate office holder in the School such as:

(a)　Chair of the Board of Examiners;
(b)　School Director of Learning and Teaching;
(c)　Assessment Coordinator/Lead or equivalent in those Schools which possess such roles.

4.22.4　The adjudicator is required to arbitrate on the nature of the disagreement between the markers rather than re-mark the assessment itself. Accordingly, the adjudicator will mainly consider the marks and comments of the two markers, including the Moderator's report. In some cases the adjudicator may wish take advice from a third party, including the External Examiner(s).

4.22.5　The adjudicator shall be responsible for making the final judgement. The awarded mark should be within the range bounded by the first marker's and moderator's marks nor the two markers in the case of Blind double marking.

4.22.6　Before the return of work where disagreements in judgment have been identified and discussed, the feedback must be checked for consistency with the final agreed mark.

4.23　A clear and transparent audit trail is required detailing Mark-Moderation and recorded through the Moderator's report. The report should include the form of moderation used (blind double or second marking moderation) and the particulars of the sample. Where marking discrepancies have been discussed, the report should provide details of the nature of the differences

(including the raw marks) and the method and rationale by which the agreed mark(s) was/were arrived at (including any adjudication).

5.   **EXTERNAL EXAMINERS AND EXTERNAL MODERATION**

5.1   As part of their duties, External Examiners are expected, not only to ensure that the academic standards for UEA awards are at the appropriate level in comparison with other Higher Education Institutions, but also to confirm that assessment processes appropriately measure student achievement against learning outcomes in ways which are transparent, valid, rigorous and as equitable as possible for all students.

5.2   External Examiners should be encouraged to be involved at all three levels of moderation, including Assessment-Moderation, to allow their expertise to "inform [the] Institution's practice as it occurs, rather than providing an exclusively retrospective comment on past practice" (UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter B7: *External Examining*).

5.3   The particular duties of an External Examiner are laid out in the University's *Code of Practice for the External Examiner System*:

https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/8551351/cop-for-the-external-examiner-system-of-awards.pdf/f0bf44d7-2b7d-4ce9-a94e-53843d704f6a

6.   **REVIEW AND EVALUATION MODERATION**

The details of this section are currently under review as part of the implementation of the Quality Review Framework.

END OF DOCUMENT

Appendix 2: COMMENTARY ON *UEA POLICY ON THE MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT*

(a) The Policy presented in Appendix 1 requires a guidance document to support it. This, at present, is not written. The following commentary contains a number of elements which will need to be included in such guidance.

(b) The current document is also intended to respond, where possible, to some of the many comments received from colleagues during the consultation process.

1. **PREAMBLE**

1.1 The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is currently undergoing redevelopment with details due for publication in November 2018. Any required changes will be reflected in subsequent versions of this section.

The University of Bath have the following list of desiderata extracted from Chapter B6 which their institution is committed to:

- it has effective procedures for:
    - designing, approving, monitoring and reviewing appropriate assessment and feedback strategies for modules and programmes;
    - implementing rigorous assessment and feedback policies and practices, ensuring that the standard for each award and award element is set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is properly judged against this;
    - evaluating how academic standards are maintained through assessment practice.
- everyone involved in the assessment of students understands and is competent and effective in undertaking their roles and responsibilities;
- information and guidance on assessment is clear, accurate and accessible to all relevant parties including students, moderators and External Examiners;
- assessment practice promotes effective learning by providing appropriate and effective formative assessment and feedback opportunities;
- the amount and timing of assessment enables effective and appropriate measurement of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes;
- academic assessment practices permit a diverse student body to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes and competence standards;
- mechanisms for marking and moderating are transparent and fair, such that students and first and second markers are aware of and understand the assessment criteria and any grade descriptors that will be used to mark each assessment task;

- assessment decisions are recorded and documented accurately and systematically and that the decisions of examination boards are communicated in a timely manner;
- there is systematic and frequent evaluation of the assessment cycle leading to future enhancements in assessment practice.

1.2   Some brief notes on the generic notion of a Community of Practice (CoP) for those not familiar with the term. It is easy to see how this generic characterisation applies to the particulars of an Assessment-Moderation CoP. Note the collegiate nature of such communities and the emphasis on interaction and dialogue between members.

A CoP is a group of people who share a concern for something they do and who interact regularly to learn how to do it better.

The domain: identity of CoP defined by a shared domain of interest.

The community: members of CoP engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

The practice: members of a CoP are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems. This takes time and sustained interaction.

The shared understanding developed within a CoP crucially develops through a process of collaborative and dialogic interaction between members of the CoP.

1.4   Part of the difficulty in writing the new Policy is that the meaning of "moderation" for many has already been requisitioned to refer and only refer to the process of reviewing the appropriateness and consistency of marking. The intention of the new Policy is to adopt a more holistic meaning of "moderation" to cover the whole of the assessment cycle from planning and development, through implementation, marking and feedback, to the review and evaluation of the assessment tasks after completion by students. It has been clear that some of the feedback on the Policy has confused these two meanings and it would be convenient to be able to introduce a new term for the broader notion. Unfortunately, there is no obvious candidate and even if there were a change of terminology would cause some confusion with those institutions (mainly Australian at the moment) who have already adopted the three-phase approach and refer to each phase as "moderation". It is further recognised that the need to modify "moderation" as "Assessment-moderation", "Marking-moderation" and "Review-moderation" where required is clumsy but necessary.

1.5   It is important to stress the **enhancement** aspect of moderation given the sector's shift in emphasis from assurance to enhancement (i.e. focussing more on the student experience); see HEA (2008) *Quality Enhancement and*

Assurance: A Changing Picture? The focus on "moderation" simply as an issue of marking accuracy (assurance) underplays the role of enhancement which is more evident in holistic moderation policy adopted here.

1.6   It has been noted by David Boud (1998: 1) that "the effects of bad [assessment] practice are far more potent than they are for any aspect of teaching. Students can, with difficulty, escape from the effects of poor teaching, they cannot (by definition if they want to graduate) escape the effects of poor assessment." For example, a rigorous procedure to ensure justness of marking practices is of little value if the assessment task itself does not elicit appropriate indicators of student knowledge, understanding and skill as intended through the learning outcomes of the module. For this reason, it is crucial that assessment design is included in the moderation process.
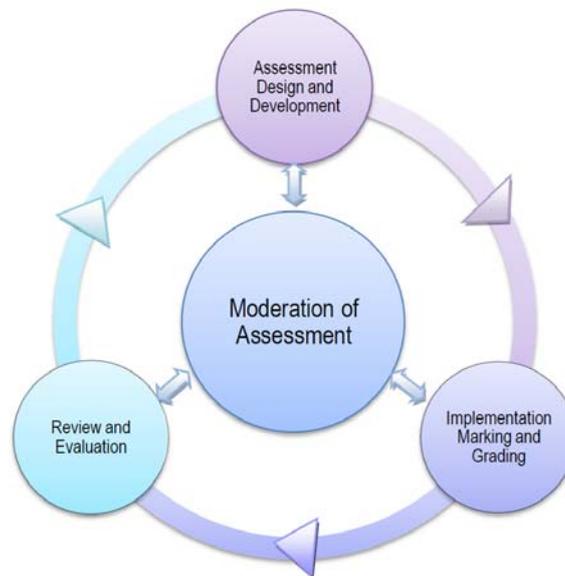
The overall goals of moderation are to ensure that assessment tasks are:

(a)   placed at the heart of modules and are appropriate and well-designed so as to provide support for quality student learning that is productive and relevant and consistent with particular module teaching approaches;

(b)   comparable across different academic disciplines, courses and modules;

(c)   aligned with module and course learning outcomes; established assessment criteria and national subject benchmark standards in ways that can be clearly and transparently communicated to students both prior to submitting the assessment and when providing feedback;

(d)   equitable, fair and valid (i.e. appropriately assess the stated learning outcomes) and provide inclusive and reliable demonstrations of student achievement;

(e)   marked consistently, reliably and are based on the evidence of the assessment submission;

(f)   subject to regular review as part of the enhancement cycle: including their frequency, type and the relative levels of attainment of students.

1.7   Although in some forms of assessment (say MCQs) and in some subject areas (mainly the natural sciences), the ability to measure students' achievement reliably is notoriously difficult, especially in those "non-determinate" subjects that deal with the human world such as the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences. Sue Bloxham's recent work provides very clear reviews of the complexities involved; see *Marking and moderation in the UK: False assumptions and wasted resources* (2009); *Mark my words: The role of assessment criteria in UK higher education grading practices* (2011); *Let's stop the pretence of consistent marking: exploring the multiple limitations of assessment criteria* (2015). Part of the reason for developing an Assessment Community of Practice (CoP) is not that that it will produce convergence on a "correct" set of answers – this is unlikely to exist in some disciplines – but that it will promote a better understanding how the team as a whole will judge students' work so producing greater consistency across the students' experience. Through the use of Benchmark statements, External Examining and so on, the CoP is able to calibrate its judgements against national and international norms.

1.8   This is the first time that "discretion" is mentioned in the Policy. Although the previous Policy allowed significant discretion, this was not always explicitly stated and led to some misunderstandings (such as all examinations had to be blind double marked). The principle adopted here is one of risk-based judgement and that Academic/Teaching Teams are best able to judge the degrees and types of moderation required within the framework of the Policy.

2.   ASSESSMENT DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT MODERATION

2.1   The University will be producing a Policy on Assessment Design which will provide a more detailed outline of the properties of good assessment design. This will be referred to in subsequent versions of the current Policy.

2.2   Important to recognise the discretionary nature of the Policy. That said, even with low risk assessments (e.g. an essay-based assessment where the title(s) have changed or a set of maths questions where the particular formulas have changed from previous years), moderation is still required; the discretion lies in the level of intensity of scrutiny.

2.3   "Moderator(s)" implies that Assessment-Moderation may involve more than one moderator. This, again, is left at the discretion of the Academic/Teaching Team; in most cases it is assumed that only a single individual will be involved. However, it could be imagined that some Schools may find it more efficient to consider all assessments within a semester/year at the same time

(particularly for introductory first year modules) where more than one moderator would be involved.

It is recognised that in some situations – for example, where the Teaching Team is especially large – it may prove difficult to find a moderator outside the Teaching Team. In such cases, the School should seek a solution, which might involve the External Examiner for example, which provides a sufficient degree of disinterested scrutiny. [See 2.5 for more detail.]

2.4   It may be worth considering whether any planned Marking-Moderators should be involved in Assessment-Moderation on the grounds that the fuller their understanding of the assessment task and associated marking criteria, the more their judgements will align with the intentions of those setting and first marking the assessment task. That said, the production of detailed assignment briefs may mitigate such a need.

2.6   Although not yet been written, it might be expected to include at least the following elements: that a particular assessment task is:

(a)   aligned with the stated learning outcomes of the assessment task/module/programme of study and designed in such a way that the students can fairly demonstrate these learning outcomes and to have these demonstrations fairly recognised;

(b)   described in terms of expected standards (including task learning outcomes and assessment criteria) which are transparent, widely-understood and accessible to students as well as markers and External Examiners;

(c)   meeting professional accreditation requirements where applicable;

(d)   equitable with respect to workload and not overly demanding with the need for students to be able to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes;

(e)   consistent with the scope and level of the module;

(f)   consistent with respect to offering a diversity of assessment types across a student's programme of study;

(g)   sufficiently flexible, where possible, for students to tailor the task to their own needs and interests;

(h)   accessible, relevant and engaging for all groups of students;

(i)   discriminatory for those from different cultural backgrounds;

(j)   clear about the relationship between the module's formative assignments and the particular summative task;

(k)   clear about how the assessment task fits with other summative assignments for the module and course;

(l)   designed, wherever possible, to avoid the inadvertent encouragement of plagiarism;

(m)   appropriately weighted and scheduled (including in relation to formative tasks) within the relevant study period?

3.   **ASSIGNMENT BRIEFS**

The requirement for those designing assessment tasks to produce an Assignment Brief is one of the most important elements of the new Policy. Here it may be useful to consider them in a wider perspective – the role that they will play in students' general perceptions of assessments and, in particular, their responses to them in the bank of four questions on assessment and feedback in the NSS:

8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
9. Marking and assessment has been fair.
10. Feedback on my work has been timely.
11. I have received helpful comments on my work.

Question 9 explicitly invokes the notion of fairness but it is worth observing that the other three questions also depend on perceptions of fairness. Couched in terms of negative judgements, it is unfair to the student if the marking criteria are not made clear in advance of finishing the assessment task since they will not know how to pitch their work; late feedback is unfair since it precludes students from having time to reflect upon and learn from it for future assessments; and unhelpful feedback is unjust since it does not provide the learning benefits that helpful feedback does.

The most detailed research students' perceptions of fairness is by Flint and Johnson (F&J): *Towards Fairer University Assessment: Recognising the Concerns of Students* (2011) and their findings will provide the detail below.

F&J distinguish between five different student notions of justice, the failure of any one of which can lead to a sense of unfairness and concern:

(a) **Distributive justice** is based on the idea that "getting what you deserve" is a function of an individual's abilities and the amount of effort accorded the task; in rough terms, assuming the same capability, those who work harder should see greater awards: ability + hard work = success

(b) **Procedural justice** relates to the processes used to make assessment decisions and includes issues relating to consistency in marking (and between markers), having the opportunity to appeal a given mark etc.

(c) **Interpersonal justice** refers to the quality of interactions between students and teachers. Those teachers who not only are available to their students but treat them with politeness, respect, honesty and so on, tend to be perceived as fairer than those who disparage their students.

(d) **Informational justice** captures the idea that all appropriate information should be made available to a student in order to properly understand the nature of a task and how its outcomes are to be judged.

(e) Retributive justice pertains to the opportunity to put things right if it can be demonstrated that there has been a lack of fairness.

According to F&J, the central concern for students is that they can:

- fairly demonstrate their capability and
- have it justly recognised.

The briefest summary of F&J's findings (based on (Australian) student interviews although a recent uea(su) Quality Conversation around this issue produced similar results) is that the central causes of student frustration around assessment are that they do not know and/or understand:

- What their teachers expect them to do in assessment tasks and/or
- What criteria and standards are applied by their teachers to judge the quality of their performance.

More particularly they express concerns about:

- Lack of opportunities to demonstrate capability (in the sense of restricted types of assessment tasks);
- Unreasonable demands (e.g. complexity of task, bunching of deadlines, exam timetables);
- Unclear expectations about what the assignment is intended to demonstrate (learning outcomes) and how this expected to be achieved;
- Unclear assessment criteria;
- Lack of opportunities to discuss the assignment brief with the teacher;
- Uncertainty about how and why a particular grade is assigned to an assessment;
- Feedback which is either difficult to understand or irrelevant to future assignments (feedforward);
- Ambiguity over word counts;
- Inconsistency applied to deadlines.

Note that most of these issues are concerned with *informational injustice* although with elements of *distributional justice* ("I worked harder on this assessment than any other."). The central intention of the Assignment Brief is that is designed to plug these information gaps so that students cannot complain: "I spent longer trying to understand the task than actually doing" or "It was only when I got the feedback that I understood what I had to do".

Developing a well-crafted brief is not an insignificant task but its effects on student understanding producing reduced levels of student stress and improved performance ought to be significant. A project at Oxford Brookes has recently produced a detailed document *Assignment Brief Design: Developing Academic Communication to Enhance the Student Experience in*

Assessment (2014) by Fiona Gilbert and Garry Maguire. CSED courses will be available on writing briefs next year and the ADTP will be happy to lead sessions within individual Schools on request.

In summary, the importance of the assignment brief lies in the belief that **well-crafted briefs will have both a significant positive impact on (a) students' assessment performance and (b) the University's NSS scores on each of the questions on assessment and feedback**.

It is recognised that in some cases the requirement to produce detailed assignment briefs will be a resource issue. It should be recognised, however, that there are mitigating factors. First, that the main impact will be in the first year of implementation; once assignment briefs have been written, they can be used again in subsequent years with minimal changes. Second, that much of the required information is already made available to students and so does not need to be written *ab initio*. Third, there should be a reduction in the number of student requests for clarification and other forms of advice which will reduce resource.

3.3   The assignment brief should explicitly and transparently provide, where this is relevant to the assessment task and subject discipline, information about:

   (a)   the purpose, expectations and requirements of the assignment;
   (b)   the learning outcomes;
   (c)   the assessment criteria;
   (d)   the expected components and stages of the piece of work;
   (e)   suggestions of potential reading materials, data sources and the place of particular theories in the assignment;
   (f)   how previous formative tasks feed into the summative assignment;
   (g)   with respect to examinations, the structure of the examination paper, whether it is seen, unseen or open book, support (revision) arrangements;
   (h)   the word count;
   (i)   the expected referencing system;
   (j)   the weighting of the particular assignment towards the module's overall mark;
   (k)   submission and return dates;
   (l)   submission format;
   (m)   whether the assignment will be e-marked or not;
   (n)   the means by which students can seek clarification with respect to the task; e.g. during specific lecture/seminar sessions, Module Organiser advising sessions, online forums, etc.

Where examinations are concerned, the assignment brief will not require such detail. Length of paper, how many questions will need answering, structure of paper for example may suffice. Particular questions from students can be answered during revision sessions.

3.4   The previously mentioned *Assignment Brief Design: Developing Academic Communication to Enhance the Student Experience in Assessment* (2014)

by Fiona Gilbert and Garry Maguire from Oxford Brookes is especially clear on how to write assignment briefs from this perspective.

3.5   In the case of some assessments (e.g. examinations), it may be thought best to withhold the assignment brief until nearer the time of submission and after certain parts of the content of the module have been covered.

4.   **MARKING MODERATION**

4.1   This is a strengthening of the current Policy which only requires Mark-Moderation on those assessments contributing 30% or more to the overall mark. Reasons for change:

(1)   that certain proportions can result in a considerable amount of work not being moderated (e.g. 25:25:50),

(2)   it is consistent with much of the rest of the sector (including Bath, Exeter, Kent, Leicester, Nottingham, Sheffield, Southampton) and

(3)   The Working Group was told of game-playing in some Schools where assessment weightings were reduced below 30% so as to avoid Mark-Moderation.

Note that this requirement removes the need for the following clauses in the current Policy:

- *if there are a large number of markers in the pool (4 or more) then moderation should be required regardless of the percentage weighting of the assessment item;*
- *assessment tasks marked by new or less experienced markers (i.e., those with less than 2 years' experience of marking in HE setting);*
- *where concerns or issues have been raised through quality assurance processes or professional body requirements. Issues may include, but are not restricted to:*
  - *high failure rates or otherwise poor performance;*
  - *an unusual distribution of marks, e.g. a large number of extreme marks;*
  - *concerns raised by student evaluation;*
  - *concerns raised by External Examiners.*

4.3   For any given assignment, where no sample of work is selected for moderation, the assignment is deemed to be single marked, but where a sample of work is reviewed, the assignment is deemed to be moderated.

ALTERNATIVE

4.1   Although the Working Party rejected this alternative (even though it is adopted by a number of other institutions), it may be worth considering again on the grounds that, aside from progression purposes, assessments at levels 3 and 4 have more of the characteristics of formative work.

- One advantage of not mark-moderating these years would be the reduction in workload required.
- A significant disadvantage would be the effect on ATs' experience (many of whom are involved in marking at these levels); to overcome this would be to have suitable support from, say, the Module Organiser during their marking.
- Note that this only refers to Marking-Moderation and not Assessment-Moderation.

4.4   Reference to the moderation of the quality of the feedback is an important addition to the Policy. It is not assumed that this will be an onerous task.

4.6   Contrary to some feedback, this is already the case.

4.7   Ditto

4.10   Checking individual markers during the first marking process may be a useful for inexperienced markers.

4.11   Contrary to some feedback, this is already the case.

4.12   Pre-marking moderation is probably best achieved by the marking team meeting face-to-face to discuss potential issues. One practice, referred to as "consensus marking", is for a small sample of submissions each to be blind marked by all assessors prior to the meeting in order that judgements and feedback responses can be calibrated through a process of comparison and discussion.

4.14   The usual convention is that blind double marking is associated with the full run of submissions and that non-blind double Mark-Moderation involves sampling a subset but these are not requirements of the Policy (nor of the current Policy). Schools may wish to consider whether, given the heavy resource implications, blind double marking a complete run of scripts offers any more quality assurance than non-blind double marking where all the scripts are moderated.

4.15   The change to $\sqrt{n}$ is an alteration to the current Policy which requires:

- *for modules with 10 students or fewer, all submissions should be moderated*
- *for modules with more than 10 students, at least 10% of all work submitted or 10 submissions, whichever is the higher number.*

$\sqrt{n}$ is based on Bloxham & Boyd (2007: 122) (who have taken it from sampling theory) and appears to be becoming the sector norm.

NB in the current Policy a module with 100 students and one with 10 are both required to take a sample of 10 assessments which does not appear equitable. With the new proposal, $\sqrt{100} = 10$ but $\sqrt{10} = 4$ (with suitable rounding up) a small saving on resource.

The current Policy requires the "spread" of marks to include borderline scripts. This is removed here since the issue of borderlines arises out of the averaging of marks either across the module or the year and may not be a property of the individual module marks.

4.17   Regarding "cost/benefit". A team might decide that the complete run of work scripts needs to moderated rather than just a subset. This could be achieved by either Double Blind or non-Double Blind marking. The former needs far greater resourcing than the latter and may not be deemed necessary; this might be the case with examinations. In other cases, the extra resource may be considered beneficial to the student – for example a greater amount of feedback in the case of projects or dissertations.

Note that the Policy does not force the issue one way or the other; this decision is left at the discretion of the School.

4.18   Assessments which may be at risk include tasks where a student's anonymity is difficult to preserve (e.g. supervised projects/dissertations, oral examinations and presentations) or where the assessment contributes significantly to the final mark for the module (e.g. where it is the sole summative assessment for a module). To mitigate examples such as these, Mark-Moderation may need to be applied to the full run of submissions, although whether this is in terms of blind double or second marking is left at the discretion of the teaching team and should be discussed as part of the Assessment-Moderation process.

4.20   Contrary to some feedback, this is already the case.

THE SECTION ON ASSESSMENT BOARDS IN THE CURRENT POLICY HAS BEEN REMOVED SINCE SUCH BOARDS ARE NO LONGER HELD.