Responsibility for Moderation

Associate Deans Learning and Teaching must ensure that moderation occurs in units where it is required. This document is mandatory where moderation is required under an agreement with a partner, in other cases it becomes best practice.

Phases of Moderation

The Australian Learning & Teaching Council (ALTC) states that moderation is an important element of assessment design and that effective moderation therefore involves three key stages of assessment:

• Assessment Design & Development (before an assessment is set);  
• Implementation, Marking & Grading (before marks and grades are finalised); and  
• Review and Evaluation (after marks and grades have been allocated).

Assessment Design & Development:

Moderation is most likely to be effective when it is viewed as an ongoing process in the design and development of assessments more broadly. Assessments should be designed in a way that clearly links to the intended learning outcomes of the unit and should be as fair and objective as possible, taking the following into account:

• Time students are given to complete the task(s);  
• Marking criteria/rubrics that are clear and detailed and emphasise merit;  
• Learning styles;  
• English language proficiency;  
• Tacit/cultural knowledge; and  
• Potential cultural biases.

Assessment design may also include factoring in the time that moderation processes take when setting due dates (i.e. not setting an assignment submission in the last week of Semester/Trimester as the extra time needed to moderate a large sample may lead to delays in students receiving feedback prior to exams/the results submission deadline).

Where possible, engaging markers at the design and development stage of assessments is more likely to lead to stronger understandings of what is expected from students and what marking criteria mean. For this reason, it is useful to design assessment criteria/marking guides in consultation with markers, University colleagues and those experienced in assessment design. In units delivered transnationally, it may also be useful to design assessments in consultation with the affiliate lecturers.

Implementation, Marking & Grading:

Students should have a clear and explicit understanding of the standard of work that is expected for any assessment. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) also require that students are provided with “details of moderation and any other arrangements that will be used to support consistency and reliability of assessment and grading across each subject,” (TEQSA, 2012 p.32).

Requirement & Scope:

Where moderation is invoked for a unit, it will be required for each significant assessment component that falls within the criteria requiring moderation. The sample size and scope of assessment submissions moderated for each assessment component should be sufficient to establish whether significant issues or deviations have occurred in the marking strategy applied by the original markers. For this reason it is important that
the Unit Coordinator reviews the marks for a range of grades that have been awarded. At Murdoch the required sample will generally be the greater of ten scripts or 10% of the submissions per assessment component. The ALTC also recommends that outliers (i.e. the highest and lowest scoring papers) and all papers that have been assessed a fail grade should be moderated.

For the University’s TNE offerings, the normal model is that assignments are marked by staff of the partner institution and moderated by Murdoch staff, whilst examinations are marked by Murdoch staff. In this instance moderation means double marking the sample with reference to the affiliate’s marks and feedback. The moderation requirements of some educational partnership agreements may differ from this standard, however, and it is the responsibility of both Associate Deans Learning and Teaching and Unit Coordinators to make themselves aware of what partnership agreements apply to the units under their management and the moderation requirements of each partnership via the TNE Liaison Team.

Communication & Relationship Building:

Establishing and maintaining strong relationships between Unit Coordinators and markers will help to ensure that the moderation process runs smoothly. Nurturing the development of a community of practice amongst teaching teams and educational partners should lead to increased engagement and better moderation outcomes. In the case of TNE offerings, the expertise, local knowledge and student engagement capacities of partner institutions and their teaching affiliates can be invaluable in developing and maintaining successful transnational programs and ensuring a trusting and collegial relationship.

Effective communication and relationship building can be achieved through:

- Structured interaction;
- Communication via a number of modes such as email and teleconference;
- Professional development opportunities; and
- Informal collegiality.

It is important that markers have the necessary marking guides/rubrics no later than the assessment due date. In-person or virtual consensus/pre-marking meetings are also useful in establishing assessment requirements, standards, expectations and potential divergent answers to assessment questions so that markers can be confident of making use of a full marking range. Here model answers can be discussed and there should be a mutually agreed and timely process of feedback established between the Unit Coordinator and marker(s) prior to submission. This should ensure that corrections to marking strategies or levels of assessment (i.e. “soft” versus “hard” marking) can be appropriately applied. It may also be helpful to ‘road-test’ marking criteria by applying it to past or present work and discussing issues and anomalies in the respective markers’ approaches prior to the marking of all papers. Under these circumstances, it is possible to analyse how significant inconsistencies or deviations from a standard arise, and to correct errors before students are misled on their performance by inappropriate, inadequate or missing feedback.

Marking & Grading:

A number of methods can be used to ensure there is consistency between markers and the feedback that they provide, noting that it is the marker rather than the marks that should be the focus of moderation:

- Allocating all assignments or particular sections of an assignment to one marker where feasible;
- Scheduling intra-marking moderation where markers can discuss issues with Unit Coordinators at the beginning of the marking process and resolve issues early to avoid total re-marking;
• Using anonymous marking to avoid bias against any student(s) in the marking process;
• Encouraging markers to review work from the same cohort that has been marked previously (i.e., earlier in the week) to ensure the application of the agreed standard has not changed; and
• Identifying discrepancies by engaging in moderation strategies such as:
  o double-marking (i.e., where two staff mark the same piece of work);
  o cross-marking (i.e., where assessments from two staff are exchanged such as in the case of tutors marking the work submitted to another tutor’s class); or
  o blind double-marking (i.e., where a second marker does not see the original marks awarded or comments given by the first marker and is therefore not influenced by the original marker’s grading, feedback or perceptions of the student).

In the case of a TNE offering, Unit Coordinators should apply moderation by double-marking. Here they should comment both on the grade that has been awarded as well as the feedback that has been provided.

Review & Evaluation:

The Unit Coordinator should review the results provided by the markers and conduct analysis of scores and marker feedback to ensure that there has been consistency amongst markers. Outliers (i.e. the highest and lowest scores), borderline scores and fail grades should all be considered. These results should be shared through a post-marking meeting or review summary (including a spreadsheet of all marks) that is provided to all markers. Such meetings or review summaries should also address any communication issues that have arisen between the team during the process.

Resolving Marking issues:

Where moderation indicates a problem, it is crucial that an investigation is initiated as soon as possible to establish if a discrepancy exists and determine if the issue is one of marking strategy or process, or the issue is one of student learning.

Where the moderation affects a unit not run through a TNE offering, the Unit Coordinator should communicate as soon as possible with the marker or markers responsible. For TNE offerings, the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching in liaison with the TNE Liaison Team should contact the appropriate party in the partner organisation to initiate discussion. The Unit Coordinator must satisfy themselves, after discussion with the marker(s) that the cause of the problem has been corrected and the issue will not be repeated. Corrections to marks must be completed as soon as possible. Where a TNE offering is involved and the students are enrolled in a Murdoch Unit, the UnitCoordinator must consult with the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching who has the authority to require a total re-mark by an educational partner. The standard process for unresolved disagreements between the affiliate marker and Unit Coordinator is to raise the matter with the TNE Dean at the partner location for resolution (i.e. if there are perceived issues to do with unfair assessment, poor marking rubrics relative to the unit content etc.). If the matter cannot be resolved at this first instance, the TNE Dean will escalate it to the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching for a final determination.

If the adjustment of marks is required then the following points should be kept in mind:

1) Any adjustment of marks should be demonstrably fair and equitable for each student affected and the Unit Coordinator will need to be able to justify all such adjustments. Therefore:
2) Post-hoc scaling of marks across a cohort of students (and especially on the basis of a small number of inconsistent results) should be avoided.
3) Simply reducing the top scores or increasing the bottom scores is also not supported.
4) Corrections to marks must be completed as soon as possible.
Board of Examiner's Meetings:

All moderation will be discussed and noted at the Board of Examiners (BOE) meetings at the end of each teaching period. In the case of TNE offerings, Unit Coordinators will be required to report on moderation, with specific reference to:

i) student performance (i.e. performance of cohort; comparison with other onshore and offshore cohorts);

ii) affiliate lecturer quality (i.e. quality of teaching; assessment timeliness; and level of communication); and

iii) unit delivery (i.e. technical and any other issues).

This process should focus on positive as well as negative outcomes and it is important to document and encourage good teaching and marking practice. The respective Transnational Deans will be provided with the minutes of the BOE meetings which details this information. If an affiliate has done an outstanding job that deserves praise or if there is a significant issue that needs to be addressed, the TNE Deans or their delegates will contact the respective Lecturer Management team at the partner institution(s) to report this and initiate any performance management or professional development requirements for future teaching periods as necessary.

Review and Evaluation as a part of Future Assessment Design and Development:

The following should be considered prior to the next running of a unit:

- Areas for curriculum improvement and assessment;
- Issues to do with the appropriateness/difficulty of the assessment task relative to the learning outcomes;
- Clarity of assessment criteria;
- Timing of assessment; and
- Feedback provided to students.

Moderation Checklist:

**Phase 1: Assessment design and development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have your assessment items been subjected to review?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the assessment match the unit learning objectives/outcomes of the unit?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are assessment items as objective and fair as possible, taking into account learning styles, English language, cultural and tacit knowledge?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is there a possible cultural bias in your assessment items?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you vary types of assessment? (e.g. essays, reports, presentations, responding to case studies, short answers)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you negotiate assessment criteria and marking keys with the entire teaching team prior to finalising them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you discuss different cultural concepts of merit (e.g. student works hard but assessment item is not of a high standard – should they be rewarded for their hard work?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are your assessment criteria clear and detailed for students and those marking in all contexts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you emphasise merit in the context of your university’s expectations?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are your marking keys/rubrics clear and detailed for those marking in all contexts?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are students familiar with the assessment criteria and marking key?  

Are markers familiar with the assessment criteria and marking key?  

Have you held a real or virtual round table with all who are marking in the unit to discuss requirements, standards and possible divergent types of answers to assessment questions?  

Do your exams give enough time and contextual keys to those for whom English is not a first language?  

**Phase 2: Implementation, marking and grading**  

Do markers cross mark assignments from a cohort in the subject other than the one they directly teach?  

If there are multiple markers, have you held a consensus marking meeting?  

If the same assessment items are used on different campuses, have you conducted a consensus marking exercise?  

If markers are marking large numbers over an extended period of time, do they review earlier marked items?  

Is a sample of assessment items double-marked and compared?  

For subjective assessment, does double blind-marking occur?  

For subjective assessment, does panel marking occur?  

Does the same marker mark all of the same assessment items?  

Are students' assessment items anonymous?  

Do you discuss student work that attains very high or very low marks with the markers?  

Do you compare marking ranges across different cohorts and markers?  

Do you give timely and sensitive feedback to markers who may be marking too 'high' or 'low' so they can adjust their marking?  

Do you provide your markers with a spreadsheet or similar showing all marks and the range of marks for each marker?  

**Phase 3: Review and evaluation**  

Have you avoided post-assessment scaling of marks?  

Have potential marking biases been identified and addressed?  

Have you completed a moderation report for each assessment item?  

Has your teaching team contributed to the moderation report?  

In these discussions and reports have you identified any communication issues between yourself and the teaching team?  

In these discussions and reports have you identified any cultural issues in assessment and its moderation?  

Have you completed a unit report that includes analysis of moderation, actions for improvement in curriculum and assessment when next taught?  

(Australian Learning and Teaching Council Moderation Checklist).
References

Assessment moderation and validation procedure, RMIT
http://www1.rmit.edu.au/browse;ID=onpk51q9afij;STATUS=A;PAGE_AUTHOR=Andrea %20Syers;SECTION=1

Australian Learning & Teaching Council Moderation Checklist

Australian Learning & Teaching Council Moderation Toolkit, UniSA

Australian Learning & Teaching Council Final Report 2011: Moderation for fair assessment in transnational learning and teaching

Moderation, Curtin University


Moderation of Assessment: How to do it Guide: ECU
https://intranet.ecu.edu.au/__data/assets/word_doc/0004/525496/Moderation-of-Assessment-How-to-do-it-Guide.docx


Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Version 2.0 (2012): Application for Accreditation of a Higher Education Course of Study (AQF Qualification)