

## MODERATION PROCEDURES

[Approved by Senate 09 March 2016]

Moderation is a process intended to assure that an assessment outcome is fair and reliable and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently. The UK Quality code<sup>1</sup> stipulates that “Processes for marking assessments and for moderating marks are clearly articulated and consistently operated by those involved in the assessment process.”

Set out below is the minimum requirement for moderation but Schools and Disciplines can choose to operate more extensive moderation procedures. Such procedures should be clearly outlined to all staff involved in marking and to the External Examiner and should be notified to, and made available for scrutiny by, the Quality Assurance Committee on request. For all assessments subject to second marking, grades must not be returned to students until the second marking process is complete.

### 1. DEFINITIONS

1.1 **Moderation:** a process of review to check for consistency of marks awarded through sampling the assessed work.

**Second marking:** a process by which a piece of assessed work is either double or double blind marked.

**Double marking:** the second marker assigns a mark to the assessment having seen the annotations and mark awarded by the first marker.

**Double blind marking:** two markers each assign a mark independently without conferring during the initial marking process. Neither marker has access to the marks or comments of the other.

**Assessments:** Any piece of work for which a student attains a grade, including examination scripts, in-course essays, project reports, oral presentations.

### 2. NON-HONOURS LEVEL

2.1 Moderation is required at non-Honours level but there is **no** requirement for systematic second marking of non-Honours assessments (unless 2.3 applies).

2.2 Where a number of different markers are involved in marking an assessment (such as where the coursework for large classes is spread between several markers) there should be a discussion between markers to outline the marking criteria to be used and agree a marking scheme. After marking is complete the Course Coordinator should review the grade distribution for each assessment on the course and for individual markers to ensure consistency in marking. All coursework or examination that is graded at CGS E1 should be second marked.

2.3 Where all assessments in a course are marked by a single member of staff, a sample of any assessment (coursework or exam question) that contributes more than 40% to the total course grade must be second marked. The sample should contain all

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/uk-quality-code-for-higher-education-chapter-b6-assessment-of-students-and-the-recognition-of-prior-learning1#.VryTJvNFDcs>

borderline fails (assessments attaining a CGS grade E1) in addition to a representative 10% of the remaining assessments (subject to a minimum of 10). Where a class contains fewer than 20 students the sample should contain 50% of the assessments. The representative sample should include a range of CGS grades.

- 2.4 Assessments that have a clearly defined correct answer and that contain no subjective elements (i.e. that are mathematically based with a clearly defined marking scheme or multiple choice questions) need not be second marked but all such assessments must be checked to ensure the accuracy of the final grade.
- 2.5 Assessments and exam scripts that are marked by someone who is external to the University of Aberdeen must always be moderated internally unless they are purely quantitative (as in 2.4). The moderation process must ensure consistency of marking and correct use of the grade descriptors in the Common Grading System.

### **3. HONOURS/POST-GRADUATE TAUGHT LEVELS**

- 3.1 The moderation process at Levels 3, 4 and 5 requires the second marking (double or blind double marking) of a sample of all examination scripts. In addition, a sample of coursework that individually contributes more than 30% to the course grade should also be second marked. The sample should contain all borderline fails (assessments attaining a CGS grade E1) in addition to a representative 10% of the remaining assessments (subject to a minimum of 10). Where a class contains fewer than 20 students the sample should contain 50% of the assessments. The representative sample should include a range of CGS grades.
- 3.2 An individual piece of coursework that contributes 30% or less to the course grade need not be second marked but should undergo the moderation process described for non-Honours level (refer to section 2).
- 3.3 In courses (worth 30 credits or more) that are assessed by a single piece of coursework designed to demonstrate a large element of independent learning (such as a project thesis or dissertation) every assessment must be second marked.
- 3.4 Where a number of different markers are involved in marking an assessment there should be a discussion between markers to outline the marking criteria to be used and agree a marking scheme. After marking is complete all borderline fails (assessments attaining a CGS grade E1) plus a representative 10% of the remaining assessments should be second marked (subject to a minimum of 10). Where a class contains fewer than 20 students the sample should contain 50% of the assessments. The representative sample should include a range of CGS grades and should include assessments marked by each marker. After marking is complete the Course Coordinator should review the grade distribution for each assessment on the course and for individual markers to ensure consistency in marking.
- 3.5 Assessments that have a clearly defined correct answer and that contain no subjective elements (i.e. that are mathematically based with a clearly defined marking scheme or multiple choice questions) need not be second marked but all such assessments must be checked to ensure the accuracy of the final grade.
- 3.6 Assessments and exam scripts that are marked by someone who is external to the University of Aberdeen must always be moderated internally unless they are purely

quantitative (as in 3.5). The moderation process must ensure consistency of marking and correct use of the grade descriptors in the Common Grading System.

#### **4. PROCESS FOR AGREEING MARKS**

- 4.1 The role of the second marker is to determine whether the marks that they would have applied to the sample are in broad agreement with the marks awarded by the first marker (i.e. within two alphanumeric grades per assessment). If there is broad agreement then the marks awarded by the first marker should stand for all assessments including those not sampled.
- 4.2 Where there is a consistent pattern of disparity between the grades awarded by the first and second markers, i.e. the first marker's grades are consistently higher or consistently lower than the second marker's grades, the markers should discuss and agree an action. The action agreed should be applied to the entire cohort, not just the sampled assessments. For example, should the discussions conclude that the grades awarded by the first marker to the sampled assessments are too low (i.e. the marking by the first marker was judged to be too harsh), ALL of the first marker's grades should be upwardly adjusted, including all non-sampled assessments. See Flow chart, Annex A.
- 4.3 If there is a major disparity (three or more alphanumeric grades) in isolated assessments (i.e. no more than 10% of the sample) the two markers must discuss the reason for this. If the first marker agrees with the reasoning of the second marker the grade may be changed. However, the first marker must review all non-sampled assessments to determine whether any adjustments need to be made to those grades in the light of the discussions. Further sampling by the second marker must then occur to ensure that this was an isolated incident.
- 4.4 If there is no consistent agreement between the two markers i.e. none of 4.1, 4.2 or 4.3 apply, (see Flow Chart, Annex A) the sample must be reviewed by a third internal marker. Exceptionally the External Examiner may be asked to scrutinise the sample if there is no third internal marker with the appropriate expertise available. If the third marker agrees with the grades awarded by the first marker the first marker's grades should stand for the whole cohort. Should the grades awarded by the third marker not agree then the whole cohort must be second marked and agreement reached between the two markers.

#### **5. RECORDING OF THE PROCESS**

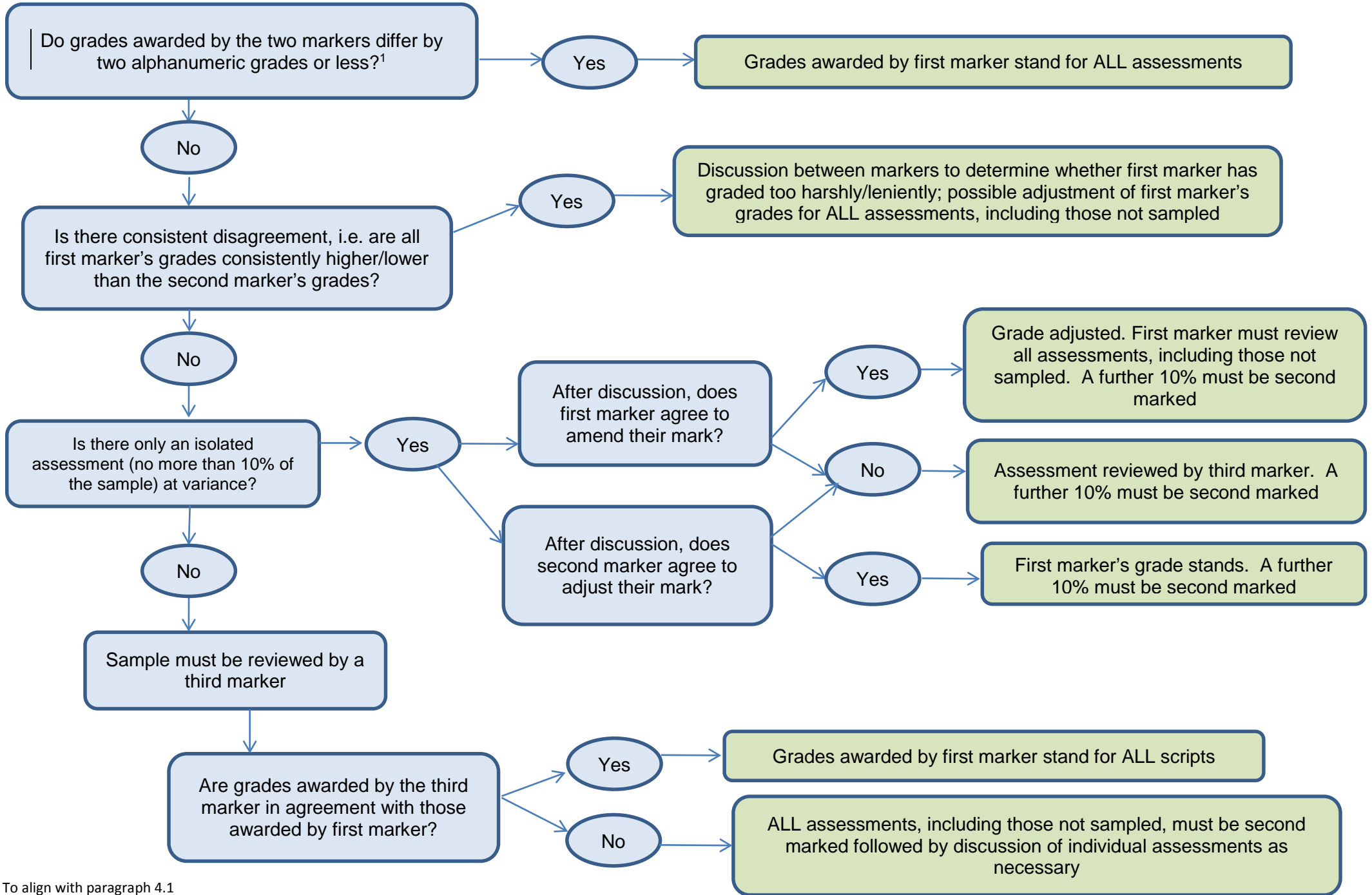
- 5.1 The outcome of the moderation/second marking process must be recorded showing clearly the rationale for any decisions taken for the purposes of the relevant examiners' meeting and for appropriate feedback to students.

#### **6. ROLE OF EXTERNAL EXAMINERS**

- 6.1 External Examiners should have the opportunity to view samples of all assessed work. If the assessment cannot be easily viewed by the External Examiner the process by which the assessment has been graded should be made available to the External Examiner.

- 6.2 External Examiners should be asked to comment on the general standard of marking and assessment and may recommend an increase or decrease in *all* grades for a particular assessment. Any actual change to grades, however, needs the approval of the final Examiners' Meeting. External Examiners may not make isolated changes to any student's grades.
- 6.3 External Examiners are not normally expected to mark or re-mark assessments. Where second marking has been adopted and the two markers cannot agree on a final mark the assessment should first be sent to a third, internal, marker rather than the External Examiner. The External Examiner should, however, have such disagreements brought to their attention.

# Second marking: reconciling differences decision tree



<sup>1</sup> To align with paragraph 4.1