Verification, Marking and Moderation Policy

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1.   Introduction

1.1. The Verification, Marking and Moderation Policy has been produced in consideration of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and should be read in conjunction with Section Academic Assessments and Awards of the HE Regulations Framework.

1.2. This procedure ensures that students and apprentices receive fair and equal access to assessment, which is free from discrimination and is made by well-informed and well-supported first markers. It also ensures that the standard of assessment remains consistent across time and between candidates with respect to individual first markers, and that there is consistency and standardisation between markers.

1.3. There are two stages to this process:

1.3.1. Verification: To ensure assessment instruments (assignments and examinations) are fit for purpose. I.e. They enable the student and/or apprentice to produce evidence that meets the assessment criteria and learning outcomes and that students and/or apprentices are provided with all pertinent details including distribution and submission dates.

1.3.2. Moderation: To ensure that assessment decisions accurately judge the students' and/or apprentices' work against grading criteria/learning outcomes and that assessment and grading are consistent across a programme.

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1.3.4. Note: To ensure guardianship of the College's Regulations and prevent ambiguity, each stage must be recorded.

2.   Externality
2.1. Externality is vital to the assessment process as it ensures that assessments are set and marked appropriately. Samples should be considered by External Examiners associated with a programme at both verification and moderation stages.

3.   Preparation
3.1. In preparation for the academic year, the academic team must create:

3.1.1. A sampling matrix identifying students/apprentices, tutors, assessments and dates that will make up each moderation sample.

3.1.2. An assessment schedule that identifies the type of assessment and the distribution and submission dates for each assessment. This will assist students and apprentices ensuring that the volume, timing and nature of assessment supports them in achieving the intended learning outcomes.

4.   Verification

4.1. Pre-Distribution

4.1.1. Ada, The National College for Digital Skills programmes must have at least one assessment per module externally reviewed at all levels. This will ensure academic rigor, standardisation, and consistency are maintained at each stage of the programme.

4.1.2. In addition to the sample sent to external examiners and before distribution to students and apprentices, all assessment briefs must undergo Verification. The outcome of Verification must be recorded. Peer reviewers, as internal verifiers, are encouraged to utilise the comment section on the Verification Form to contextualise feedback to a first marker. A rigorous peer reviewer will provide advice on what can be done to improve the assessment. If an action is identified, the first marker must complete the actions and return the brief to establish that it is of the required standard.

4.1.3. If remedial action is identified externally or internally, the action must be completed by the first marker prior to the distribution of the assessment to students; internal verification must be recorded on the Verification Form. This process will ensure the assessment is fit for purpose and that:

   4.1.3.1.   The tasks and evidence will allow the student to address the learning outcomes

   4.1.3.2.   It is written in clear and accessible language

   4.1.3.3.   Once the assessment meets the standards required, it may be issued to the students.

4.2. Internal Records

4.2.1. The internal process must be documented by the lecturer assigned to peer review the assessment using the Verification Form. The lecturer must ensure that the Assessment brief meets the following criteria:

4.2.2. Accurately reflects the programme and module details

4.2.3. Clearly identifies the learning outcomes to be assessed, as outlined in the validation document

4.2.4. Clearly identifies the learning outcome to be assessed, as outlined in the validation document

4.2.5. Specifies precise deadlines for submission, including both date and time Includes all relevant grading criteria applicable to the module(s)

4.2.6. Aligns specific grading criteria with each assessment task

4.2.7. Clearly states the required evidence to be submitted by the student

4.2.8. Is designed to elicit evidence that is both appropriate and sufficient

4.2.9. Is set at the correct academic level

4.2.10. Provides an appropriate and reasonable timeframe for completion

4.2.11. Employs clear and accessible language

4.2.12. Follows a consistent and professional presentation format

4.2.13. Informs students of the grade descriptors and the expectations required to achieve specific performance levels

5. Examinations

5.1. Responsibilities of First Markers

    5.1.1. First markers are responsible for drafting and reviewing examination papers, ensuring originality and academic rigour. They must:

    5.1.2. Avoid duplicating past questions (past 3 years).

    5.1.3. Sent examination papers and model answers to the External Examiner.

    5.1.4. Submit copies and checklists to the HE Quality and Standards Lead

    5.1.5. All examinations scripts are anonymised during marking.

5.2. Examination Dates and Times

    5.3. First markers are responsible for, in accordance with deadline dates issued annually:

    5.3.1. Under normal circumstances, a lecturer who teaches the subject being examined must not be an invigilator for an examination in that subject.

    5.3.2. Writing the examination paper, ensuring it has been checked against papers from the last three years to avoid duplicate and/or similar questions.

    5.3.3. Working with the academic team to ensure that all examination papers are sent to both the Academic Reviewer and External Examiner for comment.

    5.3.4. Working with the programme team to provide the Achievements Team with:

    5.3.5. Electronically encrypted examination papers

    5.3.6. Completed Checklists for HE Examination papers

    5.3.7. Completing the examination front sheet.

6. Marking

6.1. First Marker

    6.1.1. First marking involves judging all submitted assessments against the grade descriptors outlined in the assessment brief. This process serves to determine whether the student or apprentice has successfully met all specified learning outcomes associated with the module.

    6.1.2. Typically, first marking is carried out by the lecturer(s) responsible for delivering the module. It requires a thorough and objective application of the assessment criteria to ensure consistency, fairness, and academic integrity. Lecturers must also ensure that feedback is constructive, clearly aligned with the grading descriptors, and supports the learner's or apprentice's ongoing development.

6.2. Second Marker

    6.2.1. Second markers, when participating in the moderation process, are expected to apply the same assessment criteria and make independent judgements in line with those used by the first marker. However, this judgement is limited to the prescribed moderation sample.

    6.2.2. Wherever possible, second markers should conduct their review without being influenced by the marks, comments, or conclusions made by the first marker. This ensures an objective and unbiased moderation process,

supporting the consistency, fairness, and reliability of assessment outcomes across the cohort.

7.   Marking Requisites

7.1.   Word Count Requirements

7.1.1.   All modules delivered at Ada, The National College for Digital Skills define the type and scope of each assessment within the corresponding module specification. For assessments designated as coursework, the scope is determined by a word count, which sets the maximum number of words permitted.

7.1.2.   When designing assessment strategies, word counts are included to guide students and apprentices in understanding the expected depth, detail, and critical engagement required to meet the learning outcomes. Word limits also promote the development of concise and effective academic writing, an essential skill at higher education level.

7.1.3.   Markers are required to assess only the content falling within the specified word count, plus an additional allowance of 10%. Any content submitted beyond this limit will not be considered or contribute to the final mark. References and appendices are excluded from the word count. However, it is important to note that appendices are intended to support not replace the main body of work. Any essential content must be included within the main assessment submission, not in the appendices.

7.1.4.   Word count guidance provides students and apprentices with a clear indication of the length expected for the assessment. Where a word limit is set (with a -/+10% tolerance), and penalties apply (e.g., only marking content within the allowable limit), this must be clearly communicated to students. Feedback on any submission that exceeds the word count should explicitly show how the word limit has been managed and how any penalties have been applied.

7.2.   Referencing Requirements

7.2.1.   Markers must not impose penalties solely based on incorrect referencing format, as outlined in the College's Referencing Guide. However, constructive feedback should be provided to help students and apprentices improve their academic practice and referencing skills.

7.2.2.   In cases where a reference is so poorly formatted, or entirely missing, that it becomes impossible to link it to any meaningful source or part of the work, the assessment may be significantly impacted. Such instances can affect the mark awarded and may trigger a referral to the Academic Misconduct Panel. If academic misconduct is confirmed, a formal penalty may be applied, recorded on the student's or apprentice's academic record, and could have a detrimental effect on their academic progression.

7.3.   Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

7.3.1.   Ada, The National College for Digital Skills is committed to supporting all students and apprentices in developing the academic and professional skills essential for success in both their studies and future employment. To that end, feedback on spelling, punctuation, and grammar is provided as part of a supportive and developmental approach to help students and apprentices strengthen their written application.

7.3.2. Generally, spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors identified by markers will not negatively affect the mark awarded for an assessment, unless a specific learning outcome explicitly requires accurate use of language conventions. However, where such errors are so significant that they prevent the marker from understanding the meaning of the work, this will almost certainly have a negative impact on the mark awarded.

8. Authentic Assessment and Academic Integrity

8.1. At Ada, The National College for Digital Skills, authentic assessment is an integral component of the learning and evaluation process, encouraging students and apprentices to apply their knowledge and skills in realistic, professional contexts. This may take the form of real-world case studies or tasks situated within their own employment settings.

8.2. The concept of authentic assessment, as defined by Wiggins (1990), involves evaluating students through tasks that are realistic, require informed judgment, simulate complex real-life scenarios, and assess the learner's ability to make decisions and solve problems in meaningful ways. Authentic tasks often mirror professional responsibilities, encourage higher-order thinking, and offer opportunities for reflection and revision—providing a more valid and comprehensive measure of student learning than traditional assessments alone.

   8.2.1. Authentic assessment is underpinned by several key principles:

   8.2.2. Tasks are contextually realistic, reflecting situations encountered in real-world or workplace environments.

   8.2.3. Students must demonstrate complex problem-solving and decision-making, rather than rote recall.

   8.2.4. Transparent criteria are used, based on professional or disciplinary standards.

   8.2.5. Learners are given opportunities for self-assessment, feedback, and revision, supporting their development.

8.3. In ensuring the academic integrity of these assessments, lecturers play a vital role. They must make use of the full range of tools and strategies available to uphold standards across all awards issued by the College. These tools include:

   8.3.1. The clear communication of assessment expectations and outcomes
   8.3.2. Thoughtful and purposeful assessment design, aligned with learning outcomes
   8.3.3. Use of similarity detection tools to safeguard originality
   8.3.4. A rigorous moderation process to ensure fairness, consistency, and credibility in marking
   8.3.5. Together, these practices support the delivery of authentic assessments that are both academically robust and professionally relevant, helping students and apprentices to develop the critical skills needed for successful employment and lifelong learning.

8.3.6. Evidence of authenticity in student and apprentice work can be demonstrated in various ways, one of which is the use of viva voce (oral) examinations. Lecturers are encouraged to consider incorporating such methods during the assessment validation process. Additionally, lecturers should routinely verify learners' knowledge throughout the delivery of a module ideally through early, agreed upon methods introduced at the start of the programme. These checks also provide valuable opportunities for formative assessment.

8.3.7. In many cases, this verification may take the form of informal assessments, even if not explicitly defined within a programme's validation documentation. These can include one-to-one discussions, group seminars, or other interactive formats. While informal, such approaches can serve as useful tools in a marker's professional judgment.

8.3.8. Regardless of the format used, lecturers must ensure that all assessment methods are conducted in a manner that is fair, unbiased, and reliable, maintaining the integrity of the assessment process at all times.

9. Conflict of Interest

9.1. If a marker has a personal interest in, or a relationship with, a specific student or apprentice, they are required to declare this to the Head of Faculty. The Head of Faculty will then take appropriate steps to ensure, wherever possible, that another member of the academic team is assigned to mark and moderate the relevant work.

9.2. All declared conflicts of interest must be formally recorded on the Moderation Form. In cases where it is not possible to assign an alternative marker, the work in question must be included in the moderation sample for each assessment.

9.3. Furthermore, if the assessment contributes to a final award, the work must always be reviewed by the External Examiner to ensure objectivity and maintain the integrity of the assessment process.

10. Moderation

10.1. Definition

10.1.1. To safeguard academic standards and ensure that the assessment of students and apprentices meets the highest quality benchmarks aligned with sector expectations, a sample of submissions for each assessment will undergo second marking. This process verifies that the marks or grades awarded are accurate, reliable, and free from undue subjectivity on the part of the initial marker.

10.1.2. Moderation plays a critical role in confirming that assessment outcomes such as marks or grades are fair and consistent. It ensures that grading criteria have been applied uniformly and that any discrepancies in academic judgment between markers are identified and resolved.

10.1.3. An essential part of this process involves reviewing the feedback provided to students and apprentices to ensure it is constructive, supportive, and clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the module. The feedback should also be forward-looking, providing actionable guidance that helps students and apprentices improve in future work. This approach enhances transparency and supports development.

10.1.4. Additionally, moderation serves as a vital check to confirm whether the student or apprentice has successfully met the specified learning outcomes, thereby maintaining the integrity and validity of the assessment process.

10.2. Moderation Meetings

10.3. Following the completion of the second marking of the sample of students' assessments. The outcome must be recorded using the moderation form. It is essential that both the first and second marker engage in a thorough discussion to review and compare their judgment of the sample.

10.4. In instances where notable discrepancies are identified across the majority of the samples' marks, one of the following actions must be clearly documented and, where necessary, implemented:

10.4.1. **No Further action is required,** where the discussion concludes that differences are minor and do not affect the overall integrity of the marking process.

10.4.2. **A full cohort review by the first maker,** where they are required to reassess the marking across all submissions. This may lead to a revision of marks, either through re-marking or by applying appropriate adjustments, such as scaling up or down, to ensure consistency and fairness.

10.4.3. **A comprehensive review by the second marker,** involving a full assessment of all submitted work. After this review, both markers must reconvene to deliberate on any discrepancies. If consensus is reached, they may determine that no amendments are necessary, or they may agree on specific changes to some all marks awarded.

10.5. Should the first and second markers be unable to reach an agreement despite discussion, the matter must be escalated to adjudicator, typically the Head of Faculty, who will review all relevant evidence and make an independent judgement.

10.6. In cases where marks are amended as a result of adjudication or where significant discrepancies are identified, it is expected that the External Examiner will normally be notified and provided with details of the outcome to ensure transparency and uphold academic standards.

11. Student Feedback

11.1. Students and apprentices must only be provided with assessment feedback after second marking has taken place. This is to ensure that assessment decisions have been appropriately reviewed and endorsed before any feedback is shared, maintaining the integrity and fairness of the process.

11.2. Timely feedback is essential. Students and apprentices are entitled to receive feedback in a manner that allows them to reflect on their performance and apply this insight to future assessments. For instance, feedback on academic writing, study skills or critical analysis can guide improvements in subsequent work. To support this, students and apprentices can normally expect to receive written feedback within 15 College working days of the submission deadline.

11.3.   To avoid delays, written feedback must be issued prior to formal ratification by the Examination Board. In such cases students and apprentices must be clearly informed that marks are provisional and subject to confirmation. This clarification should be included in programme documentation such as programme and module handbooks.

11.4.   All written feedback must include a clear indication of whether the assessed learning outcomes have been achieved, not achieved or partially achieved. Learning outcomes should be fully listed within the feedback. It is not sufficient to simply reference the outcomes in the module handbook.

11.5.   Where learning outcomes have not been fully achieved, the feedback must clearly explain which areas were lacking or underdeveloped and offer constructive suggestions for improvements.

11.6.   In addition, all feedback should reference the student's strengths, areas requiring further development and specific actions for future improvement. These future developments may relate to:

11.6.1. General academic skills

11.6.2. Presentation, writing style, and structure

11.6.3. Critical thinking and analysis

11.6.4. Relevance and clarity in addressing the assessment question

11.6.5. Importantly, feedback should not only identify areas for enhancement but also guide students on how to address them in practical terms. For example, if referencing inconsistencies are noted, the feedback may include referring the student to the relevant referencing guide.

11.7.   Teaching staff should also consider using a variety of feedback formats that offer students early and meaningful responses to their performance. These may include:

11.7.1. **Self-reflection activities:** Encouraging students to evaluate their own work critically

11.7.2. **Peer feedback:** Facilitating structured opportunities for students to provide feedback to each other.

11.7.3. **Generic group feedback:** Providing a summary of common strengths and weaknesses about how the group performed in relation to the learning outcomes and other issues. This can be placed on the google classroom or disseminated in the class

11.7.4. **Oral feedback:** Supplementing written feedback with one-to-one or group discussions, especially for practical tasks or presentations.

11.7.5. **Clear boundaries on feedback:** Informing students when it is no longer appropriate to seek feedback, such as during the final days before summative deadlines.

11.7.6. **Recording assessments:** Recording presentations or practical assessments and reviewing them with students, second markers and external examiners to support reflective learning.

12. Sample Construction and Size

12.1. Construction

12.1.1. The selection of any assessment sample for second marking should be guided by a risk-based approach, ensuring that the process is robust. This approach should take into account factors such as the nature of the assessment, the experience of the first marker, previous discrepancies in marking, and any issues raised in past moderation or external examiner reports

12.1.2. The sample must be designed to provide comprehensive coverage across the programme. This means that, at each stage of delivery, the sample must include representation for every module assessment, every first marker involved, and a range of students or apprentices. Such an approach ensures that the second marking process is fair, consistent, and capable of identifying any patterns or anomalies in marking practices.

12.2. Size

12.2.1. The number of submissions selected for second marking within each module should be determined based on a range of contextual factors that influence model delivery and assessment integrity. Wherever possible, the approach to sampling should be agreed upon at the start of the academic year by the academic programme team, ensuring consistency and transparency in the moderation process.

12.2.2. Key factors that may influence the size and composition of the sample may include the overall size of the cohort, the need to capture a broad range of grade classifications, the presence of borderline grade decisions, and whether the module or programme is newly validated. In particular, newly introduced programmes or modules may require more intensive moderation to ensure assessment outcomes are fair, accurate, and aligned with intended learning outcomes.

12.2.3. Additionally, the experience level of the staff members delivering and marking the module should be considered. For example, where a member of staff is new to higher education or delivering the module for the first time, an increased sample may be appropriate to support quality assurance and consistency. Historical student feedback regarding assessment, feedback quality, and teaching, as well as any relevant comments or concerns raised by external examiners or academic consultants, should also inform the sampling process.

12.2.4. As a general rule, the initial factor for determining the minimum sample size should be based on the cohort size. A common approach is to select a sample size to at least the square root of the total number of students in the cohort, with a minimum of 6 submissions sampled per assessment. In the case of dissertation or final project, all submissions must be subject to unseen double

12.3. Second Marking Guidelines

12.3.1. First, all submissions that have been awarded a fail grade, are on a classification or grade boundaries, or have received a 70%+ must be included in the second marking process. Second, the second marker (or moderator) must have access to the full list of marks awarded to the cohort, not just the selected sample, to ensure proper contextual understanding and fairness. It is not sufficient for the first marker to provide only isolated examples without access to the overall marking pattern.

12.3.2. Although the second marker is usually responsible for selecting the scripts or assessments to be reviewed, the first marker may also suggest specific submissions for inclusion in the sample. It is the responsibility of the second marker to keep accurate and detailed records of all marks reviewed, along with any amendments made as a result of the moderation process. All such information must be clearly documented using the designated moderation form to ensure transparency and accountability.

12.3.3. The moderation process must also include documented evidence of discussion between the first and second markers, particularly in instances where there is a significant difference in judgement. This discussion should be clearly recorded and reflect the deliberation to resolve discrepancies.

12.3.4. It is important to note that the external examiner (EE) is not responsible for resolving differences in moderation. All marks must be agreed upon between the first and second markers before they are presented to the external examiner.

13. Dissertations and Major Projects

13.1. Where possible, dissertations and major projects as defined in the programme validation document should be subject to unseen double marking. This process involves independent assessment of each student or apprentice submission by two markers. The second marker must not have access to the first marker's comments, annotations, or awarded marks prior to completing their own assessment. This separation ensures an unbiased evaluation, promotes fairness, and supports the academic integrity of the marking process.

13.2. Unseen double marking is particularly important for substantial, summative assessments that carry significant academic weighting, such as final-year dissertations and major projects. These assessments often contribute heavily to degree classifications or professionals, and therefore require an additional layer of scrutiny.

14. Practical Assessment Moderation

14.1.   For summative assessments that are practical in nature such as presentations and technical skills demonstrations, arrangements must be made to ensure the second marker has access to a recording of the moderation sample. If recording is not feasible, a second marker should be involved in the live assessment process. In such cases, both markers should independently assess the practical assessment and then agree on a final mark through discussion.

14.2.   Additionally, External Examiners must be granted equivalent access to these practical assessments, either through recordings or by attending live sessions. To support their role in verifying academic standards.

15. Standardisation

15.1.   Standardisation is a process through which all lecturers involved in a module or assessment develop a shared understanding of the marking criteria and expectations for providing feedback to students and apprentices. This process is typically conducted before moderation takes place and aims to ensure consistency, fairness and transparency in assessment practices.

15.2.   In cases where a module or assessment is delivered and assessed by more than one lecturer, standardisation should also take place after the summative assessment has been submitted. This ensures alignment across all markers, particularly where variations in judgement may arise. All outcomes and key discussion points from the standardisation activity must be recorded using the standardisation form.

15.3.   Standardisation requires each member of the marking team to independently assess a sample of students or apprentices for a specific assessment task. Markers assign grades using the agreed grading criteria or descriptors.

15.4.   Once individual grading is complete, the team meets to review, discuss any discrepancies, and agree on final grades for the sample. This agreed outcome then serves as a benchmark for grading the full cohort. The meeting may also provide an opportunity to address and clarify marking issues, such as penalties for missing elements and to confirm expectations around the consistency and quality of feedback.

15.5.   If a lecturer is unable to attend the meeting, alternative arrangements should be made to ensure their participation. At a minimum, all markers must complete the grading exercise independently and be informed of the agreed outcomes before they begin marking students' submissions.

15.6.   External Examiners must be informed of the outcome of the standardisation process. They should also be given access to the marked sample used during the exercise, as part of their role of assuring academic standards.

16. Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights

16.1.   Students and apprentices are expected to treat all assessment materials as strictly confidential. They are not permitted to remove, copy, photograph, reproduce or share these materials or any part of them in any form. This includes disclosing the content to third parties or marking materials accessible to others by any means.

16.2.   Assessment materials may only be used for the sole purpose of completing the relevant assessment. Any use beyond this is strictly prohibited.

16.3.   All rights, including copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with assessment materials, remain the exclusive property of Ada, The National College for Digital Skills.