**Standardisation of marking**

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**Standardisation vs moderation**

There can be some confusion between standardisation and moderation so to clarify:

Standardisation should occur **before** the marking process and involves checking that all markers have a clear understanding of the marking criteria and/or rubric, how to apply them, clarify interpretation of terms and set a standard. Standardisation is also known as examiner or rater training in the literature (Greatorex et al. 2019)

Moderation checks the accuracy/fairness of marking and parity of feedback **after** assessments have been marked.

**Why is standardisation an important process?**

The University has clear[marking procedures](https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/quality-and-standards-office/regulations-policies-and-procedures/marking-procedures.aspx)**.** However, pre-marking processes can vary. Bear in mind that:

* Lack of formal processes can put academic standards at risk
* Disparity between marks can lead to student dissatisfaction as they often compare grades and feedback. This can lead to negative feedback and potentially poorer NSS scores.
* Disparity between the amount and quality of feedback provided can lead to student dissatisfaction.

Standardisation is also one of the ways in which staff can adhere to the expectations for standards as outlined by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (QAA, 2018).

**How many times should standardisation take place in an academic year?**

If you have an established teaching team who have marked consistently for some time then the need for standardisation should reduce. However, if the course or module has frequent changes of staff, staff on short term teaching contracts or staff new to teaching, standardisation will need to take place as often as needed to ensure all the team are marking to the same standard. This is particularly relevant for new collaborative partners whose staff are likely to be unfamiliar with the module, course and marking criteria.

It is possible for standardisation to take place for less experienced markers alone, however, new staff will learn more from standardising alongside more experienced markers.

In addition, there may be need to standardise if:

* Student feedback shows that marking has not been consistent or fair, or if there is the perception that some markers are harsh or generous.
* A new assessment pattern or type of assessment is being trialled/implemented on a course/module.
* Marking is taking place on modules which have multiple markers and large class sizes. Assessors may have different interpretations and perceptions of students’ work which can cause discrepancies across marking teams (Gardener & Evans, 2018).

**How can I implement standardisation?**

Subject areas with large cohorts of students typically require numerous markers, and ensuring consistency across a large team of markers (Beautel, et al 2017). As it is essential that work is returned within the 15 working day policy (see [Timely Feedback](https://www.canterbury.ac.uk/learning-and-teaching-enhancement/policies/timely-feedback.aspx) Policy so co-ordinating standardisation and moderation can be challenging. If an assessment has been implemented for the first time then it will be important to set the standard and decide what features represent different levels, skills, etc. but this will have to be once an assessment has run. Samples can be collated to use in standardisation sessions that can be run at any time or be used for blind marking.

Standardisation processes can be implemented in numerous ways. Decisions can be made based on time available and the size and experience of marking teams.

All the examples in the table below can:

* be run online via MS Teams or Blackboard Collaborate
* Course Directors/Module leads may choose to employ a mix of the models as appropriate at different points in the academic calendar
* all the models should have the opportunity for discussion of feedback practices and participants in the process must be able to justify grades by reference to marking rubrics/and or learning outcomes.

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| **Examples of standardisation models** | | |
| Model | Advantages | Disadvantages |
| ‘Ideal’ model – all markers are allocated a small number of assessments to mark individually and get together to discuss them in a meeting.  This can be done using assignments from previous cohorts or current assessments. | * Discussion of standards between all markers helps ensure maximum support and minimum deviation from the standard. * Less experienced staff can ask questions and more experienced staff have the opportunity to question assumptions.   **Using samples from the current cohort cuts down overall marking time but the meetings can take longer to set a standard.** | * Requires all staff to be available at the same time. * The session can be time-consuming because of the amount of discussion. * Less experienced markers may feel intimidated and afraid to ask questions or challenge decisions. Ensure that new markers are encouraged to ask questions to overcome this.   **Using samples from previous cohorts adds to the overall marking time but the standardisation process can take place at any time during the semester.** |
| ‘Asynchronous online model’ – some assignments are put online (anonymisation is preferable) with a spreadsheet for markers to add grades – or grades to be sent to the person running the session if you don’t want people to be influenced by others’ grades. Grades can be compared amongst the team by the Course Director or Module Lead.  For markers who are far out from the desired mark there is the possibility | Saves time as not all staff need to be in one place at a pre-arranged time.  Reduces social norming where less experienced markers are dominated by more experienced/outspoken markers. | Can single out ‘rogue’ markers who can feel their abilities are being questioned. It is vital to establish trust where no one is seen as being out of kilter.  Less supportive for new and short term staff. |
| ‘Standardisation committee’ model – a group of experienced tutors mark some assignments and put them online as examples of marks at different levels. Markers follow the guidelines. It is best to do this with previous cohorts’ assessments to save time | Saves time as not all staff need to be in one place at a pre-arranged time.  If using previous cohorts’ work as exemplars, then standardisation can take place at any point in the academic year and allow for questions to be asked by new staff as needed. | Does not ensure that standards have been internalised or understood unless followed up with a whole group session or individual feedback.  Less supportive for new staff/ GTAs  Does not allow for discussion around standards and harmonisation within the team needed for maintaining consensus around marking rubrics and disciplinary conventions. |

Adapted from Assessment for Learning at Kings (2018)

**Should I run sessions synchronously or asynchronously?**

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| **Advantages and disadvantages of training modes** | | |
|  | **Advantages** | **Disadvantages** |
| **Asynchronous online session** | * Can be more motivating because marker can work at own pace and take time to read scripts/come to conclusions * Can be done in marker’s own time/choice of environment * Marker can take breaks as needed * No interruption by dominant/confident colleagues – easier for shyer people * Immediate feedback can be provided * Objective because influence of other markers can be avoided | * Tiring * Impersonal, no one to share ideas or compare ratings with * Adds to screen time/strain on eyes |
| **Synchronous session (online or face to face)** | * Interaction with other markers, opportunity to discuss or ask questions * Easier to compare between scripts * More sociable and interactive | * Markers may be influenced by others and change scores/lack confidence in own judgement * Inconvenient in terms of finding time when everyone is available * Room needs booking for face to face sessions unless done on MS Teams. |

Adapted from Knoch, Read and Randow (2007, p.42)

**References**

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