Marking, Grading & Moderation Procedures

Version: 12
Revision date: 02/06/2026
Document reviewer: Head of Policy and Governance
Due for review: 25/07/2027

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1. Introduction

This document acts as guidance and a general policy statement for the marking and grading of assessments.

The individual Programme Specifications, Module Specifications and Assessment Guides contain comprehensive details of the assessment scheme for that specific module or stage of learning, and it is those that should be followed for correctly awarding marks and credits.

2. Minimum requirements

University Centre Quayside (UCQ) requires that all parts of a programme's assessed elements are completed in order to comply with the regulations set out in the programme and module specifications and guidance. For example; if a module has three assessments, then a student must complete all three. Failure to complete all three would result in a fail for that module, as the required number of credits would not be able to be achieved.

For undergraduate programmes UCQ operates 40% pass mark for all graded assessments, modules and qualifications.

For postgraduate programmes the pass mark is 50%.

3. Word limits

The word count includes all articulated content within the main body of the text, such as headings, sub-headings, tables, citations, quotes, lists, etc. The contents page, reference list/bibliography, appendices, footnotes, and endnotes are excluded from the word count unless specified otherwise in the Assessment Guide.

Where reflective review templates are used, wording contained within the template itself is excluded from the word count.

Appendices should be minimal and should only contain reference materials that support arguments already made in the main text. Any additional materials in appendices, unless specifically requested in the module guide, will not be evaluated.

Harvard referencing must be used in the citation and references sections unless specified otherwise in the Assessment Guide.

Word limits are established for each graded assessment and are detailed in the Assessment Guides. These limits ensure equitable processes of assessment for all students and promote the need for concise and clear writing. The following penalties apply for exceeding or not meeting the specified word limit:

Up to 10% over or under the specified limit: no penalty.

Between 10-20% over or under the specified limit: 5 marks will be deducted from the final mark.

20% or more over or under the specified limit: the final grade awarded will be capped at 40%.

4. Presentations

Presentations will be marked and graded in line with the requirements set out in the individual module Assessment Guide.

Presentations must adhere to the allocated time. The rationale for a time allocation is to ensure equality of opportunity for each student and to develop and demonstrate professional presentation skills. Penalties for exceeding the specified time allocation are as follows:

- Up to 10% over the specified time will not incur a penalty
- Between 10-20% over the specified time will incur a deduction of 5 marks off the final mark for *presentation skills* with a further 5-mark deduction for each subsequent 10% transgression.

5. Marking and grading bands

All graded assessments will be marked according to the assessment criteria in their Assessment Guide. The marks will be between 0% and 100% and the grading bands are shown below.

Grading bands for graded assessments:

Mark	Grade band
70-100%	Excellent Pass
60-69%	Very Good Pass
50-59%	Good Pass
40-49%	Pass
0-39%	Fail

Grading bands for BA(Hons) awards:

Mark	Grade band
70-100%	1st class honours
60-69%	Upper 2nd class honours
50-59%	Lower 2nd class honours
40-49%	3rd class
0-39%	Fail

Within a module, there may be elements which are marked on a pass/fail basis and any such elements will only be used to achieve credits and will not be used towards any classifications

6. Resits, compensation and retakes

Where a student fails a module, the following may apply in the first instance:

Resit: A second attempt of an assessment component within a module, following failure at first attempt.

Compensation: The award of credit by the Board of Examiners for a failed module(s) on account of good performance in other modules at the same credit level where the learning outcomes have been met.

Retake: A second attempt of all assessment components within a module following failure at the first or resit attempt. Retake of the failed component may require the student to participate in classes to prepare them for the second attempt.

Resits, compensation and retakes are confirmed at the Examination Board.

Please refer to section 17 of the Regulations for Validated Awards of The Open University for full information regarding resits, compensation and retakes.

7. Referrals to Academic Support Tutor

Where a first year student requires additional academic support, they will be referred to the Academic Support Tutor/Advisor until their academic standard has been raised. Once raised they will be released from this support system.

Students who achieve 40-50% in Module 1.1 Academic Writing and Study Skills will be referred to the Academic Support Tutor.

Students who achieve an average up to 55% across modules 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 will be referred to the Academic Support Tutor.

8. Credit award and progression

Credits will only be awarded upon successful external moderation of a completed module that has been marked as having all elements (both graded and non-graded) passed.

Credits cannot be awarded to a student until the Board of Examiners, followed by The Open University's Ratification Panel, have approved and validated the results.

There are three stages of the BA(Hons) degree with each stage worth a total of 120 credits. All 360 credits must be achieved in order to be awarded the final honours award.

The Board of Examiners would normally convene twice per year. There is scope to convene up to four times per year, which will be dictated by the number of cohorts on programme and their respective start and estimated progression dates.

9. Grading descriptor guidelines

The undergraduate descriptors are applicable to students' work at all levels 4, 5 and 6. The descriptors have been developed with reference to the FHEQ.

The descriptors are generic and applicable to a broad range of academic disciplines. They aim to provide:

- a reference for articulating the standards of students' work with the use of clear, consistent statements to describe student performance and what a student needs to do to reach a particular grade/mark band;
- a framework to indicate how a student can improve their performance, and to facilitate feedback to students.

Students' work should be assessed against published assessment criteria and marked/graded using the descriptors, including where work is marked as pass or fail. The descriptors describe key features and general characteristics of assessed work associated with each grade and where necessary they can be adapted. For learners to understand what they are being assessed on, clear assessment criteria and grading descriptors are needed. It is also important to ensure that the learning outcomes of the assessment are integrated with the grading descriptors.

Reference is made to the given level of study to emphasise the need to take this into account when considering the characteristics of students' work.

The descriptors are inter-related and should not be interpreted as a series of mutually exclusive categories. Students' work may demonstrate some characteristics of, for example, the pass and merit categories and the final mark/grade for the work should always be matter of academic judgement.

The emphasis given to various aspects of the descriptors will vary depending on the nature of the assessment task and discipline area. Markers and examiners should use the whole of the marking scale, interpreting the descriptors in the context of their discipline.

The descriptors may be used as they are or contextualised in the design of assessment- specific marking criteria in the context of a particular discipline, mode of assessment and in the development of marking schemes. These should clearly link back to the generic descriptors.

Where the design of a module and its associated assessment task(s)/ brief(s) mean that it is not appropriate to grade learner's work using these descriptors, for example the use of competency-based tasks, details of how the task(s) will be assessed should be clearly stated in the relevant Assessment Guide.

The generic descriptors can be found in Appendix 1.

10. Moderation

10.1 Internal moderation process

UCQ operates a transparent and fair process for marking and moderation of marks. We consider the requirements of the UK Quality Code and ensure that assessment criteria and marking schemes are clearly defined and that they are key factors in assuring that marking is carried out fairly and consistently.

All assessments, both graded and non-graded (pass/fail), will be moderated in line with these Procedures. The specific marking and grading criteria for each assessment is available within the individual Assessment Guides.

10.2 Definitions

First marker

In most cases the first marker will be the Module Lead responsible for the delivery of the assessment. The Module Lead will mark the work and produce feedback in preparation for moderation.

Moderator/second marker

The moderator (also known as second marker) looks at the sample* work and the first marker's proposed marks and feedback. If they agree about the mark and feedback, the moderation process ends.

Blind marking

Blind marking is the process whereby a second marker marks the work without the students' names being available to them – helping to ensure equality and fairness. Anonymity will be lifted following the ratification of marks by the Board of Examiners.

10.3 Internal moderation: Marked and graded assessments

Applicable to all assessments that are marked and graded, the internal moderation process exists to ensure fair and consistent marking. The use of the moderation process, including all firsts, all fails and a selection of elements from all other categories (the sample*) will ensure that first marking is scrutinised appropriately, and students can be confident of the assessment process. The sample will be a minimum of six items (where possible) and/or 30% of the cohort.

The following principles apply to marking of marked and graded assessments:

- 100% of marked and graded assessments will be 1st marked.
- The Moderator/second marker will consult the marking and feedback from the 1st marker when reviewing the submissions
- The Moderator/second marker will mark the sample*
- The 1st marker and Moderator/second marker will engage in an open moderation process to determine the veracity of marks in the sample

The 1st marker and Moderator will discuss a final mark for each element of the sample* based on the variation tolerance bands on the following page.

The table on the following page shows the recommendations of appropriate action to take based on a range of variations between the first marker and the Moderator. The variation tolerance bands and recommended actions have been notionally set by the Board of Examiners and approved by the Academic Council.

Following moderation there are four outcomes:

Confidence	Action
1st Marker and Moderator / Second Marker agree mark	Issue result
1st Marker and Moderator / Second Marker disagree (within 10 mark variance)	A moderated mark is awarded based on discussion between the 1st Marker and Moderator / Second Marker.
1st Marker and Moderator / Second Marker disagree (between 11 to 20 mark variance)	Where there is between 11-20 mark variance, a moderated mark will be awarded based on discussion between the 1st Marker, Moderator / Second Marker and Academic Programme Lead (APL), or Vice Principal where the APL is one of the original markers.
1st Marker and Moderator / Second Marker disagree – mark is overly generous/severe (21+ mark variance)	A 3rd marker takes responsibility for marking 100% of the cohort, including those not included in the original sample. This ensures learners not included in the original sample are not advantaged or disadvantaged. Moderation is then undertaken by all markers and the Academic Programme Lead before a mark is awarded

Notes:

- Module 3.4 Management Research Project will be a 100% blind 2nd mark. Anonymity will be lifted following the ratification of marks by the Board of Examiners.
- Every student will receive a moderated mark during each academic year
- Cohorts containing any UCQ staff will also be subject to 100% blind 2nd mark. Anonymity will be lifted following the ratification of marks by the Board of Examiners.

Standardisation activities throughout the year will monitor the effectiveness of this process.

10.4 Internal moderation: Threshold (pass/fail) assessments

Threshold assessments are marked against the stated criteria in the individual Assessment Guides but are not graded against a percentage scale. They are a pass if the criteria is judged to have been met, and a fail if it is judged not to have been met.

Threshold assessments are not moderated or 2nd marked in the same way as the graded assessments, in that they are 'verified' to ensure standardisation and consistency in the marking. The verification of the threshold assessments is required for 25% per cohort.

10.5 New academic staff

All new academic staff will be subject to enhanced moderation until full confidence has been awarded:

- A mentor will be allocated when employment commences – this will be someone who has previously delivered the module
- For the first two modules delivered by the new member of staff, 100% of students will be moderated

- Where there are no issues the normal moderation process will be undertaken thereafter
- Where there are still concerns, standardisation activities and additional moderation will be undertaken

10.6 External moderation

Following internal moderation, all assessment that contributes towards an award must be moderated by External Examiners, and the Board of Examiners with advice and feedback provided to internal examiners as appropriate.

The sample size selected for external moderation is defined as:

- All graded at 70% or higher
- All graded at 39% or lower
- A 20% sample of grades between 40% and 69%
- An overall minimum sample size of 25% will apply at all times

In order to ensure consistency and fairness to students, assessment regulations should stipulate that any amendments to the marks of the sample as a result of external moderation must be applied to the rest of the cohort.

10.7 Standardisation

Independent of the marking and moderation process, UCQ operates standardisation activities to ensure consistency in the application of levels and credits across our provision and to ensure consistency of practice in assessment and moderation.

It involves academic staff, including Module Leads, Lecturers, Professional Development Assessors and Moderators coming together with samples of learner work that they have assessed and carrying out peer review of one another's assessment to establish whether there is agreement and consistency. The purpose of standardisation activities is to:

- Support consistency and a common understanding of assessment criteria and grading descriptors.
- Monitor the effectiveness, consistency and interpretation of criteria between the 1st marker and Moderator.
- Provide opportunities for staff to share good practice in assessment decisions, including writing assignment briefs, establishing benchmarks, evidencing, providing feedback to learners and recording assessment marking and moderation decisions.
- Provide opportunities for self-assessment and action planning towards ongoing quality improvement and CPD.

This data will be recorded and used by the Academic Council in order to inform and report upon effectiveness of our provision.

Standardisation events will occur no less than twice per academic year. In addition to this, ad-hoc standardisation events are very much encouraged, if appropriate, at the discretion of the applicable academic staff.

10.8 Provision of resources for internal and external examiners

It is the responsibility of the Vice Principal to ensure that all internal examiners are provided with appropriate information, instruction or staff development as required, either through UCQ specific provision or through more generic training and staff development. All staff involved in the assessment of students should be competent to undertake their roles and responsibilities. Assessment procedures are routinely quality assured, including measures of reliability. All External Examiners must be provided with course specific guidance on assessment, including marking schemes and assessment criteria.

11. Monitoring and evaluation

The Academic Council, supported and informed by a variety of committees, is responsible for the periodic review of this policy. The success of this policy can be evaluated by:

- Learner voice, including questionnaire responses, showing high levels of satisfaction with the quality of teaching, learning & assessment they receive
- External reports on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Profiles of marks and grades awarded.
- Staff and student feedback on the quality of support provided by UCQ to enhance competence and skill in teaching and sharing best practice in teaching, learning and assessment.

12. Document history

ISSUE NO.	DATE	PAGE	REVIEWER	DETAIL OF AMENDMENT
10	25/07/2025	10	Tara Henderson	Full periodic review conducted; S12 Document history table added;
11	28/11/2025	5	Tara Henderson	MRAQCP updated to The Open University's Ratification Panel
12	02/06/2026	3	Tara Henderson	S3 wording updated for clarity

13. Appendix 1

Generic grading descriptors (levels 4, 5 and 6).

Grade Title:	Excellent Pass
Grade %:	70-100%
Descriptor:	All learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been achieved to a high and/or an exceptionally high level.
Criteria:	An excellent response to the task. The work demonstrates most or all of the below characteristics in relation to those expected at the given level of study within the discipline.
Guidelines:	In-depth understanding, exploration and insight. All specifications for the assessment task, including word limit/time limit where appropriate, have been adhered to. The organisation, structure and standard of presentation of the work, including referencing where appropriate, are excellent throughout. The work has been approached and/or executed/performed in an original way Insightful contextualisation, including relevant theory/ literature/ artefacts/ Performance Evidence of high to very high-quality analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critical appraisal Demonstrates high levels of initiative, personal responsibility, decision- making and achievement

Grade Title:	Very Good Pass
Grade %:	60-69%
Descriptor:	All learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been met fully at a good or very good standard.
Criteria:	A good to very good response to the task. The work demonstrates most or all of the below characteristics in relation to those expected at the given level of study.
Guidelines:	Good to very good understanding and exploration, some insight and/or thorough research. No significant inaccuracies, misunderstandings or errors The specifications for the assessment task, including word limit/time limit where appropriate, have been adhered to The work is well organised, coherent and the standard of presentation, including referencing where appropriate, is at least good The work has been approached and/or executed/performed in a comprehensive and appropriate way. Appropriate contextualisation, including relevant theory/ literature/ artefacts/performance Evidence of high quality analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critical appraisal Demonstrates good levels of initiative, personal responsibility, decision- making and achievement.

Grade Title:	Good Pass
Grade %:	50-59%
Descriptor:	All learning outcomes and assessment criteria have been met and some may have been achieved at a good standard.
Criteria:	A sound, competent response to the task. The work demonstrates most or all of the below characteristics in relation to those expected at the given level of study.
Guidelines:	Sound understanding and exploration, some insight and/or appropriate research No significant inaccuracies and/or misunderstandings No significant aberrations from the specifications for the assessment task, including word limit/time limit where appropriate The work is suitably organised and the standard of presentation, including referencing where appropriate, is at least sound The work has been approached and/or executed/performed in a standard way Sound analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critical appraisal Demonstrates some levels of initiative, personal responsibility, decision- making and achievement

Grade Title:	Pass
Grade %:	40-49%
Descriptor:	All learning outcomes and assessment criteria have just been met.
Criteria:	An adequate, but weak response to the task. The work demonstrates most or all of the below characteristics in relation to those expected at the given level of study within the discipline.
Guidelines:	Adequate understanding and/or exploration of major ideas with little insight and/or minimal research Some minor inaccuracies and/or misunderstandings Some minor aberrations from the specifications for the assessment task, including word limit/time limit where appropriate. The work is largely descriptive, some parts of the work are disorganised and the standard of presentation, including referencing where appropriate, is barely adequate The work has been approached and/or executed/performed in a basic and/or poor way Some, but limited, evidence of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critical appraisal Demonstrates limited levels of initiative, personal responsibility, decision- making and achievement

Grade Title:	Fail
Grade %:	0-39%
Descriptor:	One or more of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria have not been met.
Criteria:	An unsatisfactory response to the task. The work may display some strengths, but these are outweighed by weak features in relation to the expectations for the given level of study within the discipline.
Guidelines:	Limited understanding and/or exploration of major ideas with very little insight and/or minimal research. Some significant inaccuracies and/or misunderstandings. Insufficient attention paid to some of the assessment criteria and some significant aberrations from the specifications for the assessment task. The work is disorganised and unclear and the standard of presentation, including referencing where appropriate, is poor. The work has been approached and/or executed/performed in a poor way Insufficient evidence of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critical appraisal. Little evidence of initiative, personal responsibility, decision-making and achievement.