



EXTERNAL MODERATION of Postgraduate papers at 400-level (NZQF Level 8) and above Information Sheet for Departments and External Moderators

Scope of External Moderation

External moderation is an on-going commitment for all postgraduate programmes at the University of Otago, and is required as an on-going annual commitment prior to the finalisation of marks for semester one, semester two, non-standard and full-year papers (including research projects and dissertations) that contribute to final year postgraduate Honours, Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and Master's programmes.

An External Moderator should be an academic within the same subject area (or within a similar field if the same subject area is not available) at another tertiary institution, or could be a visiting scholar and should be appointed by the Head of Department, Director, or Head of Programme. In cases where an External Moderator does not fit the above criteria, approval should be sought from the Pro-Vice-Chancellor

Role of an External Moderator

The primary role of an External Moderator should be to check the standards applied in grading students, particularly at the pass-fail and B+/A- boundaries. External moderators are not required to undertake detailed examination of individual student work. This is undertaken by the staff member(s) involved in teaching and supervising the students. The external moderator's role is to monitor provisional marks and grades awarded by internal staff members to ensure that those grades are of a comparable standard to those awarded in other institutions or in line with what is expected in the relevant field. Substantial differences in distribution of marks may be entirely legitimate, given variation in the abilities and motivation of students, but deserve careful consideration. An External Moderator may also be consulted in the drafting of examination questions.

Please note that comments on the curriculum content are not expected. For large classes, the External Moderator can be sent a sample of assignments and examination scripts at the pass-fail and B+/A- boundaries for consideration.

When does External Moderation take place?

Within departments, grade distributions for all papers, and for examination questions and internal summative assessments should be reviewed by appropriate members of staff, ideally in a meeting of the internal examiners, and in consultation with an external moderator, for papers at 400-level (NZQF Level 8) and above (including research projects and dissertations) before marks are submitted.

Is an External Moderator expected to travel to the Otago campus?

Arrangements will vary depending on the location and the timing of each review. In some situations, it is appropriate for external moderators to travel to the relevant campus and spend some time meeting the staff and reviewing the assessment on site. The Department will make travel and accommodation arrangements should this be required. However, in other circumstances it will be preferable to use email, audio or video-conferencing.

Are there fees involved?

It is generally accepted within the New Zealand university sector that external moderation can be conducted without charge, beyond the covering of any costs incurred for travel and so on. Any such payment is the responsibility of the Department involved and should be negotiated directly between the Department and the External Moderator.

What must an External Moderator comment on?

Standards applied in grading students

- grades in the pass/fail category
- grades in the credit/distinction category (A-/B+)
- the appropriateness of grades given
- consistency of different markers
- the spread of grades across a class

What might an External Moderator comment on?

Programme Structure and Assessment

- timeframe allowed for the assignments
- the assessing standards of practical tasks
- the weighting of the examination/internal assessment
- relevance and appropriateness of the questions

Reporting the External Moderation

External Moderators are asked to submit a report to the Head of Department/Director/Head of Programme at the conclusion of their duties. The report may include comments on matters such as the examination and assessment process (appropriateness, relevance, weighting), grading standards and any suggestions for improvements.

Reports are primarily of use to the staff involved in teaching the paper(s) that an External Moderator has been asked to review. Since comments are expected to be predominantly general in nature, if mark adjustments are made, it is most common that this will affect the grades of all students in the relevant paper rather than the grades of individual students. Comments may also be used to adjust grades and/or grading practices in the future.

Additionally, as part of the University of Otago's quality assurance processes, a general summary of all external moderation reports that have been conducted across the institution each year is reported to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) in the form of a Summary of Findings and Recommendations. The External Moderator's name, position and organisation will be included alongside a brief summary of their findings/recommendations and the subsequent action taken by the Department/Programme.