

Anonymous Marking: Guide for Staff

The University Student Experience Committee agreed on 25 November 2019 to introduce anonymous marking (where appropriate) for summative assignments, to commence across the board from September 2020. Level 8 taught modules are exempt from this requirement.

What assignments should be anonymously marked?

Anonymous Marking (AM) is appropriate for many but not all assessments. The following table is a provisional list for where AM should be introduced and where it is not appropriate:

Use of Anonymous Marking at UoN	
Assessments that should be anonymously marked	Assessments where anonymous marking is not appropriate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard essay questions, reports, assignments where all students are answering the <u>same question, or selecting from a constrained brief or set of questions</u> • Exams • Multiple-choice / time-constrained assessments • Projects where all students or groups of students are completing the same assignment (or selecting from a constrained set of briefs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentations, performances, practical assessments or exhibitions where the student is physically involved during the assessment activity • Reflective assignments where the content of the assignment makes it possible for the marking tutor to identify the student • Dissertations

How to Mark Anonymously

[Guidance from the Learning Technology team on how to mark anonymously](#) is now available.

Possibly the biggest challenge will be reminding students not to put their name or student number on their submissions!

Why are we changing to anonymous marking?

A number of reasons underpin the SEC decision to introduce anonymous marking from September 2020. These include:

- Feedback from the SU BME Attainment Gap Survey, leading to a recommendation from the SU to the University in its 2018 Academic Review, and raised again in the SU's 2019 Academic Review.
- Student feedback via the National Student Survey
- Anonymous marking has been adopted by other higher education providers in response to the challenges of differential outcomes correlating to demographic characteristics.

Anonymous marking helps to minimise the impact and the perception of unconscious bias. The whole UK HE sector has a profound and long standing gap in outcomes, including enrolment, continuation, awards and graduate level employment, correlating to the ethnicity of students (but

not directly correlating to entry tariffs or markers of socioeconomic class). Over recent years, initiatives to lessen these unequal outcomes have been shown to reduce the gap.

At UoN, the average gap in degrees awarded to BAME and white students in 2017/18 is 17%¹, and students report in the NSS a perception of lack of fairness. The University of Northampton Students' Union conducted a BME Attainment Gap Survey by during the 2017/18 academic year, and comments received included:

"As BME students we feel undervalued and lack a voice. Our academic needs are not recognised, and I feel our work is not graded fairly."

"I feel that the marking at this Uni tends to be harsh towards people of colour."

The move to anonymous marking, where pedagogically possible, is one step in our journey towards obliterating the ethnicity gap in outcomes.

Anonymous Marking and Covid-19: Please be aware that late submissions and the granting of extensions may impact the ability for student work to be marked anonymously.

'Help! I don't think this is a good idea'

A number of staff may have concerns about anonymous marking. In recognition of these valid concerns:

- Anonymous marking will only be required in assignments where it is appropriate (see table above).
- The experiences of UoN staff already using anonymised marking will be reviewed to build understanding of best practice
- Colleagues are encouraged to trial anonymised marking between now and September 2020 to help address any practical issues.

One drawback concerns losing the ability to provide ipsative feedback, which builds on individual students' previous performance and development. We'd really like to hear from staff who have found ways to combine the benefits of anonymised summative marking with the benefits of ipsative feedback. Examples might include the use of assessment time to follow-up on any concerns with students in a face-to-face session where it is possible to provide more detailed feedback on a personal level once the marking has been finalised, but you may well have other creative ways to combine the benefits. Please share your solutions by [email to Rachel Maxwell](#) in the first instance.

What's the rest of the Sector doing?

A [sector-snapshot of institutional approaches to electronic management of assessment](#) (EMA) was conducted by the Electronic Assessment Management Jiscmail list in March 2018. This snapshot included a question on institutional approaches to anonymous marking (column G), to which 24 institutions contributed. Of these, there is a mixed picture:

Anonymous marking required	25%
Anonymous marking permitted/required, some exceptions	37.5%
No anonymous marking	37.5%

¹ Source: [OfS Access and Participation Data Dashboard](#). This figure is down from a high of 20% in 2015/16 but is still statistically significant. This is against a sector average of 13.7% (which is also statistically significant).

Reflection and Review

We will review experiences and best practice in Spring/Summer 2021, to learn from what works from both staff and student perspectives.