

The background of the cover is a deep red color with a faint, repeating pattern of musical notation. On the left side, there is a vertical strip of a white musical score with black notation, including notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'cresc.', 'f stretto', and 'tempo'.

ASSESSMENT MODERATION POLICY

Medina Foundation for Music

April 2016

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner features a golden treble clef on the left. From it, several thin, golden lines curve upwards and to the right, forming a series of overlapping loops. Interspersed among these lines are various musical symbols, including eighth notes, sixteenth notes, and sharp signs (#), rendered in shades of gold and light blue.

Medina Foundation for Music

Assessment Moderation Policy

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1

Preamble

Effective moderation of assessment is fundamental to the ongoing development of academic quality. Moderation is undertaken to enable a reasonable level of assurance that assessment activities have been designed and implemented appropriately so that students and staff can be confident that the results provided are valid and reliable.

2

Policy

The Medina Foundation for Music, hereafter MFM, is committed to the processes of assessment moderation at the systemic and individual level.

The purpose of this policy is to:

- a. establish legal accountability for assessment decisions made against qualifications and unit standards within the primary focus of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF),
- b. ensure that persons holding legal accountability for assessment and moderation decisions have the competence to comply with current regulations applying to such decisions,
- c. ensure that qualifications and standards for which the MFM has been accredited are assessed validly, reliably and practicably,
- d. ensure that regulations for assessment and moderation are implemented in a way that is strategically appropriate and practicable, and
- e. inform stakeholders, constituents and teachers of the policy, principles and procedures for assessment, moderation, student appeals, irregularities and registration of assessors and moderators.

The policy applies to all processes conducted by MFM.

3

Definition

Moderation is a quality assurance process directed at ensuring that assessment is accurate, consistent and fair. Moderation is required for every assessment which involves a degree of

subjectivity. Moderation can be effected through several methods and is part of the quality cycle. Moderation spans the entire assessment event, including the design and post-event analysis of the validity of the assessment.

4

Purpose

The fundamental purpose of moderation is to promote quality and ensure consistency. Five foci are specified to address this purpose:

- a. Ensure courses and modules meet NCFHE standards.
- b. Courses and modules are comparable with other further and higher education providers.
- c. Courses and modules meet the standards of external accreditation authorities.
- d. The currency of professional academic standards is maintained.
- e. MFM's commitment to quality and standards is communicated externally.

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Principles

Within the context described above, moderation can be viewed as a set of tasks and actions undertaken internally and externally. To guide the tasks and actions, the following principles and responsibilities have been developed to facilitate effective moderation:

- a. Procedures for assessment are explicit, valid and reliable and these procedures are made public to all stakeholders.
- b. Assessment tasks reflect the learning outcomes and performance criteria as stated in the module outline.
- c. Students are made aware of assessment requirements upon applying for a course.
- d. All assessment tasks are graded against a marking scheme (rubric) that is consistent with the assessment criteria.
- e. MFM maintains transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and moderating grades.
- f. Moderation processes are evaluated periodically.

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Moderation Levels

6.1. Moderation at the systemic level

Moderation processes at the systemic level can be undertaken externally and internally. External moderation includes:

- a. course accreditation through NCFHE and resultant outcomes,
- b. moderation partnerships with other further and higher education providers, and
- c. satisfaction feedback from interested entities.

Examples of Internal moderation are:

- a. Use of expert advisory panels in course development
- b. Oversight from the Academic Board of MFM's academic quality processes
- c. Formalisation of committees (eg Teaching and Learning Committee) to assess internal academic processes
- d. The use of checking processes to moderate the grading of assessment tasks

6.2. Moderation at the individual level

Individual teachers are required to be actively engaged in ongoing moderation processes through:

- a. active engagement in scholarship,
- b. demonstrated commitment to academic standards, and
- c. liaison with academic peers

7

Moderation Plans

The Academic Director is responsible for the development of a moderation plan for each examination session. The moderation plan will include tasks associated with one or more of the marking and grading review strategies listed above, with assigned responsibilities for completion of the tasks and dates and times for completion of the tasks.

The activities of the moderation plan must occur in the period following the initial marking and recording of results at the end of each examination session and before the meeting of the assessment subcommittee to ratify the grades.

8

Responsibilities

The following responsibilities underpin moderation processes at MFM:

Academic Director

The Academic Director is responsible for the overall consistency of assessment throughout the course.

Consistency of assessment is reviewed as part of the normal quality assurance monitoring process. The Academic Director reports on a range of quality metrics to the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Academic Board.

The Academic Director liaises with teachers to provide opportunities for staff to discuss aspects of assessment design, timing, consistency and implementation. The Academic Director reports to the Teaching and Learning subcommittee on any issues that may arise through the marking and moderation process.

Senior Teachers

Senior Teachers are responsible for the alignment of modules and the coherence of the assessment tasks included within them. If there are multiple teachers/markers in the module, Senior Teachers convene teacher meetings to discuss similar curriculum and assessment issues as above, in relation to the module.

Course Advisory Committees

The course advisory committee for each course (music theory or practice) is responsible for the review of all module outlines on a three year cycle to ensure, inter alia, that assessment tasks, grading and other related assessment information is appropriate.

Assessment Subcommittee

The assessment subcommittee is responsible for reviewing all module grades biannually to ensure compliance with the MFM Assessment Policy.

Academic Board

The Academic Board is responsible for reviewing the distribution of grades on an annual basis to ensure compliance with the MFM Assessment Policy.

The Academic Board shall be made up of the Academic Director, the Heads of Department and the Chief Examiner. The College Principal may attend board meetings at his/her discretion or upon request of the Board. Teachers having Diploma at Licentiate level or above and a minimum of eight years teaching experience are eligible for being on the Board.

9

Tasks and Actions

Within the broader responsibilities listed above, the following tasks and actions are used as moderation mechanisms.

9.1. Module Outline Development

All module outlines and assessment tasks are required to be checked by the Academic Director. This includes checking and providing feedback in relation to the:

- a. alignment of assessment tasks with the unit's learning outcomes and in relation to the level of study,
- b. clarity of the task description,
- c. criteria and standards by which the tasks will be marked,
- d. clarity and usefulness of any accompanying assessment rubric,
- e. ways in which students will receive feedback,
- f. guidance available for markers, and
- g. workload of the assessment tasks

9.2. Moderation by review of marking and grading

A key aspect of moderation is the review of a sample of students' marked work to determine whether the marking is consistent with the assessment criteria and undertaken at the appropriate standard. As well, all students are given the opportunity to give their feedback through the website or by sending an email at any time. These suggestions are taken into consideration and discussed during the meeting held for this purpose. Some examples of marking and grading review strategies are:

- a. blind marking of the papers or a sample of papers, i.e. the marker does not know the identity of the students whilst marking,
- b. second-marking or sampling, by the same assessor or a different assessor, concentrating at the boundaries of grade classifications (i.e. pass/fail or distinction/high distinction etc.). There should be no indication of the first assessor's grades or comments. A reasonable sample would be 5% of the papers or 10 papers (whichever is the larger),
- c. marking by an assessor external to the module, ideally by someone who has taught the module before,
- d. assign the same marker to certain questions in assessments so all those questions are marked by the same assessor across different groups,
- e. use computer aided marking (for example, machine readable multiple choice quiz sheets, on-line automated marking),
- f. use of the same marking criteria rubric by all assessors,
- g. comparison with model answers for the question type, and
- h. pre-marking assessor comparability meetings to trial mark and set marking standards.

10

Assessment

10.1. Definition of assessment

Assessment is the process of gathering and weighing evidence in order to determine whether students have demonstrated applied competence in relation to outcomes. These outcomes are specified in module standards and qualifications accredited by the NCFHE.

10.1.1. Formative assessment

Formative assessment is assessment designed to support and inform teachers and students to ensure continuing progress towards the outcomes, standards and skills programmes or qualifications targeted. It is also known as continuous assessment and is used during the course of learning to support the student by giving him/her feedback on progress. It can be used for diagnostic and remedial purposes, and can be used to build up and document a candidate profile over time in order to contribute evidence of competence to feed into summative results linked to the award of credit. The main purpose of formative assessment is to support learning, and it can be described as developmental.

10.1.2. Summative assessment

Summative assessment is assessment used to make a judgement about student achievements. This is carried out when a student is ready to be assessed, usually at the end of a programme. In longer learning programmes summative assessment can take place at different points to signify the completion of a particular portion of a learning programme. In this case, the learning activities and formative assessments are already completed, and the purpose of the summative assessment is specifically to generate evidence of competence.

Its purpose is to confirm that students or candidates have met all the requirements to be awarded a unit standard or qualification and should be made up of evidence collected through a variety of assessment methods. The assessor's job is to evaluate the evidence presented against the requirements of a standard or qualification in order to decide whether or not credits or a qualification may be awarded.

10.1.3. Integrated assessment

Integrated assessment should assess the ability to combine key foundational, practical and reflexive competencies with some critical cross field outcomes and apply these in a practical context for a defined purpose.

Integrated assessment at a qualification level must provide opportunities for students to show that they are able to integrate concepts, ideas and actions across unit standards to achieve competence that is clearly linked to the purpose of the award or qualification.

10.2. Principles of good assessment

FAIRNESS + VALIDITY + RELIABILITY + PRACTICABILITY = CREDIBILITY

The critical overriding principle of assessment is that of ethics: because the results of assessment can lead to an increase in pay, improved career prospects and the like, the principles of assessment should be applied ethically and responsibly. The universal assessment principles of fairness, validity, reliability and practicability form the foundation of the MFM Assessment Policy. Fairness relates mainly to the assessment process. Validity relates mainly to the assessment design. Reliability relates mainly to the conduct of the assessment. And practicability relates mainly to the financial and time implications of assessment.

10.2.1. Fairness

A fair assessment should not in any way hinder or advantage a candidate. Examples of unfairness might include:

- a. unequal opportunities or resources,
- b. biased assessment (e.g. in relation to ethnicity, gender, age, disability, social class, language),
- c. assessor assumptions about the candidate, based on previous performance,
- d. unethical behaviour by the assessor, candidate or other person involved (threats, bribes, copying, leaking of confidential information, etc.),
- e. any irregularities in the conduct of the assessment,
- f. a lack of transparency about the assessment process, or
- g. ambiguous or unclear assessment instructions.

10.2.2. Validity

A valid assessment really assesses the competencies it claims to assess. In order to achieve validity in the assessment, assessors must:

- a. ensure that the selected assessment instrument really targets the selected outcomes/unit standards,
- b. ensure that the assessment method is “fit for purpose”, and
- c. ensure that the rules of evidence have been applied.

10.2.3. Reliability

A reliable assessment is one that is consistent with other assessments made by the same and/or other assessors in relation to the same unit standard or qualification. Consistency means that comparable judgments are made in similar contexts each time a particular assessment is conducted. Assessment results should not be influenced by variables such as:

- a. different assessors interpreting the standards or qualifications differently,
- b. assessor stress and fatigue, or
- c. a gradual “drift” in interpretation of standards due to lack of adequate moderation processes.

10.2.4. Practicability

A practicable assessment is effective without placing unreasonable demands on the relevant role-players. Assessment should be designed to be as effective as possible in the context of what is feasible and efficient in a particular learning programme. It should try to avoid unreasonable demands in relation to the time commitments required for the generation, collection, presentation and assessment of evidence involving:

- a. the student,
- b. the assessor,
- c. third party witnesses (mentors, coaches), and
- d. evidence facilitators, advisors and others involved in advice and support.

10.3. Rules of evidence

In order to make a rational assessment decision about the award of credits or qualifications, the assessor must evaluate the evidence presented. This evaluation is governed by the following rules of evidence: Evidence must be:

- a. sufficient (Does it meet the requirements of the unit standard(s) or qualification?),
- b. valid (Does the evidence truly demonstrate due competence?),
- c. authentic (Was the evidence really produced by the student being assessed?), and
- d. current (is the evidence recent enough to demonstrate current competence it claims to demonstrate?).

10.4. Frequency of assessments

MFM shall conduct assessments at planned intervals. The timing and focus of these assessments must be recorded in an assessment plan which should be given to students as part of the course/programme outline on registration.

10.5. The roles and responsibility of the MFM

MFM will:

- a. ensure that the full range of module standards or exit level outcomes are assessed and their relevant assessment criteria applied,
- b. develop an assessment plan covering each module, award, qualification or learning programme outlining the different assessment methods, timing, weighting, etc.,
- c. ensure that the assessment plan includes assessment tasks that integrate linked knowledge and skills across unit standards wherever possible,
- d. ensure that the assessment practices are valid:
 - i. the types of methods and instruments used are varied and appropriate,
 - ii. the outcomes being assessed are clearly stated and the instruments really assess these outcomes,
 - iii. knowledge and skills assessed relate to the purpose of the unit standard(s) or qualification, and
 - iv. the evidence collected is authentic, sufficient and current;

- e. Ensure that the assessment practices are fair:
 - I. assessments are not biased in terms of ethnicity, gender, age, context, etc.,
 - II. language in the assessment is appropriate to the level of the student,
 - III. students are adequately prepared for assessment events,
 - IV. formative assessments are used continuously to enhance the quality of teaching and learning,
 - V. students are given constructive feedback on assessment results, and
 - VI. students have a right to appeal.
- f. Ensure that assessment practices are reliable:
 - I. assessors and students are provided with clear assessment instructions,
 - II. assessors interpret module standards and/ or qualifications consistently, and
 - III. assessment results are moderated.
- g. Ensure that assessments are properly administered:
 - I. students are informed about the assessment plans, the right to appeal, re-assessment opportunities, time frames,
 - II. appropriate logistical arrangements are made,
 - III. recording procedures are adequate and accurate, and
 - IV. adequate security arrangements are made to avoid irregularities.

10.6. Roles and responsibilities of assessors

Assessors must:

- a. abide by the MFM's Code of Conduct for Assessors as outlined in the Assessment Procedures Policy, Art 9 (Appendix),
- b. assess students against the relevant unit standard(s) and/or qualification(s),
- c. be guided by the MFM assessment plan, guide, tools and reporting format,
- d. assess in a fair and transparent manner, avoiding bias and addressing barriers to learning; judge evidence observing the rules of evidence,
- e. give constructive feedback to students, and
- f. give feedback to moderators on the unit standard(s) and/or qualification(s), as well as any difficulties pertaining to the conditions at the assessment venue or other factors possibly undermining the validity of the assessment results.

11

Moderation

Moderation is a key element of a credible assessment system.

11.1. Definitions

11.1.1. Moderation

Moderation is a quality assurance process that ensures that assessments meet the specified outcomes as described in the MQF standards and qualifications, and are fair, valid and reliable. It is a process for ensuring that marks or grades are awarded appropriately and consistently and involves checking and reviewing assessment schemes, items and assessor judgments. It is essentially a form of feedback to markers to help them align their marking standards with those of other markers.

Just as internal assessment is distinguished from external assessment, a distinction is made between various types of moderation. These include “internal” moderation and “external” moderation (usually referred to as verification of student achievements).

11.1.2. Internal and external moderation

The purpose of internal moderation is to ensure that assessments conducted in relation to programmes offered are consistent, accurate and well-designed. Each course is allocated a Moderator to review and endorse the assessment scheme, review and endorse each summative assessment item and verify and endorse the final grades allocated to students.

11.1.3. Stages of moderation

- a. Planning: Moderation should be planned as part of course design and implementation. It should not be left to afterthought or chance. The primary focus is consistency in the application of standards within a course, with a secondary issue of consistency across courses within a program.
- b. Course preparation: Review assessments independently prior to delivery to ensure that they are well designed and include clear guidelines for students and markers.
- c. Assessor preparation: Familiarise all markers with the marking scheme and agree on marking processes. Trial marking to refine the marking scheme and generate common understandings of expected standards. Inclusion of someone external to the course helps align the adopted standards with other courses in the program. Discussion with a colleague is especially important where there is a single marker.
- d. Review during marking (before marks or grades are finalised): It is too late or too awkward to change marks after all the marking is done. It is better to monitor and refine marker performance during the marking.

- e. Post-marking review: This stage does not affect the marks and grades given to students but is important for the future. Questions to ask are 'How consistent were we?' and 'How can we do better next time?'

11.2. Principles guiding moderation policy

The principles that guide good assessment must also be applied in all moderation practices.

Fairness and reliability are the key principles to be applied in the moderation of the assessment process. In addition, the rules of evidence used for assessment must be applied consistently throughout the moderation process.

Fairness and validity are the most important considerations in the moderation of the assessment instrument(s). And the moderation of practicability will entail following up on any negative impacts relating to the financial and time implications of assessment.

11.3. Developmental aspect of moderation policy

MFM is committed to strive for the continuous improvement of assessment and moderation practitioners, processes and procedures. Moderation procedures must be simple, clear and well-documented to enable assessors and moderators to use them effectively; they must include sections for feedback to assessors as well as recommendations, comments and questions.

11.4. Frequency of moderation

12.4.1. MFM shall conduct moderation at planned intervals, (for example, upon the completion of a module).

12.4.2. MFM shall ensure that a sample of all assessments conducted is moderated, with the aim of enhancing the quality of assessments.

Time-frames should be linked to the time-frames for assessment and there should be deadlines for turnaround times for feedback to students. Feedback should be prompt enough to help students to correct problems and perform optimally in the next section of their programme.

11.5. Further moderation procedures

- a. Creating transparency: Well-designed assessments provide clear specifications about what is expected. The assessment criteria should be made explicit. Consider also making statements or providing examples that illustrate different standards of performance (grade levels).
- b. Self moderation: Markers can be inconsistent within themselves, especially if there are many assessments to mark and it takes several marking sessions. It is important to check back over scripts that have been marked to ensure that scripts marked earlier and later have been treated similarly.
- c. Expert moderation: Sometimes an independent viewpoint is needed. This person could comment on samples of student scripts or on borderline or difficult cases, thus providing an independent perspective and overview.
- d. Peer moderation: Markers meet to review their marking. This should occur early in the marking and preferably at other times during the marking to keep markers 'on track'.

- e. Selecting scripts for review: When numbers are small, all scripts might be reviewed. When numbers are large, sampling is needed. Sampling can be random (possibly stratified within levels) or deliberate (e.g., mid-grade, borderline or problematic). The number of scripts sampled depends on many factors such as number of markers, variability of performance, tolerance of inconsistency, logistics, time and cost.
- f. Blind re-marking: In this case, the moderator (expert or peer) is not informed of the previous marker's judgment of a script. This means placing no marks or annotations on the script—often an unrealistic requirement. Where any difference exceeds a threshold, especially across grade levels, discussion is needed to resolve the difference and reach common agreement.
- g. Confirmatory review: This is often more realistic and more helpful than blind re-marking. The moderator (expert or peer) is completely informed of the previous marker's judgment of a script. The reviewer's task is to check whether they can agree with the previous marker. Discussion is needed where the reviewer cannot find the evidence to sustain the marker's judgement.
- h. Allocation of scripts: Typically, scripts are re-marked or reviewed by one other person. With multiple markers, the sample can be randomly shuffled among markers. For some purposes (e.g. assisting new markers or at later stages of marking) pairs of markers might review a selection of each other's scripts.
- i. Resolving differences: When a pair of markers cannot agree on a result, an arbitrator is needed. Recalcitrant markers may have to be replaced.
- j. Follow through: Agreements about the standards applied to the sample scripts need to be applied to all other scripts. The message is 'go and do likewise'.
- k. In-situ marking: Some assessments are conducted in-situ (e.g. orals, presentations, music or performance). An audiovisual record may be kept as backup, however the grade is based on the performance not the recording. In such cases, it may be desirable to have more than one marker and to reach consensus through discussion.
- l. Moderation across courses: At a wider level, program coordinators need to monitor standards across courses and create linkages between staff in different courses to encourage greater consistency in assessment processes and application of common standards.

11.6. Roles and responsibilities of the MFM

The MFM will:

- a. establish and maintain a quality management system that will regulate assessment and moderation within the organisation;
- b. conduct moderation at planned intervals recorded in the moderation plan
- c. conduct moderation during design phase, implementation phase and review phase;
- d. conduct moderation in line with the relevant unit standards and qualifications and the principles of good assessment, observing the rules of evidence; moderate at least 10% of assessments, and justify the criteria used to select the sample;

12

Rights and Responsibilities of Students

12.1. Students' rights

- a. Students should be assessed against each module standard (or coherent group of linked standards) and/or qualification for which they are registered.
- b. Students' assessment should address each specific outcome contained within a module and all assessment criteria and range specified within the module should be taken into consideration in the assessment design.
- c. The module contains all the information and criteria necessary for assessment.
- d. Once they have been found competent against a module or level, students will be certificated for that module or level.
- e. If students are found "not yet competent" as a result of the assessment, they will be given specific feedback regarding the areas of shortfalls, and will be guided and informed on how to address identified gaps.
- f. Students have a right to access to their assessment records.
- g. If students do not agree with the assessment decision, they have the right to ask that the assessment be moderated (refer to 12.3. below).
- h. Confidentiality regarding student's assessment and assessment results must be maintained, and only authorised parties should have access to this information during the appeals process.

12.2. Students' responsibilities

- a. Students have the responsibility of familiarising themselves with the MFM's policies regarding assessment.
- b. Students have the responsibility of familiarising themselves with the kinds of assessment activities that they would be asked to perform, the standard and level of performance expected, the type and amount of evidence to be collected and their responsibility regarding the collection and presentation of evidence.
- c. Students are responsible for their own readiness for assessment or reassessment, and for agreeing to arrangements for the date and time of the assessment and any re-assessment offered.

12.3. Request for moderation of assessment

If students do not agree with the assessment decision, they have the right to ask that the assessment be moderated. The procedure for submitting an application for review of assessment is outlined in the Assessment Procedure Policy, Art 7.8.2. (ii).

Appendix

Code of Conduct for Assessors (Assessment Procedure Policy, Art. 9)

The Code of Conduct detailed below is included in this Policy to support professionally responsible and ethical assessment practice and to guide MFM assessors in the responsibilities of their work.

- i. The differing needs and requirements of the candidates are identified and handled with sensitivity.
- ii. Potential forms of conflict of interest in the assessment process and/or outcomes are identified, and appropriate referrals are made, if necessary.
- iii. All forms of harassment are avoided throughout the assessment process and in the review and reporting of assessment outcomes.
- iv. The rights of candidates are protected during and after the assessment process.
- v. Candidates are made aware of their rights and processes of appeal.
- vi. Personal or interpersonal factors that are irrelevant to the assessment of competence must not influence the assessment outcomes.
- vii. Assessment decisions are based on available evidence that can be produced and verified by another assessor.
- viii. Evidence is verified against the rules of evidence.
- ix. Assessments are conducted within the boundaries of the assessment system policies and procedures.
- x. Assessment systems and tools are consistent with equal opportunity rights.
- xi. Candidates are informed of all assessment reporting processes prior to the assessment.
- xii. Candidates are informed of all known potential consequences of assessment decisions, prior to the assessment.
- xiii. Confidentiality is maintained regarding assessment decisions/outcomes and records of individual assessment outcomes which identify personal details are only released with the written permission of the candidate/s.
- xiv. Assessment outcomes are used consistently with the purposes explained to candidates.
- xv. Professional development opportunities are identified and sought.
- xvi. Opportunities for networking amongst assessors are created and maintained.
- xvii. Opportunities are created for technical assistance in planning, conducting and reviewing assessment practice and participating in validation.

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