Rationale for adoption of anonymous marking at Canterbury Christ Church University

Aims of the Anonymous Marking Project

Our aim is to address students' perception of bias in marking. The introduction of anonymous marking is one of several measures designed to address our attainment gap (black students' outcomes are not as high at undergraduate level as that of white students) by reducing unconscious bias through anonymisation. An evaluation will help determine whether it will help to reduce our gap.

We also aim to firm up the marking process: anonymisation provides an additional guarantee of fairness and transparency in the marking and moderation process. The focus on rigorous marking criteria will be even greater. Also, our external examiners regularly challenge us as to why we have not adopted anonymous marking as is the norm at the majority of other institutions.

Specific aims of the 2021/22 pilot

The pilot will help us achieve the following:

- trial technologies (e.g., Turnitin), a new policy and processes (e.g., mark transfer) that facilitate anonymous marking.
- enable stakeholders (students, staff) to feedback on what works well and where changes to technologies and processes will be needed
- Following a full evaluation, roll out anonymous marking more widely in 2022/23 at CCCU.

Benefits of Anonymous Marking

Anonymous marking assures students that it is the *work* that is being marked, *not the student* themselves, based on the published assessment criteria and therefore removing the potential for pre-judged expectations of student performance.

For markers this can reduce the challenge (and perhaps anxiety for some) of managing unconscious bias and protect them from accusations of unfairness and discrimination.

Alleviation of Potential Issues in terms of the student experience

A common concern with anonymous marking is that it is not possible for tutors to provide students with "personalised" feedback. It is true that, for summative feedback on work that is anonymised, markers cannot refer to achievements or issues from specific students' previous work, e.g., "you have now fully understood how to reference work".

However, individualised feedback is still possible in many ways:

- Formative activities are not anonymised (as stated in the Policy, except submission of final draft) and formative feedback can be tailored to each student
- Personalised feedback can be provided on summative work once the mark has been released, in the form of a tutorial for example
- Individualised feedback can be given on an anonymous piece of work: it is feedback specific to the work presented, with feedforward to help the student to improve in areas of weaknesses (e.g., "your engagement with the literature needs to be strengthened") and build on the strengths demonstrated (e.g., "a very effective reflection in your second section"). This feedback shows that the work has been reviewed in detail and the student's effort is acknowledged, for example by using on-script comments.