

MARK ADJUSTMENTS POLICY

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Acronyms

APL Framework	Academic Programme Leadership Framework
AVC Committee	Assessment Verification and Certification Committee
PIRI	Plan, Implement, Review, Improve
SIS	Student Information System

1. Policy Statement

The purpose of this policy is to affirm the objectives, rationale, and academic governance of MANCOSA's Mark Adjustment procedures, which are in line with the institution's academic strategy. The policy aims to foster a culture of transparency, accountability and integrity that works in the interests of assuring the strategic pillars of academic excellence and student success at MANCOSA. The standardisation of Mark Adjustments intends to ensure fairness, validity, and reliability of student assessment results across all modules and programmes offered by the institution. As such, the provisions made in the policy are designed to mitigate the impact of factors beyond a student's knowledge and aptitude on their performance, ensuring equivalency of academic standards and an accurate reflection of performance against learning outcomes. As an online distance higher education institution, MANCOSA recognises the inherent variability in assessment tasks in relation to the academic setting and marking of assessments, as well as stemming from potential technical and online learning environment factors.

The policy objective is to align the Mark Adjustment process with MANCOSA's prevailing Academic Programme Leadership (APL) Framework, and Teaching and Learning Strategy, to ensure that Mark Adjustments are conducted as part of the broader academic management function at MANCOSA and informs remedial activities such as staff training where required. The Assessment Directorate in collaboration with the Academic Directorate and the Teaching and Learning Directorate, will undertake the following:

- Improve staff and student awareness of the higher education assessment landscape and MANCOSA's assessment policies and procedures, including its associated mark adjustment procedures and the rationalisation thereof;
- Enhance Mark Adjustment procedures for the promotion of academic quality, validity, fairness, and integrity;
- Implement measures to ensure equivalency and consistency in the impact of Mark Adjustments;
- Implement measures to provide opportunities for academic staff to enhance their assessment competencies and to support their professional growth and development, to reduce potential instances of academic variability which may lead to Mark Adjustments;
- Outline clear roles and responsibilities which ensure transparency in the mark adjustment process.
- Reconcile the activities of assessment moderation, marking moderation, marker check meetings and Academic Programme Leader and School Manager input with the Mark Adjustment function;
- Provide for effective internal and external communication relating to Mark Adjustments at MANCOSA and the variation thereof, thereby promoting a culture of transparency and accountability, and linking the Mark Adjustment function with the broader academic imperative of continuous improvement
- Promote the link between assessments, teaching and learning, and academic quality in line with MANCOSA's prevailing Academic Programme Leadership and Teaching and Learning Frameworks.
- A process compliance that aligns with institutional policies and external regulatory requirements.

2. Policy Background

The policy applies to all academic and administrative assessment staff employed at MANCOSA (permanent and contract, including independent contractors) who are engaged in assessment activities. In terms of its application, the policy specifically applies to the adjustment of marks following the completion of the marking process of assessments, which includes the following contextual circumstances:

- 2.1.1 Mark Adjustments on formative and summative assessment results in line with moderator recommendations for a particular assessment
- 2.1.2 The application of ranged Mark Adjustments on summative assessment results for a particular module
- 2.1.3 Mark Adjustments on final results for individual students of all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, inclusive of WIL, Capstone and Oral Assessments
- 2.1.4 The policy does not apply to postgraduate research dissertations and research projects, as these fall in the purview of the research policy
- 2.2 The policy also articulates provisions for the investigation, review and remediation of those factors leading to the implementation of Mark Adjustments. This includes identifying root causes, implementing corrective actions, and ensuring continuous improvement through regular reviews.
- 2.3 The criteria used as a rationale for Mark Adjustments must be academic in nature and informed by statistical evidence which has been interrogated by an appointed moderator, School Manager and the Teaching and Learning Directorate to ensure consistency and academic integrity.
- 2.4 MANCOSA commits to the allocation of resources for the administration of Mark Adjustments as a component of the institution's assessment function.
- 2.5 MANCOSA continuously improves on its academic and assessment support system, academic and assessment administrative processes, financial and human resource policies, and processes, which are non-bureaucratic, user-friendly, and enabling. This administrative process will be administered by well-trained, support staff that share the pride of academic success at MANCOSA.
- 2.6 MANCOSA is committed to regular training for staff involved in mark adjustments to ensure they are up to date with best practices and institutional policies.
- 2.7 MANCOSA's Mark Adjustment Policy and Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) must be read and understood in relation to MANCOSA's Assessment Policy, the APL Framework, the Teaching and Learning Framework, as well as those relevant assessment and academic processes, such as moderation and programme review.

3. Policy Principles to Effect Mark Adjustments on Formative and Summative Assessment Results in Line with Moderation Recommendations

- 3.1 Aligned with MANCOSA's Assessment Policy, marking is externally moderated on all exit-level modules on all programmes at the institution, barring those programmes which are completed by dissertation only.
- 3.2 The purpose of moderation is to ensure the consistency, reliability, and validity in the academic quality of the assessment marking, in accordance with the stipulated assessment outcomes and rubric.

- 3.3 As part of the moderation process, moderators may identify inconsistencies in the marking and subsequently make recommendations for remediation. These recommendations may encompass remarking on a specific assessment, adjusting the marking of a specific marker, or providing additional training to markers to ensure uniformity in the overall assessment grading.
- 3.4 If a moderator does recommend that any marks be adjusted, this will be actioned by the relevant Assessment Administration Manager and communicated to the relevant Academic Programme Leader, School Manager and Teaching and Learning directorate to maintain academic quality and consistency.
- 3.5 Upon the implementation of the adjustment, the provisions outlined in Section 6 of this policy will be enforced.
- 3.6 MANCOSA will make all reasonable efforts to ensure the consistency, reliability, and validity of marking through the Marker Check Process, which is conducted for all assessments administered. This process is continually reviewed and improved to maintain high standards of academic quality.

4. Policy Principles to Effect Ranged Mark Adjustments for Online Summative Assessment Results

- 4.1 Ranged Mark Adjustments are defined as those adjustments which are made to a set of marks or grades within a defined range for a particular assessment.
- 4.2 Upon the conclusion of marking for a summative assessment cycle, the student performance data, including the mean, median and mode, will be clustered per programme, per school and the respective performance data will be shared with the relevant School Managers.
- 4.3 The respective School Managers will analyse the data with the respective academic clusters to determine the central tendency and skewness of student performance in a module and evaluate this against the extent to which the spread of marks for each module is normally distributed. In the effort to determine the spread of results and trends, a "bell curve" mathematical function or ogive graph, using statistical software, may be applied to evaluate the student performance data and distribution of results to identify the central tendency and potential skewness. Most critically, this must be evaluated per module in line with historical trends in student performance for the particular module and academic field.
- 4.4 In instances where student performance is deemed to be skewed (i.e. significantly different from what is considered a normal distribution of marks for a given module), the School Managers may recommend a Range Mark Adjustment in student marks to normalise the data and spread of marks for a given module.
- 4.5 Recommendations for Ranged Mark Adjustments which would result in any students moving from a passing grade to a failing grade will not be considered or implemented under any circumstances, as this would unfairly disadvantage those students.
- 4.6 The School Managers will subsequently table the recommendations and a justification/rationale thereof to the Assessment, Verification and Certification (AVC) Committee including representation from the Teaching and Learning Directorate, for consideration, interrogation, approval, and ratification.
- 4.7 Upon approval of the recommended range adjustments by the AVC Committee, the Assessment Administration Managers shall implement the approved adjustments, within MANCOSA's Student Information System (SIS).

- 4.8 Upon completion of the ranged Mark Adjustments being actioned by the Assessment Administration Managers, an audit trail of the effected adjustments must be provided to the AVC Committee for record keeping, demonstrating alignment to the adjustments which were approved and ratified by the committee. Subsequently, the Individual Mark Adjustments procedure outlined in section 5 of this policy will be executed by the Assessment Administration Managers, after which the final results will be released to students through the appropriate MANCOSA channels.
- 4.9 Following the implementation of a Ranged Mark Adjustment, the provisions specified in Section 6 of this policy will be applied.

5. Policy Principles to Effect Individual Mark Adjustments on Final Results

- 5.1 Individual Mark Adjustments are defined as those adjustments which are made to the marks or grades of individual students for a particular module.
- 5.2 At MANCOSA, Individual Mark Adjustments may be applied to the marks of students whose final results fall within a narrow margin of a significant benchmark, such as a passing grade or distinction. These adjustments are intended to account for minor errors, borderline performance, or exceptional circumstances that may have affected the student's ability to achieve the desired grade by a small margin. The aim is to ensure fairness for students who are close to a significant grade threshold. Consequently, students whose final results are within a narrow margin of a passing grade may receive an Individual Mark Adjustment equivalent to a "condoned pass." It is important to note that Individual Mark Adjustments constitute the only means by which a condoned pass may be granted to a student for a given module.
- 5.3 Individual Mark Adjustments will only be applied to students within a 2% range of the passing grade or 1% of a distinction. As such, a student who achieves a final result of 48%, or 49% may be adjusted to a final result of 50%, and a student who achieves a final result of 74% may be adjusted to a final result of 75%.
- 5.4 Upon the completion of the Ranged Mark Adjustment procedure as outlined in section 4 of this policy, the Assessment Administration Managers shall implement the Individual Mark Adjustments within MANCOSA's Student Information System (SIS) in accordance with the stipulations of this policy.

6. Policy Principles for The Investigation, Review and Remediation of Factors Leading to Mark Adjustments

MANCOSA acknowledges that while variability in the assessment function is inevitable, any instances of variability resulting in a Mark Adjustment must be thoroughly investigated to identify the root cause, thereby enabling the implementation of appropriate remedial actions. MANCOSA is committed to remediating any factors within the institution's control which may impact student results, resulting in Mark Adjustments, including:

- 6.1.1 Academic factors such as the quality and appropriateness of the assessment design and marking
- 6.1.2 Technical and administrative factors pertaining to the MANCOSAConnect Learning Management System (LMS) where MANCOSA's assessments are administered to students
- 6.1.3 Any other factors which may fall within the institution's purview and control.

MANCOSA will not assume responsibility nor implement Mark Adjustments based on factors for which the student is accountable. This includes, but is not limited to, technical difficulties arising from a student's personal device used for their studies, challenges related to network connectivity, or on account of a student's negligence, whereby incomplete or late submissions are tendered.

7. Investigation Of Factors Resulting in Mark Adjustments Being Implemented

- 7.1 In line with the PIRI (Plan, Implement, Review, Improve) quality model, MANCOSA is committed to the continuous enhancement of academic quality. This includes a commitment to ensuring that all factors potentially leading to a Mark Adjustment are thoroughly investigated, reviewed and that a root cause is identified.
- 7.2 The investigation will be conducted by the relevant Assessment Administration Manager, Teaching and Learning directorate and School Manager. It may involve additional stakeholders pertinent to the nature of the factors leading to the Mark Adjustment. For instance, if the cause of the factors necessitating the Mark Adjustment is technical, the relevant IT Projects Manager may be included as a key stakeholder in the investigation.
- 7.3 In line with MANCOSA's commitment to continuous improvement and identification of a root cause for a Mark Adjustment that was affected, MANCOSA will ensure that all reasonable measures are undertaken to remediate these instances. MANCOSA will implement assurance measures to prevent any repeat occurrences of the factor/s that resulted in a Mark Adjustment. This will be the responsibility of the relevant Assessment Administration Manager and School Manager, to be conducted aligned with the provisions of the APL and teaching and learning frameworks.

8. Remediation Of Factors Resulting in Mark Adjustments Being Implemented

- 8.1 Upon identifying the factors and their root cause that resulted in a Mark Adjustment, the relevant Assessment Administration Manager and School Manager will develop a Remediation Plan to address the root cause of these factors.
- 8.2 Depending on the nature of the root cause, various remediation measures may be considered and implemented, by the relevant Assessment Administration Manager and School Manager, which are fit for purpose for the nature of the root cause.
- 8.3 A report detailing the nature of the remediation activity/ies undertaken will be tabled to the AVC Committee and the Teaching and Learning Directorate for comment, monitoring and inputs and ratification purposes.

9. Student Queries and Appeals with Respect to Mark Adjustments

- 9.1 In line with the institution's strategic objectives, MANCOSA is committed to fostering a culture of student centricity, and an environment in which students are adequately supported to ensure success in their academic studies;
- 9.2 MANCOSA shall maintain transparent with students regarding the institutional position and policy on Mark Adjustments, particularly in response to any student inquiries concerning their adjusted results;

- 9.3 While Mark Adjustments constitute an academic decision that, in accordance with MANCOSA's Institutional Rules, is final and binding, student appeals, regarding Mark Adjustments will be considered;
- 9.4 The right and process to appeal is outlined and communicated in the Institutional rules and Student code of conduct;
- 9.5 Should a student request for a remark on an assessment for which a Ranged Mark Adjustment has been implemented, the same Mark Adjustment will be applied to the remarked assessment;
- 9.6 General Mark Adjustment appeals received from students who do not meet the provisions outlined in section 6.6. will be submitted to the AVC Committee for a final decision.

10. Policy Review and Revision

The MANCOSA Mark Adjustments Policy will be reviewed every **two (2)** years or when significant changes in the academic environment occur. This policy will be reviewed by the AVC Committee, Teaching and Learning Committee, Academic Directorate, and co-opted relevant stakeholders. Changes will be made on the SharePoint document, and tracked changes and version control will be recorded.

11. Communication And Training

This policy will be shared on the upcoming Quality Assurance Management System (QAMS) for all staff to access. Training will be conducted, annually in conjunction with the SOP development with all stakeholders mentioned above.

12. Implementation Timeline

The mark adjustment policy will be piloted in December 2024, utilising the PIRI model. The APL framework will drive the rationale of adjustments and approval by the relevant governance structures. This will be a phased approach within the 12 Schools.

13. Approval and Authorisation

This policy was circulated to the relevant committee members before the ratification for input and feedback. After that, it was ratified at a joint Learning and Teaching and AVC meeting, proceeding to the Legal Department for review, and obtained EXCO approval and ratification. The finalised version is shared with the Monitoring and Evaluation department for alignment to institutional templates and repositories.