



Office of Tasmanian,
Assessment Standards and
Certification
Marking Loads and
Payment Rates for Markers
Final Report

1 Executive Summary

Our Focus

Following a Request for Quote (RFQ) process for an independent review of the Office of Tasmanian Assessment, Standards and Certification (TASC) external assessment processes in 2017, WLF Accounting and Advisory were appointed to undertake the following Terms of Reference of the Review:

- determination of what constitutes a marking load; and
- payment rates for sessional staff (Markers).

The scope of the review was identified by TASC via consultation with key TASC stakeholders.

Findings

At a high level we found the following:

- The average costs per Marker increased overall from \$315.61 in 2016 to \$495.45 in 2017 (excluding the additional training component paid in 2017) representing a 57% increase. Whilst all Markers received an increase compared to the previous year, the distribution of the payment was not equitable particularly across the 2 hour and 3 hour exams.
- In 2017, the process for marking papers was impacted by (1) the distribution of papers to each Marker varying across courses, (2) sufficiency of the Markers allocated to a course and the basis for the allocation; and (3) the capability of Markers within each marking team.
- The results provided through surveys of Markers and Marking Coordinators undertaken by the independent consultant, John Firth, and cost data highlighted the marking load was impacted by (a) time taken to mark an exam paper, and (b) the number of candidates sitting an exam. A formula has been determined to include these two variables.
- The Regulations are linked to overall candidate numbers in determining sessional worker payments. Each year there has been increases in the number of student enrolments in level 3 and 4 courses (11% in current year) however the funding allocation for sessional staff has been a fixed amount.

Our Recommendations

- Recruitment of Markers should be designed to consider the experience of the Marker, and there is appropriate testing of the capability of new applicants.
- The full day of training must be compulsory for Markers and should be utilised to ensure consistency and quality in the marking process.
- We have suggested a formula to be used by TASC in determining the number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Markers required for each course. The formula will require the number of candidates sitting an exam and an estimate of how many minutes it takes to mark an exam paper. Initially the FTE requirement will be based on enrolled candidates as a basis for recruitment.
- The Exam Setter for each course will be responsible for determining how long (in minutes) a paper will take to mark. The Critic tests the amount of time taken to mark an exam for reasonableness.
- Once the exam has been held for each course (in November each year), the formula is re-run to ensure the number of FTE Marker requirements is accurate.
- TASC will set an overall budget each year for sessional staff based on the TASC Regulations applied to assumptions regarding candidate numbers (minimum and maximum range). TASC should negotiate a variable uplift amount for sessional staff based on the target increase of candidate's year on year.
- Individual cost codes should be used for each course for management and monitoring of the sessional staffing budget.

2 Context, Background and Scope

Context and Background

In August 2017 the Office for Tasmanian Assessments, Standards and Certification (TASC) changed the Regulations applicable to the payment of exam Markers and Supervisors.

In summary, the changes to the Regulations focused on the following:

- creating the role of the supervisor and providing allowances for planning and organising exam centres as well as the supervision of each exam;
- deleting the rate per hour to mark an exam paper and replacing with an allowance per course for marking papers; and
- Across all marking and supervisor roles creating a payment for half day or full day training sessions.

The changes were envisaged to be implemented through a revision to the number of Markers used for each course in line with the time taken to mark each paper. Due to time restraints, Marking Coordinators set the number of Markers used for each course and it was also dependent on the number of Markers available over the period.

From an administration point of view, the allowance has been more efficient use of resources, given the minimal number of back office staff in place. However, from a budget perspective the costs were not managed in a considered way in 2017.

TASC require a sustainable funding model and an efficient and equitable way of distributing payments to Markers.

Scope

Following a Request for Quote (RFQ) process, WLF Accounting and Advisory were appointed to undertake the following Terms of Reference (ToR) of TASC's independent Review of external assessment processes 2017:

- determination of what constitutes a marking load; and
- payment rates for sessional staff (Markers).

The scope of the Review was identified by TASC via consultation with key stakeholders.

Specifically, the scope of the TOR undertaken by WLF included:

- Reviewing data in previous years on costs and payments and consider marking loads over that period;
- Researching models applied in other states or territories for applying a flat fee/allowance for the marking of papers;
- Reviewing survey information and historical data to understand the length of time marking for each course had taken in the current and previous years; and
- Based on the above, provide a loading formula and recommendations regarding implementation of a revised approach.

We also worked with the John Firth, independent consultant who is undertaking the overarching (that is, all Terms of Reference) Independent Review of TASC external assessment processes, to ensure relevant information was shared.

This paper only considers Markers of written examination papers, and excludes folio, oral and practical exams.

3 Summary of Recommendations

The following recommendations have been set out and discussed in detail in section 4.

Key Recommendations			
Ref	Description of Issue	Recommendations	Management Comments
1.1	<p>Recruitment</p> <p>In 2017, the process for marking papers was impacted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The distribution of papers to each Marker varying across courses; Sufficiency of Markers allocated to a course, and the basis of the allocation; and Capability of Markers within each marking team. 	<p>We recommend the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment is designed to consider the experience of the Marker, and there is appropriate testing of the capability of new applicants. A full day of compulsory Marker training is utilised to ensure consistency and quality in the marking process. There should be additional time spent with Marking Coordinators to familiarise them with the responsibilities of allocation of papers in line with the calculated marking load. 	<p>Responsibility: Office of TASC</p> <p>Timeframe: 2018</p>
1.2	<p>Establishment of the Marking Load</p> <p>The survey results and the cost data highlighted the marking load for each course is impacted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time taken to mark an exam paper Number of candidates sitting an exam. <p>Therefore, the marking load formula is based on these variables. Whilst those sitting an exam is known, the marking time per course will need to be set independently each year.</p>	<p>For the purposes of establishing a marking load we recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the Exam Setter for each course be responsible for determining how long a paper will take to mark. to ensure the reasonableness of the exam marking time, the Critic tests the amount of time taken to mark an exam through the provision of the exam paper and expected answers. Any revision to the time taken should be discussed, and agreed, with the Exam Setter. TASC management should ensure that any marking times greater than 25 minutes are reviewed for appropriateness. This process must be undertaken annually. 	<p>Responsibility: Office of TASC</p> <p>Timeframe: 2018/19</p>

Key Recommendations			
Ref	Description of Issue	Recommendations	Management Comments
1.3	<p>Appointment process</p> <p>TASC will need to establish how many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Markers they require in May each year for recruitment purposes. To do so the number of enrolled students will need to be input into the formula. However, this will initially inflate requirements as the drop out rate is not known until the exam date.</p>	<p>We recommend:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once the exam has been held for each course, the formula is re-run to ensure the number of FTE Marker requirements are accurate. TASC communicates to Marking Coordinators any revisions to preliminary FTE numbers as soon as practical after the exam has been sat. TASC make marking applicants aware that their appointment is not confirmed until the number of candidates who have sat the exam is finalised. 	<p>Responsibility: Office of TASC</p> <p>Timeframe: 2018</p>
1.4	<p>Budgetary control</p> <p>The TASC Regulations are linked to overall candidate numbers in determining sessional worker payments. Each year TASC has experienced increases in their enrolments of students undertaking level 3 and 4 courses (11% in 2018). The budget however is a fixed amount that covers all sessional staff. This has further been exacerbated as a budget has not been set to measure against actuals incurred for each type of sessional worker. As a result, each year the budget has not been met and additional funding has been required.</p>	<p>We recommend</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting an overall budget each year for sessional staff based on the Regulations applied to assumptions regarding candidate numbers (minimum and maximum range). TASC should have the ability within the budget to determine a variable uplift for sessional staff year on year based on the target increase of candidate's year on year. Individual cost codes should be used for each course to allow for management and monitoring of the sessional staffing budget. 	<p>Responsibility: Office of TASC</p> <p>Timeframe: 2018/19</p>

4 Establishing a marking load formula

Our analysis assisted us in concluding that there are two relevant factors in developing a formula for the determination of a marking load:

- a) Time taken to mark an examination paper; and
- b) The number of candidates sitting a course.

Both factors will be variable for each course and information pertaining to each factor will be available at alternative times in a teaching year:

Factors	Type	Based on.....	Timing
(a) Time	Subjective	Judgement	One the exam is set
(b) Number of candidates	Definitive	Enrolment/sitting exam	Start of year/ time of exam

4.1.1 Time

The Exam Setter is well placed to be responsible for setting the time taken to mark an exam paper as they are independent from teaching roles. We recommend the Exam Setter be responsible for setting the amount of time it takes to mark an exam and for each section/question where relevant to assist the Marking Coordinator in distributing papers.

TASC should ensure that any marking times provided for papers in excess of 25 minutes are reviewed for appropriateness given the survey results where 25 minutes appeared a consistent timeframe.

To ensure the Marking Coordinator is brought into the process at the right time, the marking time should be shared with them without provision of the exam paper. This will be for the purposes of determining if the time is in line with expectations from the previous year.

4.1.2 Number of Candidates

The number of candidates enrolled for a course is known at the start of the year. However, the actual number of students sitting the exam will not be known until the day of the exam. As such, there will be an estimate of how many Full Time Equivalent (FTE) Markers should be recruited for those roles at the time the exam is set, however the actual number of Markers required at the examination marking period will vary and require revision to estimates. This is to ensure that the marking load for each Marker is accurate.

For the purposes of establishing a marking load, we recommend:

- the Exam Setter for each course be responsible for determining how long a paper will take to mark.
- to ensure the reasonableness of the exam marking time, the Critic tests the amount of time taken to mark an exam through the provision of the exam paper and expected answers. Any revision to the time taken should be discussed, and agreed, with the Exam Setter.
- TASC management should ensure that any marking times greater than 25 minutes are reviewed for appropriateness.
- This process should be undertaken annually.

4.1.3 Calculation

The calculation of the number of FTE Markers per course required to mark an exam paper is based on the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{No. of students (sat exam)} \times \text{No. of minutes to mark and exam}}{\text{No. of minutes the allowance deemed to cover}}$$

The model is then to be updated once the final candidate numbers are known. The final FTE Markers for each course will be shared with the relevant Marking Coordinator(s) for final appointment.

We note that flexibility is required to the recruitment to roles and then in turn the payment structure to allow for partial, full, 1.5 and double loads. Marking Coordinators will need to be provided with the necessary tools to enable them to appoint and reconcile to the final approved FTE numbers provided by TASC management.

We recommend:

- Once the exam has been held for each course, the formula is re-run to ensure the number of FTE Marker requirements are accurate.
- TASC communicates to Marking Coordinators any revisions to preliminary FTE numbers as soon as practical after the exam has been sat.
- TASC make marking applicants aware that their appointment is not confirmed until the number of candidates who have sat the exam is finalised.



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Move Forward