Marking approach – top-down or bottom-up?

Teachers have sought guidance from NZQA about differing approaches to making assessment judgements against standards. NZQA uses two distinct approaches for internally and externally assessed standards. This document explains the reasons behind these differences and provides guidelines for teachers assessing internally assessed standards.

Why are there two approaches?

The distinction between NZQA's approaches arises from differences in the design and delivery of internal and external assessments:

- Internally assessed standards are flexible and allow for varied forms of evidence, tailored to classroom contexts.
- External assessments are standardised and centrally marked, requiring consistent application across all candidates.

These differences need different marking strategies to ensure fairness, reliability, and consistency.

Key Differences in NZQA's Roles:

- ***Internal Assessment:*** NZQA moderates teacher judgments for internally assessed standards and provides feedback based on moderation outcomes.
- ***External Assessment:*** NZQA appoints and manages markers for externally assessed standards.

Internal Assessment – Bottom-Up Approach:

- ***Moderation:*** NZQA moderators review school-based assessment materials and student evidence, providing feedback to teachers and schools.
- ***Standard and Assessment Design:*** Internally assessed standards allow for different forms of evidence. A bottom-up approach ensures all requirements of the standard are met, including evidence of the subject knowledge underpinning the standard, starting with Achievement, then Merit, and finally, Excellence.

External Assessment – Top-Down Approach:

- ***Assessment Design:*** Tasks are designed to allow candidates to meet requirements of standards at any level of achievement, starting with Excellence.
- ***Assessment Schedules:*** These unpack achievement criteria in the context of the task. Higher levels of achievement are qualitative, but Grade Score Marking introduces quantitative distinctions within grades.
- ***Marker Training:*** Markers start by looking for evidence of Excellence. If insufficient, they then look for Merit, and finally, Achievement. NZQA trains markers to apply the top-down approach consistently.

Guidance for Teachers – assessing against internally assessed standards

- Use a bottom-up approach to ensure all standard requirements are met.
- Confirm that students demonstrate the subject knowledge required at the Achievement level before awarding merit, and that the merit requirements are met before awarding excellence.
- Avoid using a top-down approach for internal assessments, as it may result in awarding higher grades without sufficient foundational evidence.