

# Introduction

Welcome to the 'Mark My Words' Campaign, this is the National Anonymous Marking Campaign to support you and your officers in getting more fairness and equality for students at your institution through the way that their work is marked. As you will know the campaign was launched in September with a national survey to help assess where anonymous marking is in place both in your institution and across the country, we are still collating responses and will update the website accordingly. However, early indications tell us that anonymous marking of exam scripts is common practice whereas marking of coursework is patchy both across the UK and within institutions. If you haven't already, please complete the survey which can be found online at [officeronline/equality](http://officeronline/equality).

It is crucial that you use this guide as a toolkit to achieve anonymous marking implemented across the board. This kit will help you to inform your members, deliver a vibrant, effective and winning campaign for all students at your college or university. You can use it with all our other tools too, you will have already received posters to display and postcards to handout to students and ask them to sign and return to you principal or vice chancellor and ask them to pledge to have all work marked anonymously by September 2007. The reason for this is that it takes time to implement change and it's crucial that this is done properly and effectively. It's a long-term campaign that will ensure fairness, equality and quality for students in the future at your institution.

We hope that you find this toolkit useful and along with the campaigns material available from NUS it will form an effective campaign that wins for you, your union and all students across the UK.

Yours in Unity,

Julian

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## Contents

1. Frequently Asked Questions
2. Anonymous Marking and Liberation
3. Engaging Your Liberation Campaigns
4. Getting Others Onside with Your Campaign
5. Five Steps for Getting Your Campaign Underway
6. Campaigning For Change
7. Model Motion to Your Council or Executive
8. The Student Representative's Role
9. Meeting with Your Institution
10. The Future of Your Campaign

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Why do we need Anonymous Marking?

The student movement is based on equality of opportunity. In everything we fight for we ensure that all students are represented. However, there is still a long way to go. Students from minority ethnic groups, those who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Trans students and women still find that they are underrepresented and in some cases discriminated against because of who they are. Ideally students would be able to put their name on their coursework and leave the name on the exam paper visible for all to see and not fear that their work will be marked any differently to others on their course or in their institution. Unfortunately we don't live in a perfect world and liberation campaigning still has a long way to go to ensure equality and parity for students.

Marking coursework anonymously means that student can submit their work without any name that identifies who they are. There is nothing to tell the marker that the student is a woman, Black or Asian or that the student is LGB or T. Many people would say that we don't need anonymous marking anymore, that prejudice is a thing of the past. Unfortunately not, recent research tells us that 12% of Black students felt that their work had been marked unfairly because of their ethnic background and 39% of LGBT students felt that their work had been marked down because of their sexuality or gender expression. This shows that we have not yet won the fight for equality and we have a long way to go. But in the meantime anonymous marking is needed to ensure that we have some parity and equality in the way that work is marked at our colleges and universities.

## How is work marked if treated anonymously?

If work is marked anonymously there are many different systems that can be used. It is common to use a numeric system of identification for students' coursework. Most colleges and universities now have a system where students have a student number. This number stays with them throughout their course and only in very rare cases would ever change. Under anonymous marking coursework would be submitted to an assignment handling office where their work is stamped and a receipt given to the student as proof of submission. A top sheet attached to the assignment containing only the student's particular identification number will then be collated with others in that cohort and given to the marker. Once the work has been marked the coursework is returned to the assignment handling office for collection by the student. As the student has to give the officer proof of identification including his or her identification number only then can the work be identified.

For exams many colleges and universities have anonymous marking in place. The exam scripts are collected in the normal way at the end of the exam. Before collection the student is asked to fold over and seal the part of the script which identifies them. The exam script is only identifiable by the identification number on the front. When exam results are being submitted to the system the number is used and the student is only identifiable once the marking procedure is complete.

## How can I start from scratch?

If you know that you have no method of anonymous marking at all in your institution then you are not starting from scratch. The first step is to research exactly which courses and departments carry out anonymous marking and which ones do not. Just like in the national campaign it is important that you identify where the gaps are at your college or university.

Once you know where the gaps in provision are then you can set up a meeting with the management of the institution to begin to effect change. It's not going to happen over night but if you start to get procedures changed today then you are definitely moving in the right direction.

## My students don't care how their work is marked, how do I convince others to see that anonymous marking is the way forward?

If this is the case at your union then you need to explain why anonymous marking is a positive step forward for equality at your institution. It's difficult enough to effect change through convincing management, the last thing you need is your members to be working against you. The campaign must involve and inform everyone of the benefits of having anonymous marking across the board.

Run an awareness campaign about the issues of equality and raise your concerns in creative ways to your membership. Ensure that they are on side and you get them involved in the wider campaign. The 'Mark My Words' postcards will engage the student body and make them feel part of the fight for equality. It will also give others information about why it is crucial to challenge any practices that are open to discrimination. Use the posters which you will have received to inform students that this is one of your priorities and make sure that you put your name at the bottom of the poster so that they can contact you for more information.

Raise the issue at your council, general meeting or executive committee meetings to inform the other students' union leaders and members of the issues and allow the opportunity for people to ask questions and even challenge you about why this campaign essential. It's not going to be easy to effect change but if you engage your membership you will have a clear mandate to go ahead and effect change for the better at your institution.

# Engaging with your Liberation Campaigns

NUS has a proud history of campaigning for change, locally, nationally and internationally. Our four liberation areas, Black students, Women's, Students with Disabilities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans students have engaged fully with this campaign and have clear policy in favour of anonymous marking at universities and colleges. This campaign would not work without them both in NUS and with liberation campaigns on your campuses.

The following are a set of statements from the national liberation officers; it would be great if those officers on your campus could get behind your campaign. It adds weight to your arguments and can encourage more people involved.

## Anonymous Marking and LGBT Students

Sadly, Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans Students often fear expressing their sexuality in an Educational Setting due to the fear of prejudice. Leaving them feeling isolated and unable to raise issues with their teachers and lectures that may affect their work, for fear of outing themselves, and being subject to abuse.

Anonymous marking is something that the NUS LGBT Campaign has been focused on for many years. We believe that someone's sexuality should not affect their marks and people should be marked on their capability and not their sexuality.

One of the best ways to support LGBT students that believe they have been marked down is to have LGBT groups with trained officers as a part of your union structure. This provides a first port of call for LGBT students in a safe environment where they will more likely feel comfortable.

We found that 39% of LGBT Students who responded to a survey felt they had been unfairly treated by the university because of their sexuality and 35% of LGBT Students felt that their university had not "tried to reasonably adjust to their needs".

Anonymous marking is a great first step to alleviate some of the pressures and worries of LGBT Students and the NUS LGBT Campaign would encourage you to make sure your University has an anonymous marking system in place. However, dealing with a symptom of bigotry rather than the root cause is not ideal, and the NUS LGBT Campaign believes that we should be tackling discrimination in a dual way - by minimising the affects that the students feels by ensuring Anonymous marking is in place while we challenge and educate those in both society and our institutions with discriminatory attitudes.

*National LGBT Officers - James J Walsh (Open place) & Kat Louis (Women's Place)*

## Anonymous Marking and Women Students

There are countless examples of how women are discriminated against in society, in education, in the workplace and in the home. But while we are overwhelmed by case after case demonstrating that sexism is alive and kicking in the 21st Century, these cases vastly outnumber the solutions.

However, anonymous marking is a perfect example of how we can change women's lives for the better by ensuring that their grades reflect their ability to study, not an outdated gender prejudice.

The main strength of anonymous marking is that it is a system that does not allow an individual's response to a student's work to be influenced by a set of pre-conceived assumptions or prejudices.

When anonymous marking is implemented, all the research suggests that while men continue to achieve the same grades, women students achieve better grades.

I do not understand why anonymous marking still isn't mandatory for every course in every college and every university and I urge all students and all student officers to unite behind this campaign and lobby our Vice-Chancellors and Principals to Mark Our Words!

*Jo Salmon – National Women's Officer*

## Anonymous marking and Black Students

When colleges and universities do not have anonymous marking in place, research shows that Black students can receive up to 12 per cent lower marks. This anomaly has been vigorously tested by independent bodies with the results consistently demonstrating a bias in the scoring process as a root cause.

All discrimination is unacceptable. But the kind of discrimination that manifests itself in the educational experience, and has a direct impact on the future opportunities of individuals is particularly malignant.

This inequality could be easily corrected if students' unions lobby their institutions for anonymous marking in exams and coursework. Similarly, student complaints and exam appeal procedures should also be made available in accessible language for students worried about discrimination, so that they can invoke the appropriate procedures.

*Pav Akhtar – National Black Students' Officer*

## Anonymous marking and Students with Disabilities

The NUS SWD Campaign believes in equality for all disabled people in every aspect of their lives, including education. We believe that Students with Disabilities should be treated on their ability and not pitied. Discrimination has no place in any aspect of society. Yet we know still it occurs. It is only through anonymous marking that we can ensure that inequalities no longer exist and students are judged purely on their ability.

### **Some considerations that you need to make about Anonymous marking from a SWD viewpoint:**

The main issue is how to balance anonymous marking with the accessibility needs of students with disabilities. For example, dyslexic students would need to have spelling and grammar disregarded in their assessments.

### **Some solutions about anonymous marking:**

Many institutions have introduced a 'sticker system' or equivalent, which works well, unless there are only a couple of dyslexic students on a course, in which case they are identifiable. There are similar difficulties if students need other adjustments, e.g. typing answers rather than writing them etc. However, working towards a method of anonymous marking will have great benefits.

So when looking at the issue of anonymous marking and applying it at your institution you need to be thinking about your students with disabilities and how it will impact on them. Of course you need anonymous marking so that students individual scripts cannot be identified, but you also need to ensure that reasonable adjustments are made.

*Sian Davies – National Students' with Disabilities Officer*

## Getting others on side with the campaign

### People you will need to convince

There will be people who work within the institution who may not be aware of the students' union campaign for anonymous marking. It's a good idea to let people know what you are working towards or fighting for. It's always useful to identify some key partners in your campaign. There may be heads of departments, Deans, secretaries or even the registrar who will be onside.

Give your evidence and supporting information to as many people as possible to gain interest and arouse debate within departments. The management will be more inclined to listen to a number of stakeholders rather than just one. Meet with senior academic staff between ordinary meetings, they'll usually be happy to meet you and discuss your aims. Be clear about what you want to achieve, if you are then even if you don't get complete consensus the relationship will help you achieve what you want and you can find out which issues you can unite around. These people will include:

- √ Chair of Student Experience meeting
- √ Chair of Quality Assurance Committee
- √ Chair of Academic Board/ Senate
- √ College/ University Registrar/ Secretary
- √ Pro-Vice Chancellor/ Vice-Principal
- √ Principal/ Vice Chancellor
- √ Deans or Heads of Department

## Departments to fight help your corner

There are often people of departments who will help you win your campaign. These are people who run services that are student focused and will often understand the need for anonymous marking, they can help you. They will be another way to influence your college or university to strengthen your argument and help you win. These may include:

- √ Chaplaincy
- √ University of College Governors
- √ Student Services eg. Disabilities Officer, Mental Health Coordinator
- √ Your Welfare Unit or Students' Union Advice Centre
- √ Dean of Students
- √ Head of undergraduate/postgraduate studies

## Five Steps to get your Anonymous Marking Campaign Under Way

1. Find out where the gaps are, which courses, departments or schools/faculties have anonymous marking in place
2. Start to build awareness around why anonymous marking is important
3. Get students involved in the campaign
4. Identify the right person to contact in the college/university for example, the chair of academic board, senate, pro vice chancellor, VC or principal
5. Arrange to meet them and find out if there is any strategy in place to introduce it across the board

## Campaigning for Change

In the section below we have detailed some of the major points of action and have detailed a model motion to your council or executive committee to get you started. We have a five point action plan to effect change and start to build for a future of anonymous marking at your institution. The role of other activists in your union including council, student and course representatives and a summary of what to do once you have got the campaigning ball rolling.



# Model Motion to Union Council/Executive Committee

## **This Union Believes:**

1. That currently there is no anonymous marking across the college academic marking procedures
2. That the National Union of Students has a National Anonymous Marking Campaign 'Mark My Words...Not My Name'
3. That students from under represented groups are at risk from prejudice and their mark for course work and exams are lower than other groups
4. That 39% of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans students feel that their work has been marked unfairly simply because of their sexuality or gender expression
5. That 12% of Black students have received a lower mark for coursework or exams than that of their white counterparts
6. That despite positive steps made in the women's liberation movement sexism and prejudice still exists including the academic setting

## **This Union Further Believes:**

1. That this students' union should campaign for anonymous marking across the board and ensure that academic procedures are tightened so that all students are treated equally
2. All students have the right to achieve their potential while at college or university and this should not be put at risk because of prejudice of others
3. Unfairly marked exam scripts and coursework can potentially lead to students dropping out of their course and putting their future academic achievement at risk
4. That more needs to be done to see that students are not discriminated against because of their gender, sexuality, age or ethnic group.

## **This Union Resolves:**

1. To mandate the Executive Committee to meet with the Principal/ VC to discuss plans for reform of marking procedures in the institution
2. To run an Anonymous Marking Campaign and to collaborate nationally with other unions and NUS in order to achieve our aim
3. To hold a campaign meeting with student/course representatives to discuss the campaign strategy
4. To ask the liberation groups/societies to draft a united statement about the inequalities that current marking guidelines can present to under represented groups
5. To mandate the Education officer/ President to present this motion to the next meeting of the academic board/ senate
6. To ask course representatives and school/ faculty board reps to present this motion to the relevant meetings at the next available opportunity.

356 Words

## The Student Representative's Role and the Campaign

The student representatives are the eyes and ears of the students' union. Be they course reps, society officials, part time executive or union councillors they have a role to play in any campaign for change at your university or college. Communication with these representatives must work both ways, you should communicate to them your priorities and they should help roll out your campaigns across the union and its membership.

In the case of anonymous marking student reps will need to be aware of all the issues. They will need to know the benefits of anonymous marking and can help you deliver that information to students on their courses. These are people who will be affected by any change to marking procedures and are the very people who you will need onside.

If academic reps hold positions on one of the management boards or committees it is crucial that they are giving out the same messages about what they want to see to improve the student experience, avoid giving mixed messages to you university or college management. For example, you do not want student reps turning up at course or school/faculty boards and speaking against anonymous marking.

It's also useful to communicate with the reps to find out exactly what is common academic practice in their course, department or school/faculty. It's common to find that marking procedures are different in different parts of the university or college. Working with reps, perhaps carrying out some research will help you identify where the gaps are in anonymous marking across the institution.

Finally, don't forget your members who sit on council or are involved in your clubs or societies. These are often your more involved members and they can help you too. Link up with your liberation groups or societies; this can make for a stronger case when you begin to lobby the management for a change in marking policy.

# Meeting with Your the College or University

## Before You Meet

As with any campaign or lobby it's important that you are prepared you're your meeting and have all the evidence and information you need to win. Familiarise yourself with institution's aims and objectives, mission and values. You will normally find these on the website. These will often talk about accessibility, equality and fairness for students. It helps if you can identify the relevant aim or part of the statement that can help you with your campaign. Once you've done that you can go to the management with a well-drafted case. Take any research you have done about marking procedures or guidelines at the institution. This along with your research about equality and fairness will help with a more convincing argument.

If you are able to take information along to the meeting that you have collected through your advice centre or welfare service this will help. Take along any case studies you have available from students who have come to the union for advice collate them and present them at the meeting. You might want to contact your regional officer too; he/she will be able to give you some tips for winning your arguments while in the meeting. If you need any support in this do not hesitate to contact a member of the national executive committee or your regional office you can find their details in the democracy guide.

TAKE A NOTEBOOK TO THE MEETING AND MAKE A NOTE OF ANY ACTION POINTS AGREED AND WHO IS TO CARRY OUT THE ACTIONS. AGREE A TIME TO RECONVENE AND WHEN ACTION POINTS SHOULD BE MET.

## After You Have Met

Once the meeting is over type up the notes, keep a record for you and copy the notes to the others who were present at the meeting. This will enable you to follow up on the key points of the meeting. Before the time that was agreed at the meeting for action points to be met make contact with the college or university representative to discuss any issues that may need to be clarified before you reconvene. This is so that the next meeting can be as effective as possible. It may be necessary to gather any further evidence or information needed to bolster your campaign further.

When you meet ensure that all action points have been followed up, if not, seek an explanation for why action points have not been met. It's advisable to find out when the institution envisage anonymous marking being implemented. If they do not wish the process to be rolled out in the foreseeable future then you may need to rethink and reconvene at another time having re-evaluated your strategy. If this is the case then you may want to explore other methods of campaigning. You will find that all campaigning materials for the national Mark My Words campaign at [officeronline/equality](http://officeronline/equality).

## The long term future of anonymous marking in your institution

Once you have an agreement from your institution that anonymous marking will be implemented at your college or university it's crucial that you continue to follow up its progress. With the changing nature of students' unions your campaign should be imbedded in the culture of your union. If you have a strategic plan make sure that the campaign features in it. Ensure that any support staff at the union are aware of the campaign aims and outcomes and have copies of minutes and action points from any meetings where the campaign has been discussed. Make your campaigns an integral feature of the handover process with new officers, ensure that all successive officers to your position know what to expect in the way of alterations to academic marking procedures and when they are likely to take place.

Once these have been followed it is more likely that your university or college will have achieved anonymous marking over the next one to two years rather than it becoming a campaign that has to be re-introduced year after year. If the culture of fairness for all students is embedded in the culture of your students' union this will remain a priority. Whatever headway you make with this campaign you will have changed things for the better for your students.

## A final Word About the National Campaign

This document will be updated as research is further compiled to help us win our campaign for equality and fairness for students. Please keep your eye on the website [officeronline/equality](http://officeronline/equality) for updates on the campaign and if you have a contribution to make, please email it to [education@nus.org.uk](mailto:education@nus.org.uk)

You will have also received posters to help raise awareness of your campaign on campus. We have also included some post cards to lobby your principal or vice chancellor about the importance of anonymous marking. You can order more materials online so please do not hesitate to do so.

We know that campaigning for change can be a long process but it's important to start now. There are officers all over the UK who have made this a priority this year; it's crucial that we all work together to see that this becomes a priority for others too so things can really be improved for the future.

Good Luck,

Julian & Stephen