Calibration of assessment standards in the UK geography community
Dr Jennifer Hill & Dr Stephanie Wyse
We support the professional judgment and autonomy of examiners and institutions.

Geography has been relatively self-aware, and self-critical, about academic standards.

It is complementary to our activities: CPD, subject networks, programme accreditation, support for professional practice.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to calibration; disciplines engage differently.
What we did, and how it evolved

Late 2016: Worked with HEA. Consulted with senior external examiners about views and needs.

Early 2017: Which led to three disciplinary strands of work… alongside the HEA/AdvanceHE work
- Discipline data on degree outcomes
- Geography resources
- Calibration & moderation
- Professional development course

May 2017: Explored the three strands with a small group of highly experienced external examiners.

Sept 2017: Hosted a departmental away-day, tried calibration with refined resources

Late 2017: Shared findings with Council of Heads of Geography Departments, and QAA PSRB Forum
- Evolved disciplinary calibration to merge with professional development course
- NW Regional Consortium integrated course (calibration + PDC)

Late 2018: Paper for publication (under review) & conference dissemination

2019:
Along the way, we learned...

- ‘Real world’ subject-based resources essential
- Face-to-face discussion matters, for:
  - Standards, and how we understand them
  - Assessment practices and criteria, and how they are applied
  - The grade awarded, especially close to boundaries
- …but it takes a skilful facilitator to bring about consensus
- The collaborative process engendered a sense of ownership and willingness to engage with issues
Calibration was incorporated into Professional Development Course (PDC) for external examiners.

Trialled autumn 2018 with the NW Regional Consortium.

- On-line preparation (2-3 hours)
- Geography-specific PDC (1 day)
- Calibration workshop (1 day)
### Integrated PDC outcomes

Marks awarded to final year geography coursework essays pre- and post-calibration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre calibration:</th>
<th>Essay 1</th>
<th>Essay 2</th>
<th>Essay 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marks awarded (%)</td>
<td>52-68</td>
<td>38-58</td>
<td>68-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range (%)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean (%)</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>73.1</td>
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**Final resolution:**
- mid 2:1 (64%)
- high 3\(^{rd}\) (48%)
- mid 1\(^{st}\) (75%)
All participants attested to improved confidence in understanding the standards of their discipline.

All agreed the course had given them ideas to follow up in their institution.

I think these networking and sharing opportunities are crucial for consistent approaches to moderation.

Definitely will have a go at social moderation & agreeing the most important criteria.

Interested in following up calibration regularly within own institutions and periodically at national level via RGS-IBG.
Headline messages from geography

- There is an appetite for calibration of academic standards in geography
- Excellent intermixing and debate across mission groups
- Cross-sector discussion of standards occurring within disciplinary communities via calibration is unique
- Process offers value beyond external examiners, contributing to professional development of assessment literacy - cascade effect to HEIs
Moving forward

- Adopt an assessor-centred collaborative approach
- Articulate calibration within subject communities … over space and time … to strive for sustainability
- Focus on quality of dialogue to identify key influential characteristics and their balance at grade boundaries
- Support endeavours with subject ‘toolkits’ that make processes explicit and offer exemplar marking - linked to influential characteristics