

SANDFORD AWARD



*THE QUALITY MARK FOR
HERITAGE LEARNING*

Moderation of Sandford Award Reports

The Heritage Education Trust Sandford Award (HETSA) is recognised as assuring the 'gold standard' in authentic and experiential learning at widely differing heritage sites and has a national and increasingly international reach with sites found in all parts of the British Isles. The reports, written by Sandford Award assessors, serve as critical evaluations of heritage sites' practices and outcomes and provide recommendations for the sites' future development planning.

Much high-quality guidance is provided by HETSA for its Sandford Award assessors to use so that the standards expected of each site are assessed fairly using similar quality marks and that the reporting style is accurate and consistent. The guidance available aims to set the process of moderation from the beginning of each assessment. Therefore, assessors are asked to carefully consider the issue of moderation from the outset when embarking on the assessment of any site.

Guidance includes:

- General advice for assessors' preparation, from documentation review to the site visit.
- Sample questions for helping to gauge assessment against the Award's six criteria.
- Notes to assist assessment for each of the six criteria on the report template, including the visit summary, recommendations and citations.
- The minimum number of words or approximate ranges of words to be used for each section of the report, as stated on the report template.
- Advice for assessors on writing reports.
- A 'house style' to provide preferred choices when writing reports, to maintain consistency in presentation and the scope of recommendations.

The aim is to have reports that are 'right the first time'.

By following the guidance and prudent selection of language, this is frequently achieved by assessors. However, as a part of HETSA's internal quality assurances processes, reports are checked by small teams of moderators who not only check for typographical errors, but also for issues that might develop into inconsistencies across the reporting system as a whole. The moderation teams will often make minor changes directly, but where writing is unclear or contradictory then the assessor is asked to advise or review and re-word themselves. The moderation is constructive and two-way.

The crux of assessment and of moderation is whether a site should be deemed worthy of receiving the Sandford Award or not.

Criteria 1 and 2, as the main outcomes, are seen as needing to be assessed at least as 'Mostly Met' for the award to be given. This level of expectation protects the standard relative to the central elements of the Sandford Award - Learning and Heritage. Therefore, the moderating rule for a report to assess a site at 'NO AWARD' is:

'NO AWARD' requires at least one criterion to be 'Not Met'; or Criterion 1 and Criterion 2 to be rated only 'Partially Met' or below.

Clearly, the moderation process allows for wide variety in the actual choice of content for each of the reports' sections. The challenge of writing a report that extrapolates the quality of a site's wider performance (from an application form, documents, conversations and one site visit) means the assessor must have freedom to pick and choose the examples and illustrations necessary to build the picture behind the ratings. Guidance on word count is approximate; where minimum/ maximum limits or ranges are suggested, tolerance of about 10 per cent in moderation is common.

Website: heritageeducationtrust.org

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