

## Principles for moderation of assessment

### Purpose

The purpose of moderation of assessment is to foster the three key objectives for quality in student assessment in higher education<sup>1</sup> to 1) guide and encourage effective approaches to learning; 2) validly and reliably measure achievement of expected learning outcomes, in particular the higher-order learning that characterises higher education; and 3) define and protect academic standards.

These principles provide the basis for pre- and post-assessment moderation for the purposes of enhancing:

- comparability of assessment;
- quality of assessment; and
- adherence to academic standards

thus leading to improved outcomes.

### Scope

Moderation applies to all award and non-award coursework units offered by ACU National including offshore units and those coursework units completed as part of an honours or research degree. Where units are offered under contractual agreements, such units will be governed by these agreements.

### Definitions

**Moderation** of assessment is a quality review and assurance process by which the University seeks to ensure that its assessment procedures and practices are valid and reliable and are aligned with its stated standards, principles and ethos. Moderation may involve pre-assessment and post-assessment procedures.

**Validity** refers to the “*appropriateness of the inferences, uses, and consequences that result from the assessment*”.<sup>2</sup> The best evidence of the validity of assessment comes from the alignment of the assessment tasks to unit learning outcomes and content. Validity seeks to answer questions such as “Are we assessing the right things in the right manner and making the right interpretation of the results?”

**Reliability** refers to the consistency, stability and dependability of the assessment. Reliability seeks to answer questions such as “Would the same or similar results be achieved on another occasion or by another assessor?”

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<sup>1</sup> James, R., McInnis, C. & Devlin, M. (2002). *Assessing learning in Australian universities*. Parkville: Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne for the Australian Universities Teaching Committee [refer [www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning](http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning)].

<sup>2</sup> McMillan, J. (2007). *Classroom assessment: Principles and practice for effective standards-based instruction* (4<sup>th</sup> edition). Boston: Pearson. pp. 64-65.

**Academic standards** are specified in terms of content and performance standards. Content standards describe what the student should know and be able to do. Performance standards are agreed sets of criteria “designated to signify qualitatively different levels of performance.”<sup>3</sup>

The ‘**approved unit outline**’ is the unit outline approved by Academic Board as part of the curriculum plan.

**Pre-assessment moderation** is a quality assurance process that aims to ensure the appropriateness, fairness, clarity and standard of assessment tasks and resources before they are used for assessment.

**Post-assessment moderation** includes quality assurance processes during and after marking to ensure consistent and accurate assessment decisions in accordance with the set marking criteria and the University’s published academic standards.

**Moderator/s:** The person/s appointed to conduct pre- and/or post-assessment moderation. An internal moderator is a member of the teaching team. An independent moderator is not involved with assessment in the unit and may be internal or external to the University.

**Cross-campus moderation** refers to moderation of units offered on more than one campus or by more than one mode.

**Assessment tasks** are the single components of an assessment schedule for a unit of study. They should explicitly reflect the learning outcomes for the unit and related generic outcomes/skills.

**Blind marking** is the second marking of a ‘clean’ assessment task script with no indication of the first marker’s grade or comments.

## Principles

These principles apply to all coursework units of study and should be implemented at a local level to ensure comparability of assessment across sites and modes of course delivery. The principles address moderation processes before and after assessment tasks are completed by students.

### General principles underpinning moderation

- Assessment is a key part of ongoing unit development. Members of the teaching team should be provided with the opportunity to be involved in developing the unit.
- Moderation of assessment by self-review, School processes and, where applicable, internal moderators are integral to quality assessment practices each time a unit is offered.
- Moderation of assessment by an independent moderator/s at regular intervals provides opportunities for independent feedback.
- Moderation will be most effective when conducted in a spirit of professional learning and quality improvement.
- Moderators will have appropriate knowledge of assessment practices, policies and procedures and be prepared for the role.

### Pre-assessment moderation

- **Principles of pre-assessment moderation for all units**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

- i. Assessment tasks will be subject to routine pre-assessment review to ensure that they reflect appropriate assessment practices, including their fit with unit learning outcomes, focus on higher-order learning, use of appropriate marking criteria and appropriateness in relation to progressive learning and assessment during the course.
- ii. Mapping of assessment tasks in relation to increasing complexity, variety and graduate attributes across a course provides a basis for effective planning and pre-moderation of assessment.
- iii. All assessment tasks in a unit will normally be moderated on a regular basis by an independent moderator/s prior to implementation with students.

- **Cross-campus units**

In addition to the above the following also apply to cross-campus units to ensure equivalence of assessment and consistency in assessment standards:

- i. Cross-campus units will have equivalent assessment tasks with a substantial proportion of available marks being common in terms of requirements and assessment criteria (including type and criteria weightings).
- ii. Variation is possible but equivalency in assessment should be demonstrable and in no circumstances advantage students at one campus over students at another campus.

These principles also apply in an equivalent manner to units offered in multiple modes.

## **Post-assessment moderation**

- **Principles of post-assessment moderation**

- i. The marking of all assessment tasks is subject to post-assessment moderation at each unit offering to ensure consistent and accurate assessment decisions in accordance with the University's Assessment Policy and Procedures, set marking criteria, and academic standards. Post-assessment moderation always includes self-review by the lecturer/s and School processes as required by the Assessment Policy and Procedures.
- ii. When there is more than one member of the teaching team involved in marking assessment, post-assessment moderation by an internal moderator/s is integral to quality processes.
- iii. At least once in the 5-year course review cycle, post-assessment moderation of the two assessment tasks with the largest weighting from a random sample of units will be undertaken by an independent moderator. The sample should be randomly selected from each grading level to enable comparison with criteria and academic standards.
- iv. Moderation processes will lead to specific recommendations to improve assessment practice.
- v. Students should be informed that it is routine practice for samples of students' work to be used for moderation. Work will be de-identified to maintain student confidentiality.

- **Cross-campus units**

In addition to the above the following applies to cross-campus units:

- i. Post-moderation processes for cross-campus units should be designed to promote the comparability of assessment outcomes.

These principles also apply in an equivalent manner to units offered in multiple modes.

***THE PRINCIPLES FOR MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT WERE ENDORSED BY THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE ON 6 FEBRUARY 2008***

