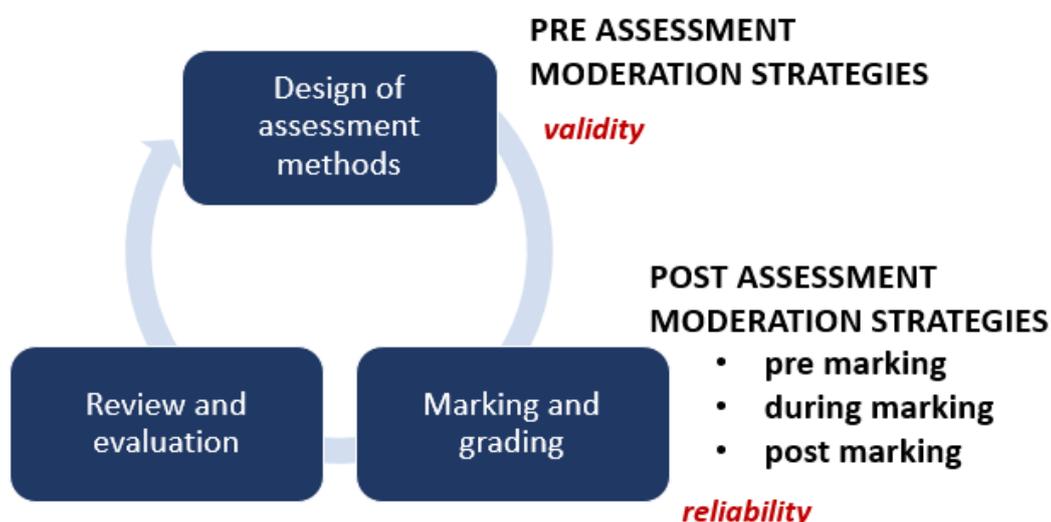# MODERATION ESSENTIALS

What is moderation and what is in JCU procedure?

Moderation articulates with all stages of all assessment. According to the JCU *Learning, Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Procedure (Proc):*

Section 3.6 of the LTA procedure focusses on moderation.

LTA Proc. 3.6.2. states: Assessment moderation methods include: pre-determined criterion-based standards/rubrics, comprehensive marking guides, peer review of assessment, double marking, exchange marking, blind marking, and confirmatory review.

Further to when moderation should take place, **LTA Proc. 3.6.1. b)** identifies that moderation processes of pre-marking and/or during marking, and/or post-marking to assure validity and reliability of the assessment item.

PRE ASSESSMENT MODERATION STRATEGIES

validity

- Design of assessment methods
- Review and evaluation
- Marking and grading

POST ASSESSMENT MODERATION STRATEGIES
- pre marking
- during marking
- post marking

reliability

Other relevant JCU Learning, Teaching and Assessment Procedure statements

Design of assessment methods

LTA Proc 3.1.2 Learning outcomes and assessment are aligned, transparent in assessment descriptions, and in rubrics that contain criteria or scales which define the standards that are expected of students to attain a particular grade on a criterion-referenced assessment item.

LTA Proc. 2.1.1 Curriculum design assures equivalent opportunities, student preparedness, and pathways for progression, in accordance with the University's Course Proposal process, and the requirements of TEQSA and the AQF.

LTA Proc. 3.1.3 Assessment methods within each subject must be the same across study modes and campuses, and have the same subject learning outcomes, weightings, and workload, in each academic calendar year.

Grades and Results

LTA Proc. 3.6.1 c) Select the sample for moderation: individual assessment items, or whole-of-subject assessment;

LTA Proc. 3.6.1 d) Implement subject-level moderation processes that consist of an analysis of top grades, borderline pass/fail grades and a selection of mid-range grades;

Review and evaluation

LTA Proc. 3.7.6 The Subject Coordinator must undertake a biennial peer review of a subject's assessment plans and grading practices in accordance with 2.4.2.

Terms in procedure defined

Validity: The degree to which a task assesses what it is intended or purported to assess (i.e. evidences student achievement of knowledge, skills and dispositions targeted in learning outcomes and task criteria).

Reliability: Concerned with fairness to students based on comparability between markers' judgements and of results yielded over time.

Pre and post assessment moderation: Investment in design of assessment methods (pre assessment), as well as processes to support and review marker judgements of students' marks and/or grades and feedback (post assessment).

Pre-determined criteria based rubrics and comprehensive marking guides: Instruments used to promote shared understandings about expectations and performance standards in assessment.

Exchange marking: Occurs when two staff members exchange certain pieces of work for marking (e.g., the Cairns lecturer marks examination scripts for the Townsville lecturer and vice versa).

Double marking: Occurs when two staff members mark the same piece of work. Comments and marks of the original assessor are seen by the second marker.

Double blind: Double marking where the second marker does not see the original comments or marks.

Interchangeable terms

- Exchange marking = Cross marking
- Double marking = Confirmatory review
- Blind marking = Anonymous marking

Consider

Pre assessment moderation

It is critical when designing assessment to ensure that the ability to complete the tasks we set for students *actually* depends on achievement of the intended learning outcomes. If the task can be done without that learning, then the measure is **invalid**. If you assess something that is not specified in the subject learning outcomes, then what message are you sending to your students? Conversely, if you specify learning outcomes that are not assessed, what message are you sending your students?

Post assessment moderation

When you mark a piece of work you are using your professional judgement. Imagine you take a copy of all your students' work. You mark the originals and return them, keeping a record of the marks. A week later you mark the copies and compare the marks. Do you think that they will compare well? (**Intra-marker reliability**). What about if a colleague marks the copies? Will their marks compare well with yours? (**Inter-marker reliability**).

Research literature says that both these forms of reliability are frequently very low unless specific practices are employed to ensure that markers agree on the criteria, the performance standards and the forms of evidence that equate to particular marks being awarded. (Duncan Nulty, unpublished Good Practice Guide)

MODERATION ESSENTIALS

How do we moderate?

PRE ASSESSMENT

Design of assessment methods: It is essential to invest in pre assessment moderation strategies. **No amount of investment in post assessment moderation strategies can address flaws in design of assessment methods.**

Subject Coordinators, as appropriately supported by Course Coordinators, are encouraged to engage with relevant colleagues and available data in subject level planning to ensure that:

1. Assessment tasks and criteria are aligned with learning outcomes, and across campuses, modes and/or study periods, of high cognitive order, and weighted appropriately
2. Assessment tasks are authentic (see JCU assessment list), aligned with core learning activities and, where appropriate, stimulate a wide range of active responses
3. Assessment tasks take student and marker workload into consideration, are distributed across the study period, and allow opportunities for timely and consequential feedback
4. Assessment task specifications, criteria, standards and supporting resources are available, clearly articulated and aligned

Data may include**:** Curriculum mapping output, student achievement data, YourJCU Subject Survey data, Peer Review of Teaching data, pre marking moderation meeting notes etc.

Adapted from Lasen, M. (2017)
Learning Teaching and Student Engagement
James Cook University

POST ASSESSMENT

Marking and grading: It is important for Subject Coordinators to facilitate processes associated with supporting and reviewing marker judgements across different campuses, modes and/or study periods. Facilitating a **pre marking calibration meeting** and maintaining communication with markers to further support judgements **during marking** will significantly reduce the number of issues that can present post marking.

Pre marking

Pre marking calibration meeting: A highly effective moderation strategy is for Subject Coordinators to select and distribute a small sample of student work to all markers, across campuses and modes, who blind mark according to the criteria-standards rubric or marking guide. Subject Coordinators then facilitate a meeting with markers to review and calibrate marker judgements (through discussion and review of criteria vis-à-vis evidence/student work). Only after having been calibrated do markers then commence marking their allocated quota.

Other pre-marking moderation strategies include:
- de-identifying student samples to allow for anonymous marking;
- exchanging a percentage of student submissions for marking;
- allocating questions to markers so that, where possible, the same assessor marks a particular question for all papers.

During marking

Double mark a selection of submissions at grades borders across the grades range, noting that:

A **critical interface** in any standards system is the one between satisfactory and unsatisfactory or **pass and fail**. The greatest return on investment is probably to be had by focusing on that interface. This is what 'benchmark', 'threshold', or 'minimally competent' decisions are essentially about. The second most critical point is probably the **level of attainment necessary to warrant award of the highest available code** (Sadler, 2014, p. 285).

Post marking

Note that it is often problematic to change or scale marks after all marking has been completed. This moderation strategy should only be used when other strategies have been ineffective.