Moderation versus validation: policy and practices in higher education at TAFE

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Abstract

Current studies conducted by NCVER and others in a vocational setting suggest that practitioners at TAFE are quite clear about validation, but much more needs to be done to ensure that the concept and practice of moderation is clearly understood and implemented within the sector.

This preliminary study further investigates the nature and extent of moderation policies and practices in higher education programs at a TAFE Institute. The study firstly explores staff perceptions that underlie their experiences in relation to the moderation policy and practice within a department. The preliminary findings will be used to explore, review and evaluate the consistency, reliability and comparability of assessment judgment from different departments within the institute. The scope will then be extended to a nation-wide basis, surveying Australian TAFE Higher Education Providers members to compare understandings and practices of moderation to seek ways to improve the practice in order to meet TESQA requirements, which demands evidence of

“details of moderation and any other arrangements that will be used to support consistency and reliability of assessment and grading across each subject in the course study, noting any differences in these processes across delivery methods, delivery sites, and/or student cohorts” (TESQA 2012, p.32)

The final stage of the study will be further broadened internationally, comparing New Zealand, UK, Australia, Canada and the United States under similar settings, for international comparison and analysis. The aim of the research is to better understand the issues and challenges in relation to the quality and rigour of assessments within an institute, nationally and internationally.
Why?

- HE at TAFE is still young and different
- Promote a good practice
- Increase and promote staff awareness
- Compliance issue
The Literature

- HE sector: reliant more on sessional markers (Smith & Coombe, 2006) – their flexibility and lower cost.
- University assessment practice in moderation is considered far behind assessment practice in moderation in the school sector (Bloxham, 2009; Murphy, 2006).
Research on moderation within vocation settings (Gillis, Dyson & Bateman, 2010) and/or at university setting (Kwan, Wong, Kwong, Lau & Goody, 2014) certainly has been conducted.

There is no coherent body of work that combines the findings on a cross-institutional or international basis.

There is no such study within the setting of higher education at TAFE (Misko, Halliday, Wynes, Stanwick & Gemici, 2014).
TESQA

• “details of moderation and any other arrangements that will be used to support consistency and reliability of assessment and grading across each subject in the course study, noting any differences in these processes across delivery methods, delivery sites, and/or student cohorts”
Research Aims

• Review the consistency, reliability and comparability of assessment judgement, seeking ways to improve the practice not only to meet TEQSA requirements but also promote a good practice

• Compare the moderation policies and practices at Australian TAFE Higher Education Providers (HEPs) to further develop benchmarking, scholarship and workforce development opportunities nationally and internationally

• Further develop relationships for knowledge exchange and business opportunities within international networks
Research Questions

1. What understanding and practice of moderation are held within different departments in the institute?

2. What are staff perceptions regarding to the range of processes and procedures of moderation currently being used within the institute?

3. What are similarity and differences in relation to the moderation policy and practice between different TAFE HEPs in Australia?
Research Methods

• A mixed method approach
Three Stages

- **Stage 1:** will explore higher education staff perceptions that underlie their experiences in relation to moderation policy and practice within Holmesglen. The analysis will review the consistency, reliability and comparability of assessment judgment. Approaches to meeting TEQSA moderation requirements will be examined.
Stage 2

• The scope will be extended on a nation-wide basis, surveying Australian TAFE Higher Education Providers (HEPs) to compare moderation practices at different TAFE HEPs. This will assist those providers with benchmarking, scholarship and workforce development.

Permission has been granted by Australian TAFE HEPs Network to interview the members.
Stage 3

- The scope will be further broadened internationally, comparing New Zealand, UK, Australia, Canada and the USA under similar settings (i.e. vocational non-university HEPs). This analysis will further develop relationships for knowledge exchange and business opportunities globally.
Preliminary study

• Survey was conducted
• 6 questions:
  1. How do you define ‘moderation’?
  2. Why do you moderate?
  3. What do you moderate?
  4. When do you moderate?
  5. With whom do you moderate?
  6. How do you moderate?
Assessment Moderation

Moderation usually means social moderation. in the sense used by Linn (1996). That is, it involves comparisons of the assessment judgements of different assessors in different settings but all relating to the same learning outcomes (or competency standards), with the purpose of ensuring that the judgements are comparable.
Assessment validation in VET

• Validation involves checking that the assessment tool produced is valid, reliable, sufficient, current and contained authentic evidence to enable reasonable judgements to be made as to whether the requirements of the relevant aspects of the Training Package had been met. It includes reviewing and making recommendations for future improvements to the assessment tool, process and/or outcomes.

(The University of Notre Dame Australia, guideline (VET): Validation and Moderation of Assessment)
Responses: How do you define ‘moderation’?

Key words:
• Consistency
• Accuracy
• relevance
• Fair
• Critique assessments
• Standards achieved
Responses: Why do you moderate?

• Custom and practice
• Accurate and valid final result
• Standards are maintained
• Consistent quality of marking
• Fair
• Does this sound familiar?
Responses: What do you moderate?

- Assessments
- Marking guide
- Assessments and grades
- Students works

Why so limited in assessments and marking only?
Responses: When do you moderate?

- End of the session
- Once assessments complete i.e., exams are done
- Marking is done
**Responses: How do you moderate?**

- Sample
- Review marked sample assessments from different grade rank
- Borderline is looked at, reviewed and decisions are made in terms of final outcomes
Responses: With whom do you moderate?

- Same teaching team
- Teachers in the same department
- Subject experts or peers
- “Convenience "is an issue
What does this mean?

- Does “validation” cover “moderation”?
- Is “moderation” more limited than “validation”?
- Do teaching staff moderate because of compliance rather than genuinely believe in the practice?
- Where is the role of industry in this? (compare to VET, HE seems behind)
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References


