

Moderation of school-based assessment

Assessments of student performances in courses and subjects at school are often used in the selection process for post-school study or employment. Consequently, it is essential that these assessments are comparable in all schools. This in turn helps to ensure fairness in the assessment, marking and grading of students.

Moderation is the term used by the Curriculum Council to refer to the process for achieving comparability between schools of grades (A to E) and where applicable, numerical assessments (marks out of 100). Comparability occurs when the same result in the same course unit or subject means the same thing across the state.

The basis of establishing comparability is:

- syllabus documentation which clearly indicates to schools (i) the knowledge, skills and understandings that is to be taught state wide and (ii) the requirements that schools must follow in terms of assessment types and weightings
- professional development opportunities for teachers to develop a common understanding of the standards to be applied in the course or subject
- statistical adjustment of school numerical scores based on performance in the Curriculum Council examination.

To achieve this, the Curriculum Council provides:

- quality syllabuses
- quality assessment support materials
- assessment seminars for teachers
- a moderation program involving consensus moderation meetings and school moderation visits and validations.

Assessment seminars

Assessment seminars provide an opportunity for teachers to share good practice in developing assessment outlines, designing assessment tasks and marking keys and the marking of student work. They promote the development of common understandings about standards for the course or subject.

These seminars are typically of a half-day duration and are usually held in Term 1.

Consensus moderation meetings

Consensus moderation meetings are conducted by Curriculum Council officers with teachers from groups of schools. The focus of the meetings is the development of a shared understanding of assessment standards for the course. This is achieved by reviewing all of the marked assessment tasks for a sample of students covering the range of grades from different schools. After receiving feedback from their colleagues, teachers reflect on any adjustments that may be required in order to make their school's assessments comparable with others in the group.

These meetings are typically of a half-day duration and are usually held in Term 3.

Teachers are required to retain all completed student assessment tasks in a student assessment file until grades for the course unit or subject have been finalised.

School moderation visits

Each year, moderators and school moderation officers visit a sample of schools. The purpose of school moderation visits is to ensure that Curriculum Council requirements are understood, that approved assessment and grading procedures are implemented, and that state wide comparability of standards is achieved. A moderation visit can be either a document visit or a grading visit.

The following materials are required for all moderation visits:

- a course unit or subject outline
- an assessment outline which reflects the requirements of the syllabus
- student assessment records (i.e. the marks book) for the class or classes (at the time of the visit)
- assessment tasks given before the visit and any developed for use later in the year.

In addition, for a grading visit the following materials also need to be provided:

- a proposed distribution of grades for students at the school
- student assessment files for students at the cut-offs for each grade
- a ranked list of the numerical scores of the students (at the time of the visit).

In some situations, where a visit is not viable, a document or grading validation will occur. The school submits the required materials to the Curriculum Council. The materials are reviewed, a report is written, the teacher is contacted to discuss the report, and then, the report is sent to the principal for sign-off. This validation process is typically used for schools that are delivering a course or subject for the first time and for isolated schools.

Small group moderation

In a course unit or subject with a small number of students, the anomalous performance of one or two students in the Curriculum Council examination may unfairly affect the degree of statistical adjustment of the numerical school assessment of other students in that school's cohort. Forming a small group moderation partnership with one or more other schools provides the school with the opportunity to increase their group size. Correctly implemented small group moderation procedures minimise the potential statistical anomalies associated with the statistical moderation¹ of numerical school assessments in a small cohort.

Schools must become involved in a small group moderation partnership when the number of Year 12 enrolments in a particular course unit or TEE subject is less than 10 Curriculum Council examination candidates. It is the responsibility of each school in this situation to form a partnership and to ensure it operates effectively.

Note: When groups are between 10 and 15 Curriculum Council examination candidates it is advisable to consider forming a partnership, to allow for possible reductions in enrolments that may result in less than 10 students sitting the Curriculum Council examination. For Languages (LOTE) courses or subjects there should be a minimum of 10 Curriculum Council examination candidates over and above background speakers.

¹ Statistical adjustment or moderation is the process used by the Curriculum Council to adjust the distribution of the schools marks in a course unit or subject to the same distribution (i.e. mean and standard deviation) as the distribution of the school's standardised Curriculum Council examination mark.