

Developing and testing models for benchmarking and moderation of assessment for private higher education providers

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List of acronyms used

ACER – Australian Council for Educational Research

AHELO – Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes

ALTC – Australian Learning and Teaching Council

AM – Assessment Moderation

AQF – Australian Qualifications Framework

AUQA – Australian University Quality Agency

BAMET – Benchmarking and Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool

BM – Benchmarking Moderation

ERGA – Education Research Group of Adelaide

HEI – Higher Education Institutions

HERDSA – Higher Education Research Development Society of Australasia

HERGA – Higher Education Research Group of Adelaide

HOS – Head of School

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OLT – Office for Learning and Teaching

SANTPEN – South Australian Northern Territory Promoting Excellence Network

TEQSA – Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency

Executive Summary

Numerous previous studies, including projects conducted under the auspices of the Office for Learning and Teaching and its predecessors, have focussed on benchmarking in universities, in areas ranging from archaeology to leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching. The small-sized, private higher education provider institutions' needs have not received similar level of attention even though it is expected that the private higher education sector will expand to contribute up to 30% of the total higher education enrolments by 2020 (Shah & Lewis, 2010). In order to address this gap, this project sought to examine the needs of these smaller institutions, testing the lessons learned in practice and thus improve their quality of capability in the context of Australian higher education.

The specific purpose of this project was to benchmark assessment moderation in four colleges by applying the Garlick and Pryor (2004) model of benchmarking. This benchmarking approach contrasts with prior benchmarking approaches, as typified by the McKinnon et al (1999) model where information is sought from an institution, e.g. a university, for the purpose of senior management decision-making. Instead the Garlick and Pryor model argues for an improvement and learning focus for the staff at the coalface. Hence, our interest in the Garlick and Pryor approach.

The five steps suggested in the Garlick and Pryor approach were adopted as the project's guiding principle, in order to test the process of benchmarking in practice.

The steps are outlined below:

Step 1	Review the current environment
Step 2	Develop consensus around a strategic plan
Step 3	Commit to its implementation
Step 4	Review Progress
Step 5	Learn for Continuous Improvement

Step 1 was enacted through interviews around current assessment moderation practices in two departments, namely, Education and Theology/Ministry, in four private higher education colleges in four different states of Australia. The review results were reported back to the informant groups and they were provided with an opportunity to revise their assessment moderation processes in light of the collated survey reports. The progress of these reflections and changes to assessment moderation were then examined by way of an online survey. This survey was analysed in order to learn how the facilitation of assessment quality and assessment moderation processes could be continually improved and managed. Steps 2 - 4 were conducted through a consensus-building process consisting of regular team-meetings and through dissemination exercises and progress reports. Step 5 is evidenced in the outcomes of the project and the application of the guiding principle throughout the project.

Implications:

1. Clarifying the Definition of Assessment Moderation and its Purpose

The range of responses to the survey question which sought clarification of terminology was met with surprisingly little focus or coherence. Instead the responses appeared to slant towards addressing the purpose of assessment moderation. Hence, discussions around 'meanings' did little to clarify definitions of benchmarking but rather appeared to suggest that some respondents were thinking of 'meaning' in terms of pragmatic 'purposes' of assessment moderation. In general, the purpose of Assessment Moderation was regarded as contributing to the following:

- Assuring Fairness and Equity
- Assuring Quality
- Assuring Comparability of Assessment Across Departmental, Discipline and Institutional Boundaries
- Targeting Learning and Teaching and Research outcomes for Assessment Improvement.

2. *Clarifying Strategic Purpose: Accountability vs Improvement*

On the basis of these findings, the project developed emphasis around how conversations about benchmarking could be more strategically focused to produce formative learning opportunities. As such, two significant tools were developed:

- a. *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool* (Appendix B), which is anticipated to be gainfully utilised in future reviews and evaluations of assessment moderation to facilitate and extend conversations about benchmarking for formative assessments
- b. *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* (pages 44-46). This framework was developed in response to a key finding of the project, i.e. that participants of the project were driven by 'accountability' measures rather than the improvement and learning opportunities that assessment moderation provided. Hence, the developed framework anticipates that this excessive focus on accountability can be moderated and channelled into more formative approaches to manage assessment moderation outcomes. The excessive focus on accountability instead of academic learning and improvement in the assessment moderation processes suggested to the project team that more attention should be given to the post-moderation actions, where more deliberate structured steps should be implemented in order to ensure beneficial learning and action would follow the moderation investigative phases. The *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* is yet to be published but will be trialled across the four institutions post-project.

3. *Supporting Part-Time and Sessional Staff with Assessment Moderation*

Another significant finding of the project reveals a noticeable gap in quality assurance involving the need for strategic capacity building of all staff, including part-time and sessional staff. The canvassing of the views and needs of both full-time and part-time academic staff identified that the part-time staff are often neglected in professional training and policy-development and dissemination on assessment moderation practice. As a result of this identified disparity, the project team concludes that greater focus needs to be given to the induction, education/training engagement and support needs of the part-time academics in assessment moderation processes (see the full list of issues identified to be noted with regard to part-time academics on page 38).

Overall, in the initial interviews, five aspects of assessment moderation impact were identified, i.e. the learning and research impact, the comparability impact, the impact of quality assurance on quality assurance, the impact on students and the impact on fairness and equity of assessment. A number of difficulties and potential solutions were also suggested. The areas causing difficulties were time issues, procedural issues, consultation issues, resource issues and professional development issues.

In the final survey many of the identified assessment moderation issues were revisited and similar concerns were raised again leading to the following overall recommendations.

Recommendations

1. That institutions prioritise assessment moderation as an urgent research agenda to improve Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and that the *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool* and the *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* be tested and validated in practice.
2. That private and public higher education providers seek to improve inter-institutional collaboration on assessment moderation by streamlining and formalising review and evaluation processes by establishing clear guidelines and employing constructive strategies to facilitate such conversations.
3. That institutions seek out and test and validate available tools in their particular contexts, such as the *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool* provided here, as a basis for professional discussion, learning, analysis, research and evaluation about the assessment moderation process and its comparative value.
4. That greater intentionality is applied in decision-making and strategic planning around the induction, induction training, and consultation needs of part-time academics in relation to assessment moderation
5. That the focus on academic learning and improvement be targeted as a key performance indicator of quality assurance processes with respect to assessment moderation outcomes.
6. That models, such as the *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* provided here, be evaluated and adapted for particular institutional contexts for structuring assessment moderation processes and workflows to facilitate formative value-building for stakeholders.
7. That institutions develop local contexts for supporting Garlick and Pryor (2004) benchmarking processes to focus more strategically on personal and professional learning which can be viewed as a grass roots form of institutional learning, rather than accountability.

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Introduction

Background

Benchmarking and assessment moderation are generally recognised as important quality assurance mechanisms in education (Nazarko et al, 2009). Substantial investments are made in benchmarking and assessment moderation in higher education across the world. They form the basis for ensuring the quality of education and institutional operations. It has become clear, however, in a number of reviews of benchmarking, e.g. Garlick & Pryor (2004), Stella & Woodhouse (2007), that a one-size-fits all model of benchmarking, e.g. as expressed in McKinnon et al (1999) *Benchmarking: A manual for Australian Universities*, is not appropriate or helpful for all higher education institutions.

The importance of benchmarking and moderation of assessments in higher education has been generally recognised by accreditation authorities, such as Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) and Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) (Coates, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia, 2011a, 2011b; Dill & Beerkens, 2010) as well as the higher education institutions characteristically (Jones & Lang, 2009; Whitlock & Cross, 2011). But how might this benchmarking and moderation of assessment be achieved to provide the best benefit for higher education? Which model of benchmarking might be the most appropriate for this situation? In an attempt to answer these questions, this discussion begins considering benchmarking, its meaning and value in higher education.

Benchmarking

Garlick and Pryor's (2004) study of benchmarking in Australian universities concluded that 'whilst benchmarking has been increasingly evident in Australian universities over the last decade, ... its development has not kept pace with changes in recent years in performance reporting and quality auditing.' (p. vii). They proposed a new approach to replace the McKinnon, Walker and Davis (2000) manual-based approach, involving five phases

- a review of the current environment
- agreeing on a strategic plan
- committing to its implementation
- reviewing progress
- learning for continuous improvement

They explained:

These five phases see an approach to benchmarking as a holistic and ongoing process leading to real improvement through learning, connectivity and leadership commitment. It is an intrinsic and ongoing part of the operating environment and not a one-off statistical exercise based only on the collection of comparative performance indicators (p.46).

This they contrasted with the McKinnon et al. (2000) approach, based on their findings in their review of university benchmarking project:

The project found that the McKinnon et al. manual was not seen positively as a benchmarking tool that could assist universities with their improvement agenda. It was seen as having confusing language and concepts, as being a 'one size fits all' top-down approach, and as anathema to 'learning for improvement organisations'. It was seen to also contribute further to the existing uncertainty and suspicion with which evaluation and auditing processes generally are regarded in universities. (p.viii)

The debate on how to best benchmark academic achievement in higher education institutions continues. In Europe there is a concerted move to produce generic and subject-specific outcomes for graduates and to devise tests around these outcomes in order to validate the quality of individual tertiary programmes and thereby permit meaningful comparisons to be made amongst them.

Similarly, OECD's AHELO (Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes) project involving 149 higher education institutions across 17 countries brought an international dimension to the significance of measuring learning outcomes. Whilst still in its early stages there is confidence that progress is being made especially in relation to 'improved learning outcomes':

A major benefit of working towards developing comparative measures of learning outcomes is to keep the spotlight on teaching and learning within higher education institutions. Measures of learning outcomes also hold important promises for higher education faculties and leaders in providing evidence-based diagnostic tools on the strengths and weaknesses of their courses and programmes to be used as part of their quality improvement efforts. Developing benchmarks on learning outcomes attained by students in different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is also essential to better understand the interplay between teaching and learning, and supports HEIs and faculties in moving towards more student-centred pedagogies. (p.56.)

In a similar vein, the European Union Tuning Project, with over 100 universities participating, has sought to reconcile the need for universities to retain their unique missions whilst acknowledging the need for a ready comparison of degrees through the testing of competencies.

The Tuning project deals with two types of competences: generic competences (instrumental, interpersonal and systemic) and subject-specific competences (including skills and knowledge). First and second cycles have been described in terms of *agreed and dynamic reference points*: learning outcomes and competences to be developed/achieved. The beautiful thing of comparable competences and learning outcomes is that they allow flexibility and autonomy in the construction of curricula. At the same time, they are the basis for formulating commonly understood level indicators. (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2003, p.28)

The three generic types of competencies are defined as follows:

Instrumental Competences: Those having an instrumental function. They include:

- *Cognitive* abilities, capacity to understand and manipulate ideas and thoughts.
- *Methodological* capacities to manipulate the environment: organising time and strategies of learning, making decisions or solving problems.
- *Technological* skills related to use of technological devices, computing and information management skills.
- *Linguistic* skills such as oral and written communication or knowledge of a second language.

Interpersonal Competences:

- *Individual* abilities relating to the capacity to express one's own feelings, critical and self-critical abilities.
- *Social skills* relating to interpersonal skills or team-work or the expression of social or ethical commitment. These tend to favour processes of social interaction and of co-operation.

Systemic competences: Those skills and abilities concerning *whole systems*. They suppose a

combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge that allows one to see how the parts of a whole relate and come together. These capacities include the ability to plan changes so as to make improvements in whole systems and to design new systems. Systemic competences require as a base the prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences. (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2003, pp.70-71).

The Tuning Project, though initially established in Europe in 2000 to link the political objectives of the so-called Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy to the higher educational sector, has now been expanded to include South and North America, Africa and Russia and has been conducting feasibility studies in Australia, Canada and China. What all these initiatives reinforce is the endorsement of learning and improvement without minimising flexibility and distinctiveness.

Within Australia, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) developed the Graduate Skills Assessment (<http://www.acer.edu.au/gsa>) to test critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal understandings and written communication both at the commencement and again at the completion of a degree. The Graduate Assessment Skills is an Australian version of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (<http://cae.org/performance-assessment/category/cla-overview/>) which itself has been used in over 700 institutions in the United States over the past decade.

This development is in-line with the expectations of the Bradley review of higher education in Australia (Australian Government, 2008), specifically:

Recommendation 23: That the Australian Government commission and appropriately fund work on the development of new quality assurance arrangements for higher education as part of the new framework set out in Recommendation 19. This would involve:

- a set of indicators and instruments to directly assess and compare learning outcomes; and
- a set of formal statements of academic standards by discipline along with processes for applying those standards. (p. xxii & p.137.)

Assessment Moderation

Against this backdrop, this project was initiated with the express aim of supporting the call for improved course assurance and to share and extend current best practice in assessment moderation across four institutions. The project has been further informed by current but as yet, limited research into the practice and impact of assessment moderation. In this context, several studies have been useful.

For instance, a number of studies conducted within and between Australian universities to ascertain positions held by academic staff with regard to moderation practices suggest that the interest in moderation practice is increasingly evident. A 2008 – 2010 study on assessment moderation in transnational education (Mahmud & Sanderson, 2011) unearthed some common meanings about assessment moderation among academics. They understood assessment moderation to be about:

- Consistency in assessment and marking
- Process for ensuring comparability
- Measure of quality control
- Process to look for equivalence
- Maintaining academic standards to ensure fairness
- Part of quality assurance (Assessment Moderation Toolkit, 2010)

From the research it is evident that moderation of assessment is sometimes viewed very simplistically as post-hoc comparison of assessment results, and in some institutions, then

normalising the assessment results (Brown, 2010). However, a more comprehensive view of moderation is emerging in a number of places with significant institutional commitment to more comprehensive processes which attend to assessment design, making judgements on informed and common basis, and grading outputs (Brown, 2010; Bloxham & Boyd, 2011). For example, the (assessment) moderation process as understood in the *Moderation for fair assessment in transnational learning and teaching* project (Mahmoud & Sanderson, 2011) utilised a revised form of depicting the assessment process derived from Bloxham and Boyd (2007) comprising the following stages which focus on i] pre-assessment issues, ii] marking issues and iii] after the assessment process issues:

Phase 1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturer(s) design assessment items and write assessment criteria (and marking scheme) Considers learning objectives, fairness, contextualisation and clarity • Scrutiny of assessment items by colleagues/course team/external examiner • Communication of assessment criteria and marking scheme to markers and students • Students complete assessment items
Phase 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lecturers mark completed assessment • Second marking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Representative sample \sqrt{n} + fails (min. 5) or Double marking (e.g. dissertations and high value assignments) • Markers agree on final marks (with third marker involved if dispute) • Intra-module moderation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checking for consistency of marking and standards across modules which are offered more than once during the year or at different campuses • External examiner receives an agreed sample of items for all modules (not usually applicable to Year 1 work)
Phase 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination/assessment board • Considers and agrees all marks. Reviews mark profiles and consider unexpected or inconsistent patterns in student performance across modules and student groups. • Marks/grades released to students • Review of assessment with reference to examination board data and examiner, staff and student feedback to inform future assessment processes.

A significant milestone in current studies emerged in 2013 when Adie, Lloyd and Betel reported on a small-scale study involving interviews of 25 academic teaching staff at a single Australian university. Four current and distinct views on the perceived role for assessment moderation were identified and labelled accordingly in terms of serving principles of ‘equity’, ‘justification’, ‘community building’ and ‘accountability’. ‘Moderation as equity’ focused on the perceived need for grading to be consistent as well as fair to students while ‘moderation as justification’ rated the ability to justify any decisions in any public or private defence of grades awarded. ‘Moderation as community building’ set as its focus the sharing of standards and the interpretation of these in order to ensure a degree of conformity in the grading process whilst ‘moderation as accountability’ placed the distribution of grades across the spectrum as the prime function for moderation.

Notably and even more recently, the ‘Assuring learning and teaching standards through inter-institutional peer review and moderation’ project established ‘a robust and validated inter-institutional peer review and moderation strategy’ through which ‘general consensus can be reached on assessment input (e.g., assessment focus, criteria, valid assessment tasks and guidelines) and outcome standards (i.e., student achievement in subject-level assessment as evidenced in assessment samples) in a comparable final year subject being taught in different universities’ (Krause, 2014, p.7).

Others have, however, expressed reservations about the desirability of establishing such

generalities. Sadler (2013) challenges

the philosophical legitimacy of decomposing competence as a complex concept into constituent skills-competencies; the uncoupling of various competencies properly expected of study in higher education from regular academic programmes and courses; and the prospect of mass testing and its flow-on effects could divert attention and resources away from the primary sites at which competencies should be developed, practised and refined, these sites being normal academic studies. (p.15)

Previously he had cautioned against assuming that consistency in any grading process can be readily ensured by the use of 'rubrics':

A third and more recent method is to rely on codifications, which are word-based descriptions of standards, including rubrics. Interpretations of the key terms in such statements are not fixed universals but context dependent and, for that reason, are elastic. (Sadler, 2012, p.3).

He continued with a further cautionary note against the ready dismissal of the value of so-called subjective judgements:

Judgements which are integrative, holistic and made without formal decision templates or procedures are commonly labelled in a somewhat derogatory way as 'subjective' as if to suggest they are based on little more than unsubstantiated opinion or personal taste. That line of thinking does subjective judgements a grave disservice. Many professionals constantly rely on so-called subjective judgements that are not, and sometimes cannot be, verified by independent objective means such as a standard laboratory test. (p.10).

Grote, B. (2000) has argued in a similar vein:

Higher education requires much professional judgement that cannot be constrained by or contained within regulations. The best quality assurance is highly qualified, competent staff who put their research work out for peer review through regular publication in learned journals. (p.7)

Benchmarking Assessment Moderation

It is in this atmosphere of debate about the most effective means of ensuring appropriate benchmarking for tertiary programmes that this project was launched to investigate the opinions about and practices in assessment moderation within four private Australian higher education institutions. The project group opted for a Garlick and Pryor (2004) approach following their five-step process and has been encouraged by the words of Dill and Beerkens (2013):

The ultimate goal of external quality assurance should be for universities themselves to become genuine 'learning organisations' (Dill, 1999) in which each institution's assurance of academic standards demonstrably involves: a 'culture of evidence' utilizing accepted canons of scholarly inquiry; effective peer accountability for the quality of academic programmes and the validity of unit-level academic decision-making; and systematic identification and dissemination of best practice for improving teaching and student learning in all subject fields. (no page number).

The rationale for this project is a response to Dill and Beerkens call for higher education institutions to become 'learning organisations' in the context of assessment moderation. The specific activity context for developing these new and more appropriate models of benchmarking was selected to inform and improve the management and practise of the assessment of student learning. In that context some of the important factors to be considered were identified to be graduate standards and attributes as a basis for quality assessment, the nature and application of assessment policies and the quality processes used to assure the value and credibility of the assessment processes. In particular with regard to the quality assurance mechanisms associated with assessment, the project group chose to focus on moderation.

The key questions considered in this project were:

- a) How well are the processes of assessment moderation understood?
- b) How do they operate in small colleges?
- c) How can assessment moderation processes be usefully employed by small colleges without placing onerous burdens on institutions with limited resources?

Thus this project consisted of a combined effort between the four colleges, where benchmarking in improving assessment quality was treated as a collegial conversation and learning together processes (Garlick & Pryor, 2004) and where improved trust in and around the assessment process became one of the key aims as suggested by Carless (2009).

The proposal to develop benchmarking at these colleges was not a new idea. In 2010 a group of seven private higher education institutions from Australia and New Zealand sought to develop and implement benchmarking processes. However, despite interest and goodwill on all sides, due to resource and time limitations, the progress of the initial project was slow. Thus, this project has sought to take up one of the resource challenges faced in the initial project by streamlining goals and consolidating resources to benefit wider sector practice for such providers. Thus this project and funding context has provided a way to implement practically a key part of the vision of the original collaborative consortium of colleges.

Project Context and Purpose

A number of previous Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT), and its predecessors, projects have focused on benchmarking between universities, e.g. within areas such as archaeology (Clarke, 2008), clinical learning in speech pathology (Lincoln et al, 2008), e-learning (Smith, 2011), graduate employability (Oliver, 2010; Beck, 2014), capacity building in learning and teaching (Jones, et al., 2014), and leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching (Harvey, 2014). The needs of private, small-sized institutions have not received similar level of attention, even though it is estimated that private higher education sector will expand to contribute approximately 30% of the total higher education enrolments by 2020 (Shah & Lewis, 2010) and already over the period 2009-2012 they experienced 22.3 % growth in undergraduate numbers (Edwards & Radloff, 2013). Thus this project sought to understand in greater depth the needs of these smaller institutions test the lessons learned in practice and thereby strengthen their quality and capability in the context of Australian higher education.

The project sought to develop a shared understanding of how educational quality of a particular aspect of tertiary higher education programmes is conceptualised and implemented in private higher education institutions. The project group sought to use this understanding as a basis for improving the educational quality of the colleges' processes, in particular the assessment of student learning and, thereby to provide for better student learning outcomes. More broadly we sought to develop models of benchmarking and moderation of assessment which are appropriate for, but not limited to, small institutions of higher education.

The project activities were conducted in multi-disciplinary small-scale, private, faith-based, not for profit institutions of higher education. In the process of examining and developing models of benchmarking of assessment for small entities such as the four participating institutions, the findings are intended to provide opportunities for benchmarking between a range of stakeholders. Fundamentally, an important goal is to ensure these models articulate into benchmarking activity between small and large, private and public, faith-based and secular higher education entities. Thus, while the project's baseline is to seek immediate benefits for participating institutions, it anticipates that a subsequent step in a follow up project would be to develop communities of practice to measure these outcomes across various cohorts of higher education providers. In summary, this project sought to use existing information on assessment quality processes, to develop and improve processes and procedures for benchmarking that are appropriate for, but not limited to smaller institutions, specifically in the context of assessment moderation.

The Project Plan

The project comprised of 5 stages as set out in the table below:

PROJECT PLAN		
Stage	Outcome & Deliverables	Evaluation & Dissemination
Stage 1 : Project establishment		June 2012 – Aug. 2012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage project manager and evaluator Formation of terms of reference for reference group Preparation of agreements between institutions Planning and scheduling of project activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agreed detailed project plan among the four colleges Ethics approval List of suitable staff members from the colleges to interview in stage two List of identified opportunities for dissemination Terms of reference for evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team meeting 1 Discuss with evaluator the purposes of evaluation, both formative and summative Identify among team members opportunities for dissemination.
Stage 2 : Data Collection and Interviews	<i>Step 1 in Garlick & Pryor benchmarking process</i>	Sept. 2012 – Feb. 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of background information for data gathering activities As per ethics application in stage one interviews with key personnel, Document acquisition, from two main disciplines in the four colleges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional document analysis report Preparation of conference paper on assessment moderation and benchmarking policies in private higher education institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team meeting two Paper presentation at appropriate conference.
Stage 3 : Data Analysis and Trial Design	<i>Step 2 in Garlick & Pryor benchmarking process</i>	March 2013 – May 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data analysis and design of revised approach to assessment moderation via team analysis and working conferences with key college members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised model (with possible variations) of assessment moderation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team meeting three including the reference group and the evaluator.
Stage 4 : Implementation of revised model of assessment moderation and evaluation of interviews.	<i>Step 3 in Garlick & Pryor benchmarking process</i>	June 2013 – Dec. 2013
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of revised approach to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ethics approval for the evaluation of revised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team meeting four

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessment moderation Preparation of interview questions and ethics application for evaluating the revised model trial. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> model Preparation of information for revised model implementers. 	
Stage 5 : Evaluation and Reporting	<i>Steps 4 & 5 in Garlick & Pryor benchmarking process</i>	Jan.2014 – May 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of the revised approach to assessment moderation and benchmarking Transcription of interviews and their analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview reports Final project reports Conference and journal papers on project outcomes. 	Team meeting five <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluation of project objectives and external evaluation Dissemination of findings and the effectiveness of the new model of assessment moderation and benchmarking in operation as a report to academic discipline networks, private higher education institutions and the higher education community in general.

The above plan was implemented with contextually necessary modifications, e.g. more team meetings than were initially envisaged were conducted via teleconferencing to discuss research and administrative issues and the timelines were adjusted where necessary.

Project Methodology

Multiple methods of data collection and analysis were employed in this project (Thomas, 2003). Each of the forms of data and analysis were correlated, or triangulated, in order to ensure a more comprehensive and finely nuanced picture of the issues examined emerges.

The specific methods of data collection relevant to each of the project objectives are summarised in table below, and then described in greater detail subsequently.

	Objective	Data collection
1	Report describing the existing benchmarking models, processes and results arising from the benchmarking activities which are employed by the four participating private colleges with respect to graduate standards and attributes, and learning assessment policies and processes, focusing particularly on the moderation of assessment within disciplines and across disciplines.	Interviews with college academic managers, heads of schools and a sample of key full-time and part-time staff teaching in the two main disciplines common across the colleges, education and ministry/theology. Policy documents on assessment and moderation. Institutional reports and documents on assessment and moderation over the last two years.
2	Report section on the views of the staff who participate in the first round of the inter-college benchmarking process with regard to its outcomes and how this process may be implemented in a regular and more beneficial manner.	Working conferences, with key discipline groups in each institution considering the benchmarking process and its outcomes.
3	Implementation of revised processes in all the colleges which take into account the feedback from the first round of consultations.	Based on the evidence obtained during the above data collection steps, revised processes of assessment/moderation were to be trialled in each of the colleges according to the strategic needs identified by the academic managers and heads of schools, but were only partly accomplished. Documents describing changes to assessment and assessment moderation based on the stage one report were to be collected, but this was not achieved. Information with respect to the outcomes of the trial was collected.
4	Report on a second round of inter-college benchmarking in these areas, which has incorporated the feedback from the first round and has evaluated the subsequent activities.	Survey data was collected from the staff and heads of schools involved in the implementation of the revised assessment/moderation processes.

The above plan was implemented with contextually necessary modifications e.g. more team meetings than were initially envisaged were conducted via teleconferencing to discuss research and administrative issues and the timelines were adjusted where necessary.

Research Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative data were sought in data gathering and analysis. The quantitative information included quantitative survey questions, with opportunities to respond to multiple choice questions with pre-formulated answer options as well as opportunities to provide alternative answers in short-answer format. The qualitative information consisted of descriptive answers to qualitative interview and survey questions. Taken together this was a rich source of comparative information between the four participating institutions enabling a form of intrinsic benchmarking. The value of this exercise was that it extended professional conversations beyond the investigating circle to include the survey cohorts, enabling further and ongoing reflection on specific aspects of assessment, moderation and quality to be explored against institutional capability and resourcing.

Instruments

The project data was collated through interviews and document analysis conducted in four institutions across four states but confined to two disciplines: Education and Theology/Ministry.

Process Steps

As indicated previously, the project was guided by Garlick and Pryor's 5-step process. In the first instance, the environmental scan was achieved through the surveys and document analysis. The surveyed information was then analysed and feedback was provided back to the participating institutions, enabling them to review their responses in light of the combined, consolidated results from the eight research sites. As a result of the review, departments were expected to consider modifications to their moderation processes for improved performance. The process steps conformed to Garlick and Pryor's 5-step model.

Step 1, A Review of the Current Practice consisted of an environmental scan and was achieved through the interviews and document analysis.

Steps 2 and 3, Agreeing to a Strategic Plan and Committing to Its Implementation were achieved through project team reporting back to the departments surveyed and providing them an opportunity to utilise the combined information from Step 1 to develop and implement revised approaches to assessment moderation.

Step 4, Reviewing Progress was achieved by undertaking a survey at the end of this project to review the processes undertaken and their value.

Step 5, Learning and Continuous Improvement was achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, the process itself was an opportunity for reflective learning, as the staff members involved were challenged to articulate their perspectives on assessment and assessment moderation in particular. Secondly, the staff members were expected to reflect on their own academic practice and act on the basis of the information provided to them from seven other departments. Finally, they will be receiving information from the total project process which may be used as a guide for future thought and action about assessment moderation, assessment in general and benchmarking of academic activities.

A significant aspect of this research project is the question of ownership. The various stages of the project anticipated participation of players at the local level. Thus in this project the staff teaching the courses and in charge of their implementation and quality control were the key players in the process. They were the ones who furnished the information about the existing practice. They were the ones who considered the combined assessment moderation practice report from the eight individual sites and they were then invited to review their own practices in order to improve them. They also the ones who were then invited to implement the improvements to the processes they had devised and finally they provided the information for

the evaluation on the changes made to their processes and on the project process itself. However, the teaching staff engagement in the various aspects of this process in the discipline groups in the four institutions did not happen in a lock-step fashion. Some groups had the opportunity to engage with the process more thoroughly and were able to progress further than others in the same time period, for example, due to whole of institution accreditation pressures in some of the participating institutions over the project time period. The project acknowledges that this uneven outcome means that some of the anticipated benefits for some departments have been deferred but this variation is expected to be resolved as relevant parties continue to engage with this process through the Moodle site being developed as an output of this project.

The researcher team, consisting of representatives from all the four institutions, had the task of developing and leading the research programme, implementing the information gathering, collation, analysis and reporting on the original practice information gathered and collating, analysing and reporting on the final evaluation outcomes. This project anticipates ongoing conversations around the improvement of assessment moderation as its fundamental value.

Results

Data Collection - Interviews and Data Analysis

During the first phase of the project the current assessment moderation practice in place at that time was examined through interviews and document analysis in two disciplines, theology and education, in the four institutions across four Australian states. Information was gathered, analysed, categorised and provided back to the institutions so that they could review and modify their own assessment moderation processes in view of the combined results from the eight sites. These modifications would then be implemented and any modified assessment moderation programmes were to be evaluated in the final stage of this project.

Table 1 Interview Participation

Interview Participation			
	Total	Education	Theology & Ministry
Avondale College of Higher Education	12	5	7
Christian Heritage College	5	2	3
Tabor Adelaide	11	6	5
Tabor Victoria	12	3	9

Interviews were conducted with 40 lecturers at the four higher education institutions in Queensland, Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

The number of academics involved from the two disciplines was almost equal, with 21 of the lecturers coming from theology and/or ministry and 19 from education disciplines. The number of respondents from Queensland was five, from NSW 12, from Victoria 12 and from South Australia 11. These numbers of respondents provided good representation of their departments, as the sizes of the teaching groups varied between the institutions, except perhaps a lower proportion of Christian Heritage College Education staff than from the other departments or institutions.

Each interview was conducted on site at the interviewees' campuses and lasted from 30 to 90 minutes.

A pre-selected list of questions were posed, the responses recorded and subsequently transcribed and finally categorised. (See Appendix A for the interview questions).

On the basis of the data gathered in the first stage of the project four prime purposes for assessment moderation were identified amongst academics in education and theology. These are outlined in the table below:

Table 2 Summary of Assessment Moderation Purposes

	Purposes of Assessment Moderation	Identified Aspects	Details
1	<i>To establish fairness and equity in assessment</i>	10	The ten aspect focused on viewing assessment moderation as checking assessment consistency, and ensuring both the marking and grading were fair to students.
2	<i>To support quality assurance and accountability</i>	13	Thirteen aspects of assessment moderation as quality assurance were articulated, four aspects of accountability, two aspects relating to assessment moderation to teaching and three aspects about how assessment moderation can be seen as a means to achieve success in teaching and learning.
3	<i>To enable comparability of assessment across inter-institutional boundaries</i>	17	Eight aspects of internal institutional comparison were articulated, nine aspects of inter-institutional comparisons and finally how assignment moderation helps to align the educational programmes with the disciplines.
4	<i>To provide developmental value through learning and research processes aimed at improving assessment</i>	17	Eleven ways in which assessment moderation contributes to academic learning were identified, four ways in which assessment moderation links with research and two ways in which assessment moderation contributes to the goal of improvement of assessment

The results indicate similar levels of concern from education and theology departments for assessment moderation being used to check assessment consistency and fair marking and grading of students. On the other hand, the theology staff in general placed more emphasis on assessment moderation as both an internal and external form of quality assurance, except in terms of it acting as an audit of academics' work where the responses were similar. The theology staff also saw assessment moderation as a desirable internal comparison across boundaries, to ensure equitable grading across subjects or units and degrees. Only a few respondents in both education and theology saw assessment moderation as a way of improving teaching and learning.

The following table provides a breakdown of the responses of interviewees which led to the categorisation 1-4 above.

Table 3 Purpose of Assessment Moderation

Assessment Moderation Activity Category	Number/disciplines of people who identified Assessment Moderation activity category	
	Education N = 19	Theology N = 21
1. Assessment Moderation – Concern with Fairness and Equity		
<i>(b) Check of assessment consistency</i>		
Assessment moderation as check of assessment consistency across lecturers in a subject, including adjuncts (consistent standard of marking/assessment; verify consistency in marking / appropriateness of grading)	6 31.7%	8 38.1%
<i>(c) Fair marking and grading</i>		
Students have been marked and graded fairly (ensuring assessments are fair and equitable; demonstrate fairness and equity)	5 26.3%	5 23.8%
2. Assessment Moderation as Quality Assurance		
<i>(a) Internal process</i>		
Assessment moderation as internal checking of work against standards and benchmarks (assessments being internally second-marked, benchmarking against internal standards, internal process - range of marked exams / assessments given to colleague, including any 'fails', for cross marking)	1 5.3%	8 38.1%
<i>(b) External process</i>		
Assessment moderation as external audit of academics' work (markers being externally assessed, judgements of standards how assessors mark, external process)	7 36.8%	9 42.9%
Assessment moderation as an external check of the subjects and grading (feedback from external assessors on unit content, Fairness to students – whole external moderation process)	1 5.3%	6 28.6%
Assessment moderation as external checking of work against standards and benchmarks (assessments being externally second-marked, to ensure assessments are meeting unit outcomes)	3 15.8%	8 38.1%
3. Assessment Moderation as Comparability of Assessment Across Boundaries		
<i>(a) Internal process</i>		
Assessment moderation as internal comparative marking process (internal cross-marking to ensure equitable grading across unit / degree)	3 15.8%	12 57.1%
<i>(b) External process</i>		
Comparability of academic standards	3 15.8%	2 9.5%
There is consistency in assessment across institutions (benchmarking against standards of other colleges)	3 15.8%	1 4.8%
4. Assessment Moderation as a Learning and Research Process for Academics Aiming for Assessment Improvement		
<i>(a) Academic learning</i>		
Assessment moderation as means to improve quality of teaching (assessment has proper part in learning and teaching, improves quality of teaching/learning/ assessing)	2 10.5%	3 14.3%

The categories identified in this project are not dissimilar from those established by Adie, Lloyd and Betel (2013) (outlined above) or those by Mahmud and Sanderson (2011) who list them as:

consistency in assessment and marking; processes for ensuring comparability; measurements of quality control; processes to look for equivalence and maintenance of academic standards to ensure fairness; and part of quality assurance practice. (pp.15-16).

Mahmud and Sanderson's study investigated transnational assessment comparability, and therefore their prime concern was the comparability of assessment across national boundaries, but in our study the comparability across boundaries was identified as particularly important by 57.1% of the theology discipline staff across internal boundaries, e.g. internal cross-marking for grading consistency within subjects (or units) and degrees, and much less important issue by the education staff.

Moderation as a means of quality assurance, as noted in the Mahmud and Sanderson study, was particularly important to the theology staff with various aspects being endorsed by 28.6% to 42.9%, but less important to education disciplinary staff with most of the assessment being endorsed by between 5.3% and 15.8%, with only the external audit function being endorsed by 36.8%.

The consistency in assessment and grading focus identified by Mahmud and Sanderson received affirmation from about a third of the respondents in these interviews, i.e. 31.7% for education and 38.1% for theology staff.

The learning and research aspect of assessment moderation category identified by a small number of responses in this study was not at all mentioned in the Mahmud and Sanderson study, and therefore is a new perspective in this area.

The study has also gathered information on the prime impact assessment moderation is believed to have had on those doing the assessment, i.e. the markers and lecturers, and to lesser degree on students, as noted below.

Table 4 Impact of Assessment Moderation

Type of impact	Number/disciplines of people who propose given type of impact	
	Education N = 19	Theology N = 21
(a) Learning and Research Impact		
Moderation guides you where you want to go (leads to effective changes)	10 53.6%	2 9.5%
Encouraging and affirming of personal practice (reassuring / affirming / validating)	16 84.2%	10 47.6%
(b) Comparability Impact		
Gives bigger picture re assessment process and impact	3 15.8%	3 14.3%
(c) Impact on Quality Assurance		
Monitoring process to identify problems	4 21.1%	2 9.5%
Improves quality control in the development/ design of assessments	3 15.8%	3 14.3%
(d) Impact on Students		
Teachers and learners become more capable of self-assessment	3 15.8%	1 4.8%
(e) Impact on Fairness and Equity		
Moderation is a quality control of students' grades (grading is fair)	3 15.8%	5 23.8%

The learning and research aspect of moderation as perceived by the education staff had the most significant impact (53.6% - 84.6%) and for both the education and theology staff the encouraging and affirming aspect of moderation was esteemed to have the highest impact, i.e. 84.2% for education and 47.6% for theology staff. In comparison all the other aspects were thought to result in fairly limited impact ranging from 4.8% to 21.1%.

It is hoped that this wide range of perspectives on assessment moderation will provide a springboard for academics involved to review their personal and institutional understanding of the assessment moderation processes. These findings should also contribute to the conversation about how assessment practices in general can be improved.

Table 5 Main Difficulties and Proposed Improvements

Categories of challenges/difficulties in AM	How could AM be improved?	Number/disciplines of people who had difficulties with AM or suggested improvements	
		Education N = 19	Theology N = 21
(a) Time issues			
Lack of time	Operate moderation in cycles, allocate more time to what?	6 31.6%	6 28.6%
(b) Procedural Issues			
Lack of clear institutional procedure (lack of clear, common criteria for moderation)	Clarify institutional procedure, develop an easy to follow, common criteria that every subject can be moderated under. Distinguish between internal and external moderation procedures.	6 31.6%	0 0%
(c) Consultation Issues			
Lack of consultation across the college (discussion with colleagues, inter-departmental meetings)	More consultation, allocate time, arrange deliberate linkages.	6 31.6%	2 9.5%
(e) Resource Issues			
Sourcing willing moderators (obtaining external moderators)	Develop a current list of potential moderators, Establish inter-institutional agreements.	4 21.1%	2 9.5%
(f) Professional Development Issues			
Lack of knowledge about the assessment moderation process (lack of familiarity with moderation process, no clear understanding of the process)	Provide better information about assessment moderation, define moderation - internal vs external and processes, better induction, work through the assessment moderation process.	4 21.1%	4 19.1%

Final Survey Results

The second major data gathering activity in the project consisted of a final survey which sought information from the staff in the two departments in the four colleges that had participated in the project from the beginning. Not all the staff in the participating departments had the opportunity to answer this survey, so this survey will stay open for some time after this report is completed and will report in other publications on the more comprehensive results.

The total number of responses to the survey gathered was 24. The number of people responding is shown in Table 6, below.

Table 6 Survey Responses

Answer Options	Response Count
Avondale	11
Christian Heritage College	3
Tabor Adelaide	9
Tabor Victoria	1

Nine of the respondents were full-time academics, and four were part-time academics. Seven were male and six were female. Their employment levels are shown on table 7.

Table 7 Employment Levels

Answer Options	Response Count
Tutor	0
Lecturer	13
Senior Lecturer	9
Head of School	2
Professor	0
Senior college administrator	0

The respondents' employment profile at their current place of employment is shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Employment at current institution

Years of employment at this college	Response Count
1-2 years	4
3-5 years	2
6-10 years	7
More than 10 years	9

Two respondents indicated that moderation of assessment had been a part of their previous university level course. Some of the respondents indicated they had experienced assessment moderation in their current role, and in other previous roles and locations, as noted in Table 9.

Table 9 Roles and positions where respondents had experienced assessment moderation

Answer Options	Response Count
In my current role	18
In previous role(s) in the college	1
In other colleges of higher education	4
In one or more universities	3
In other types of employment, e.g. school system(s)	5

The clarity the respondents had about their institutional or departmental assessment moderation policy varied from very clear to very unfamiliar, as shown on Table 10.

Table 10 Clarity of understanding of assessment moderation policies

Answer Options	Very clear	Reasonably clear	Not sure	Very unfamiliar
Your college	6	10	5	1
Your school or department	5	8	4	0

The importance of the categories of previously researched meanings about assessment moderation varied from only slightly important, e.g. *student involvement in assessment moderation*, to very important especially on issues such as *check of assessment consistency* and *fair marking and grading*. See the results in table 11.

Table 11 Importance of meanings of assessment moderation

Meaning categories	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Design of assessment, subject and degree	10	10	0	0	0
Check of assessment consistency	13	8	0	0	0
Fair marking and grading	13	8	0	0	0
Student involvement in assessment moderation	4	5	6	5	1
Assessment implementation	8	11	2	0	0
Post-assessment activities	5	12	3	1	0
Pastoral concern for students	10	7	1	3	0

Most people thought that the internal and external assessment moderation were either very important or important as quality assurance processes. See the results in table 12.

Table 12 Importance of internal and external assessment moderation as quality assurance.

Answer Options	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Internal process	9	9	1	0	0
External process	9	9	1	0	0
Internal and External process	10	7	2	0	0

The majority of people thought that assessment moderation as comparability of assessment across boundaries was either important or very important as an internal or external process. See Table 13 below.

Table 13 Importance of Assessment Moderation as comparability of assessment across boundaries

Answer Options	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Internal process	3	13	3	2	0
External process	9	9	2	1	0

Nearly all respondents considered assessment moderation to either important or very important as either learning and/or research process for academics aiming at assessment improvement. See table 14 below.

Table 14 Importance of assessment moderation as academic learning or research

Answer Options	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Academic learning	10	10	0	0	1
Academic research	10	8	1	1	1

The majority of the respondents rated seven of the suggested improvements to assessment moderation process in the colleges as either important or very important. The two aspects that received the least support were *the desire for increase face to face communication with external moderators* and *more consultation, allocate time, arrange for consultation about moderation*. See table 15 for details.

Table 15 Importance of suggestions made for improving assessment moderation.

Answer Options	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Because of lack of time, operate moderation in cycles; allocate more time to it.	8	8	2	0	0
Clarify institutional procedure; develop an easy to follow, common criteria that every subject can be externally moderated under. Could also develop one for internal moderation.	6	10	3	0	0
Know how frequently you are going to be moderated externally and internally; get feedback from surveys quicker; get feedback from internal and external moderation quicker and more regularly.	6	9	2	2	0
Would like to see face to face communication with external moderators.	3	7	6	3	0
More consultation; allocate time; arrange for consultation about moderation.	4	8	4	3	0
Make a plan for more consistent moderation across the school / college.	7	10	1	2	0
Develop a current list of potential external moderators; establish inter-institutional agreements.	8	11	1	1	0
Mentoring - take more time to induct new staff in assessment moderation; visit other colleges and observe same subject teaching and assessment; all new staff should have training.	7	10	1	1	0
Provide better information about assessment moderation; define moderation - internal vs external and processes; better induction; work through the assessment moderation process.	10	9	0	1	0

The other potential improvements to assessment moderation that the colleges should consider

are reflected in the following comments:

I think all lecturing staff need to be aware of the different forms of moderation they can engage with starting before a unit is taught through to the moderation of exit grades at the end of a unit. The most important thing in assessment moderation is to upskill the staff who are engaged in the moderation of assessment.

If moderation is to become a larger process (ie more time consuming) in the College then funds need to be allocated to adjunct lecturers (casual-employees) as currently these add on duties are unpaid.

It appears that most of the respondents thought they had gained either substantial or some benefit from this project in the four areas: *had their personal perspectives on assessment moderation confirmed, gained better understanding of assessment moderation, perceived blind spots in current processes and discovered new ways to improve assessment moderation.*

Table 16 Perceived areas of benefit from the project

Answer Options	Extensive	Substantial	Some	Small	Minimal	Nil
Had personal perspectives on assessment moderation confirmed	0	7	6	0	1	0
Gained better understanding of assessment moderation	1	4	4	3	2	0
Perceived blind spots in current processes	1	4	7	0	2	0
Discovered ways to improve the assessment moderation processes	1	1	7	3	2	0

The changes and the importance of the changes the department or college has made to the assessment process as a result of this project are as follows:

Table 17 Changes made to assessment moderation processes and their importance

Change type	Importance
Discussed the expectations of internal moderation and the options for providing support to sessional lecturers.	Minimal
Not sure of any changes which have been a direct result of this project	-
Not known in general but the total word count for Assessment items has been moved up to 5,000 words.	--

All categories of staff had from double to four times moderate to very high further training needs compared to minimal or nil estimates with regard to assessment moderation. See details in table 18.

Table 18 Staff training needs in assessment moderation

Answer Options	Training needs - very high	Training needs - high	Training needs - moderate	Training needs - minimal	Training needs - nil
Heads of schools/departments	2	4	6	4	0
Senior lecturers	2	4	6	5	1
Lecturers	2	1	5	3	0
Tutors	1	4	7	3	0
Part-time staff	4	4	7	3	0

Certain areas of assessment moderation were identified as being important for personal professional development. They were expressed as follows:

Would appreciate PD on marking to criteria and construction of assessment to meet Unit objectives.

The different types of moderation need to be examined and unpacked so that staff know their purpose and how they can be used to improve learning and teaching.

External Moderation.

I would appreciate some guidance surrounding 'best practice' models.

Nil for me as I have been involved in many moderation processes with the IBMYP, SACE Board and Flinders University and Tabor Adelaide.

With regard to the assessment moderation training/education for the rest of the college where the staff members were working they identified the following areas of need:

Continual processes to ensure moderation happens to keep standards equal.

Consistency across schools.

Unable to determine due to no knowledge of this matter. Problem of being a part timer and not being able or asked to attend meetings!

New staff need induction to moderation training each year.

Communicating the expected process adequately to faculty.

The general comments about assessment moderation were:

More conversations in faculty meetings about expectations around assessment and moderation when different forms of assessment are used.

The new assessment moderation process we have entered into with Alphacrucis looks like it will be a positive development.

In the broader context I do not know what happens. Problem of being a part timer!

A bit hit and miss at present.

When asked for general comments about the Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Project the answers given were:

It is a good idea as from experience at University level some faculties have very hard Assessment Tasks and others very easy. Rules such as Penalties for lateness vary markedly and the process for applying for extensions to deadlines is not consistent and subject to ad hoc decisions.

It was useful in helping us reflect on our moderation policy and processes.

Overall, the survey results indicate a good response rate from Avondale College and Tabor Adelaide, mainly from lecturers and senior lecturers, where a substantial number have been employed at these colleges for six or more years. The vast majority of staff had experienced assessment moderation in their current roles, rather than elsewhere, and most were either reasonably clear or very clear about their departmental and institutional assessment moderation policies.

The four most important meanings attributed to assessment moderation were with regard to

- a) design of assessment subject and degree,
- b) check of assessment consistency,
- c) fair marking and grading, and
- d) pastoral concern for students.

The least important aspects were student involvement in assessment and post-assessment activities. Both internal and external assessment moderation and assessment moderation as comparability across boundaries were seen as important by most people.

The vast majority also thought assessment moderation was important for academic learning and research. Even suggestions for improving assessment moderation were seen as important or very important, but the two received more muted support. A majority of the respondents had gained various degrees of benefit from this project, e.g. 13 had personal perspectives on assessment confirmed to some extent, nine had gained a better understanding of assessment moderation, 12 had perceived blind spots in current process, and nine had discovered ways to improve assessment moderation processes.

However, it appears that the respondents had not yet implemented or experienced any significant departmental or college changes to assessment moderation processes as a result of this project. An important finding from this survey was the identification of the part-time staff assessment training needs as a priority, however significant training needs were identified for

other levels of staff as well. A variety of disparate issues requiring attention were unearthed as desired foci for professional development, training and education for college staff. No strong themes emerged in general comments about assessment moderation and benchmarking of assessment project.

Key Findings

Assessment Moderation Part 1: The Benchmarking Process Evaluation Tool

The meanings of assessment moderation expressed by the staff members at the eight sites as reported in the Results section were collated and organised into common groups. It became evident that these meanings could form a basis for a tool, which could be utilised in the professional discussions about Assessment Moderation. For example, if the assessment moderation processes of a department or institution were reviewed, the range of meanings of assessment moderation academics in this project expressed could form a starting point for reviewing the implicit individual, departmental or institutional assumptions about assessment, and the moderation of assessment. Unearthing such assumptions can help to clarify the desired purposes and functions of assessment moderation. Clarifying the assumptions by way of professional conversations enables discussions and debates about desirable improvements to be conducted with greater clarity and common understanding.

The range of distinct perspectives expressed by participants in this project totalled 127. These perspectives have been employed to inform the construction of our benchmarking tool. The project group anticipates that such a tool, constructed from the wide range of attributes, assigned priorities and desired outcomes suggested by project participants, will generate the groundwork for building a valuable trajectory of developmental ideas and cross-institutional conversations around assessment moderation. It is also anticipated that the tool could achieve an economy of scale in terms of time and resources.

This is similar to the issues that arose during the development of the MacKinnon model of benchmarking (MacKinnon et al., 2000) where the huge number of benchmarking items originally generated for universities, was considered too large in relation to the time and resources required for such processes, and then a more limited 27 key criteria were identified, as being the most important and urgent benchmarking issues to be examined.

However, having a comprehensive set of potential target issues to consider gives the reviewers and evaluators a good range of items from which they can choose the most urgent ideas to explore. Having a broad range of initial ideas also gives the reviewers and evaluators an opportunity to be involved in professional conversations seeking to clarify the key issues in evaluation amongst the various stakeholders in the review/evaluation processes. This aspect is developed further in the next section of the findings, in terms of shifting the focus of assessment moderation from accountability to professional learning, the original impetus for this project.

The developed Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool (BAMET) is presented in Appendix B.

It covers the Assessment Moderation categories:

- Assessment Moderation as Concern with Fairness and Equity
- Assessment Moderation as Quality Assurance
- Assessment Moderation as Comparability of Assessment Across Boundaries
- Assessment Moderation as a Learning and Research Process for Academics Aiming for Assessment Improvement
- Characteristics of Assessment Moderation

As discussed above it is envisaged BAMET could be used:

1. as a formative basis for discussion about the nature of assessment moderation at the beginning of an assessment moderation review or evaluation among the various stakeholders.
2. to select target areas for assessment moderation, e.g. Fairness and Equity concerns vs. Professional Learning.
3. to suggest sub-categories to the major factors to be considered, e.g. under the Comparability of Assessment Across Boundaries, the reviewers may wish to consider internal comparability of assessment among groups of markers, or between subjects, and/or they may wish to also consider comparability of assessment across institutions, perhaps among the same discipline group, or even between dissimilar discipline groups (e.g. see Bowers, 2006), where insights from quite different academic groups might suggest creative improvements.
4. as a teaching resource in assessment moderation training and education, especially for new or sessional staff, helping to broaden their perspectives on the meaning and range of assessment moderation.
5. as a springboard for research into assessment moderation, where the nature and value of the various views embedded in the resource are further considered, and new insights around the assessment moderation and improving the quality of assessment are developed.

Assessment Moderation Part 2 – Needs of Part-time Staff

The final survey indicated that the majority of staff in the participating departments experienced assessment moderation more in their current roles in tertiary education (about twice or more at the rate to any other context) than in other situations. However, a significant number of the staff had experience in assessment moderation in other types of employment, e.g. in school systems. Some experience in assessment moderation had been gained in other colleges, and in previous college roles and at other universities.

With regard to the clarity of understanding of institutional or departmental assessment moderation policies the majority of the staff were either very clear or reasonably clear in their understandings. However, when the perspectives of the full-time and part-time staff are compared a hint of a possible difference in levels of understanding may be suggested by our results.

Table 19 **Clarity of understanding of assessment moderation policies**

	Your college		Your school/department	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Very clear	1 (16.7%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)	1 (25%)
Reasonably clear	5 (83.3%)	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
Not sure	0	1 (25%)	0	2 (50%)
Very unfamiliar	0	1 (25%)	0	0

Proportionately a few more of the part-time staff, although few in number responding to this survey, indicated lower levels of clarity about assessment moderation policies, i.e. not sure or very unfamiliar, compared to the full-time staff.

One of the comments made with regard to the needs of part-time staff was that 'if moderation is to become a larger process (i.e. more time consuming) in the college then funds need to be allocated to adjunct lecturers (casual-employees) as currently these add on duties are unpaid.'

In the comments on the assessment moderation training/education needs, the part-time staff felt at a disadvantage, as they were not part of college meetings and therefore could not form informed comments about the quality of the college professional development processes. It was also voiced again with regard to the overall comments about assessment moderation, one respondent was not aware of the assessment moderation situation at the college.

So it is evident that in terms of the assessment moderation the part-time lecturers may have greater needs than the full-time academic staff in relation to understanding assessment moderation policies, induction, mentoring, rewarding appropriately the time they are expected to spend on assessment moderation activities. However, because of the very low numbers of respondents in these surveys, further work is needed to explore this issue in the future.

Assessment Moderation Part 3 – A Formative Assessment Moderation Framework

Purposes of Assessment Moderation

Another aspect of these survey results provides useful information on the *purposes* of assessment moderation. In response to a direct question on what the respondents believed to be the purpose of assessment moderation, the following trends were noted:

1. Assessment moderation was regarded as a significant player in providing a degree of justification to academics on the reliability and validity of their marking rigour and assessment outcomes.
2. The nature of the responses weighed more heavily towards ‘accountability’ rather than improvement perspectives.
3. This accountability was perceived as largely driven by justification and verification indicators and hence lecturer-centred in focus.

What these results largely confirmed was that the general definition of moderation and the perceptions of the purpose for assessment moderation were built around notions of ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ of assessment, ‘fairness’ to students and affirmation for lecturers of their own understanding and measurement of how well the students met the discipline standards. In this sense, these results supported low-level definitions of moderation, i.e.

Moderation is a process for assuring that an assessment outcome is valid, fair and reliable and that marking criteria have been applied consistently /[and that the] benefits considered to accrue from effective moderation ... include improved reliability resulting from the opportunity to discuss differences in the interpretation of criteria and marking schemes (Partington, 1994).

Further, the results across the four institutions appear to favour a teacher-centred rather than student-centred focus. By that is meant that lecturers were more focused on verifying their performance than in seeing assessment moderation as a window of opportunity for improvement and growth and for better serving the learning needs of students. What the results suggest is that academics are overwhelmed by quality assurance processes and practices and that there is minimal understanding and acceptance of the purpose of quality governance. Alternatively it may be that the academics are working within their employment guidelines and requirements, not having in place suitable organisational systems to use the assessment data for professional improvement.

As table 22 below demonstrates, the respondents of our survey regarded the focus of assessment moderation as accountability rather than improvement driven. The concern with such a focus is that it is short-sighted and summative rather than formative and evades one of the key purposes of the learning and teaching agenda, i.e. providing an opportunity for innovative practices in the design and delivery of scholarly teaching and learning, rather than simply meeting the regulatory requirements (Aspland & Patel, 2014). A similar conflict between the accountability and improvement of teaching and learning agendas is noted by (Hutchings, et al., 2013) but they also argue that such conflict may be resolved by institutions adopting an intentional agenda to build bridges between these perspectives.

Given that the sample group in this study is made up of four private higher education providers, such a focus is not surprising in that being non-self-accrediting institutions, accountability has been a high priority socialized through the 5- to 7-year accreditation audits by External Quality Agencies, such as AUQA and more recently, TEQSA. The government’s call more recently for an ‘Accountability for Quality Agenda’ as developed in the Gallagher’s draft discussion paper for Group of Eight (Gallagher, 2010) stresses the rising demands for accountability in a risk-prone environment, but there is an urgent need to move beyond accountability to improvement frameworks or perspectives.

Harvey and Newton warn though that external reviews of any kind that value accountability without an improvement agenda in place risk de-stabilizing the transformative value of our educational efforts. They cite that while there is a great deal of clamouring around discourses of improvement 'improvement has been a secondary feature of most systems'.

The improvement function of quality monitoring procedures is to encourage institutions to reflect upon their practices and to develop what they do. Evaluation needs to be designed to encourage a process of continuous improvement of the learning process and the range of outcomes. Arguably, the assessment of value-added is at the core of any improvement-oriented, value-for-money and transformative approach to quality (Harvey & Newton, 2004).

Similarly, others argue that the importance of considerations of quality must be positioned as 'conversations' that should further the understandings and ease the tensions between the transformative value of education and the 'the value for money imperative' (Collini, 2012 cited in Watty et al, 'Social Moderation').

As the Table 22 and Figures 1 and 2 below indicate, our study demonstrated that for academics within the institutions surveyed the priorities were in the following hierarchy:

1. Justification of marking in order to ensure validity and reliability of marking
2. Verification including satisfying industry standards, statutory and professional compliance requirements.
3. Student Feedback
4. Internal Coherence of Unit - Accountability vs Improvement focus

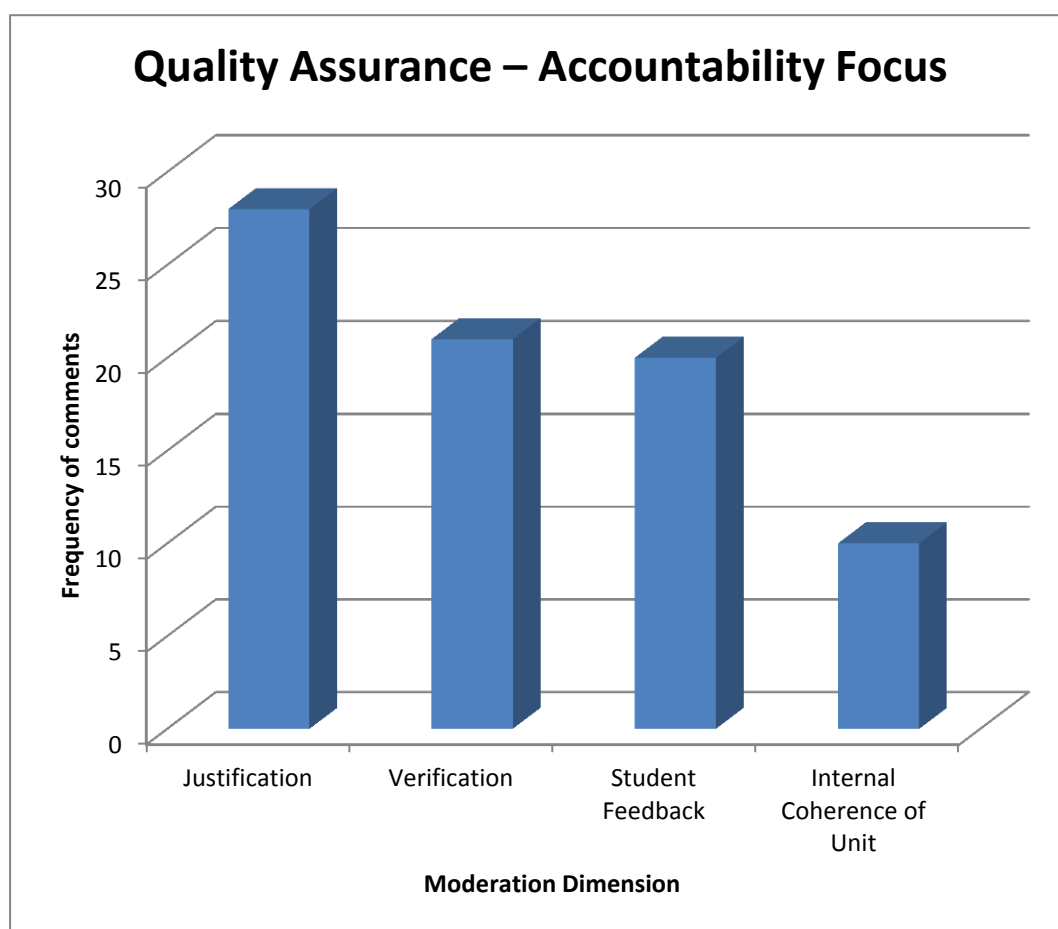
Table 22 Purposes of assessment moderation

Assessment Moderation Purpose	Number of responses	Quality Assurance Focus
Question 1c: What are the purposes of moderation of assessments?		
Question 14. Why do you think we should moderate our assessments?		
Quality Assurance – Accountability Focus		
Justification Results are consistent [16] Results can be translated/related to other organisations (ensures we are equal with other colleges) [10] Reassurance of good quality assessment (to ensure appropriate grading) (2)	28	Accountability Focus on justifying marking; ensuring validity; seeking reassurance
Verification To verify whether we are meeting industry standards (7) Verify fairness of results to institution (6) Provide feedback to a school re consistency, compliance and transparency (3) Employer Confidence Comparability of grades for employers (1) Compliance Ensuring compliance with accreditation documents (1) To ensure unit outcomes match TEQSA requirements (1) Monitoring overloading students with assessment (1) To ensure manner of delivery is relevant for students	21	Accountability Focus on justification for industry and professional standards. Institutional and sector compliance

in different courses (1)		
Student Feedback Give students sense of quality and fairness re assessment	20	Accountability Focus on vindicating marking and assuring students
Internal Coherence of Unit To encourage quality & relevance in assessment tasks Quality control (4) Enables provision of evidence re performance in detail, i.e. rationale, demonstration, timeline, scope and sequence (1) To ensure relevant, current bibliographies (1) To ensure unit outcomes are being met (3) Monitoring types of assessments (1)	10	Accountability
Total	79	
Quality Assurance - Improvement Focus		
Cycle or review and improvement (to encourage continuous improvement)	10	Improvement
To deliver best practice	8	A and I
To improve teaching	7	Improvement
Improved communication with students	5	Improvement
To gain a fresh perspective / new ideas	4	Improvement
Professional development for teachers	2	Improvement
Professional learning for the moderators	1	Improvement
Support mechanism for adjunct staff	1	Improvement
Aligning courses to new directions in education	1	Improvement
Provide new avenues for assessment	1	Improvement
Help teachers understand where they are in the field	1	Improvement
Better understanding of assessment	1	Improvement
Improve cohesiveness of the faculty and college	1	Improvement
Total	43	

A closer study of the Accountability Indicators suggest also that in each of the indicators, the focus was external drivers, the rationale was to prove the lecturer's ability, verify lecturer's performance, assure lecturer of comparable performance, provide benchmarked-evidence to external stakeholders and to assure students of consensus in marking. In all of these, little attention has actually been given to the indications of improvement or enhancement of learning and teaching through the moderation cycle.

Figure 1 **Quality Assurance – Accountability Focus**



At this juncture is valuable to consider what the moderation of assessment is predicated upon.

Traditionally, moderation of courses in higher education has focused on what happens during the assessment process. This has resulted in associating moderation with practices such as double marking, applying assessment criteria and standards and assigning marks and grades (Sadler, 2005; Yorke et al., 2000; Miller, 2000).

This association is further reflected in the literature where moderation is defined as 'a process for assuring that an assessment outcome is valid, fair and reliable and that marking criteria have been applied consistently' (Bloxham, 2009).

Would we be involved in assessment moderation if we were not expected to be accountable for the marks we allocated? Is marking consensus, justification and verification sound pedagogical rationale for assessment moderation or have we lost our way in framing assessment moderation within a discourse of accountability rather than improvement?

Figure 2 **Quality Assurance - Improvement Focus**



In the sample study undertaken, respondents indicated less of a focus or interest in improvement, reflecting also the pressures for accountability driven both within institutions as well as by external stakeholders. It is our contention that there needs to be a constructive alignment between learning and teaching development and assessment moderation. Such an alignment can only be achieved if we target improvement as the objective of assessment moderation. Such an outcome can only be achieved if processes are in place for post-moderation procedures. While the current focus is prior to and at the point of enactment of moderation, a failure to emphasise and formalise post-moderation processes means that the value gained from the moderation exercise is likely to be merely superficial.

Assessment Moderation Part 4 – Building a Formative Assessment Moderation Framework

Based on the above findings several questions are proposed for reflection which should help to close the loop in moderation processes:

1. What processes are in place to ensure that recommendations flowing out of moderation processes are acted on?
2. How can the lessons learnt from moderation be employed to further enhance learning strategies and improve learning and teaching outcomes?
3. How can these improvements be shared and valued through an ongoing collaborative process of assessing the future design of assessments and the delivery of learning outcomes?

What we might consider is how a realignment of practice in assessment moderation in light of Harvey and Newton's (2004) call for a focus on improvement 'in the transformation of the student learning experience' would be pertinent. How can we build communities of practice around assessment validation and improvement? The ALTC funded peer-marking project (Crisp et al, 2009) is one example of the emerging focus on building communities of practice around assessment moderation.

In concluding, we reiterate that our findings indicate that for the four institutions within this sample group, the focus of assessment moderation is mostly

1. externally-driven
2. a confidence-building exercise for academics, and
3. a justification of marks.

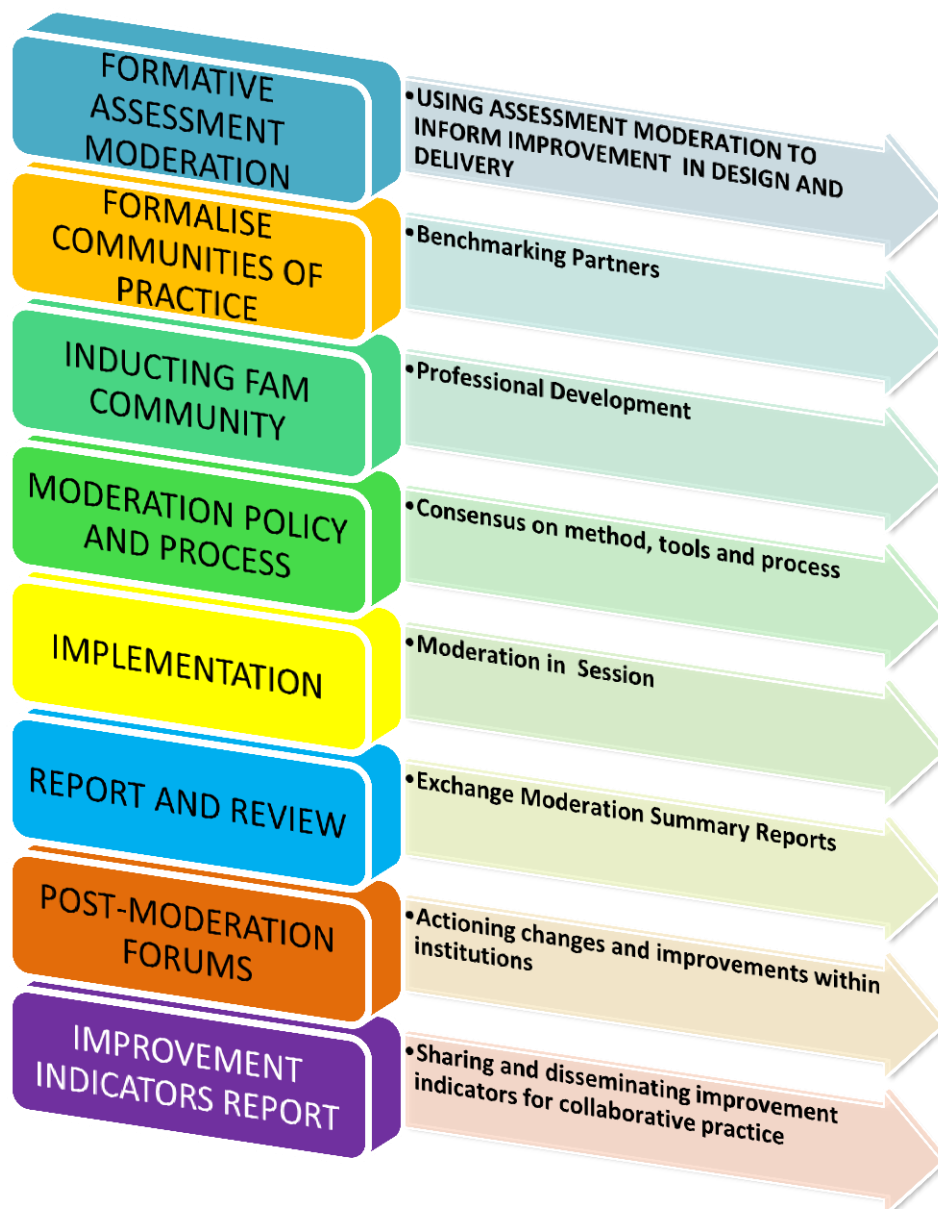
We propose that the institutional focus on quality assurance has to be intentional and targeted, focused on delivering real outcomes that impact the learner. The concern then for the academics is how to steer the focus of assessment moderation along formative guidelines. We recommend six steps for formative practice.

1. Build formative Learning and Teaching communities of practice
2. Induct members into formative moderation processes
3. Implement Moderation Cycle
4. Exchange moderation reports
5. Review Process
6. Engage in Post-Moderation Forums to monitor 'closing the loop' on moderation cycles

How this Formative Assessment Framework might be implemented is shown in Figure 3.

In the first instance a deliberate institutional action programme needs to be adopted and implemented to undertake formative assessment moderation, where assessment moderation is used to inform improvement in design and delivery of education, including assessment.

Figure 3 Formative Assessment Framework



Secondly, communities of practice around this purpose need to be established and formalised. These may be led by academics, especially leaders in the academic community, with expertise in teaching and learning, such as faculty deans of learning and teaching, but they should operate in collaboration with institutional teaching and learning and quality assurance institutional services.

Thirdly, the moderation policies and processes need to be considered by these groups, seeking to arrive at consensus on methods, tools and practices.

The implementation of their work would then involve working on moderations, which would report and review the moderation results as an overall activity, rather than simply as an individual academic activity in a single subject offering.

The next key activity ought to consist of actioning changes and improvements to teaching and learning, including assessment, by way of post-moderation forums which utilise the issues arising from moderation as starting points for professional conversations about learning improvements.

Finally an improvement indicators report should be produced based on this process, which

would then be shared and disseminated among the institutional academic community and more widely, to ensure the lessons learned by application of the Formative Assessment Framework were utilised as widely as possible.

Dissemination

Dissemination of Project Activities

Table 23 Project Dissemination Activities

Date	Event title, Location	Title/Focus	Attend (n)
7.8.2012	Faculty of Nursing, Avondale College	Unpacking Benchmarking Project	12
8.8.2012	Faculty of Business, Avondale College	Unpacking Benchmarking Project	6
13.08.2012	Faculty of Arts and Theology, Avondale College	Unpacking Benchmarking Project	28
13.08.2012	Faculty of Education and Science, Avondale College	Unpacking Benchmarking Project	31
22.08.2012	Benchmarking team meeting, Adelaide	Physical first meeting of project team, reference group and evaluator	8
21.9.2012	Education Research Group of Adelaide Annual conference, Adelaide	<i>Battle of the benchmarking models</i> – Education Group of Adelaide annual conference presentation	15
6.9.2012	SANTPEN Event: Developing the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching, Darwin	Presentation about the OLT Benchmarking project to teaching and learning week special SANTPEN event	18
22.10.2012	OLT project management workshop 22-23 Oct 2012, Sydney	Presentation about the OLT Benchmarking project to OLT project management workshop participants	25
25.10.2012	Avondale Learning and Teaching week presentation, Sydney	Benchmarking models: Diversity & Inclusion, Project Discussions	30
26.11.2012	Tabor Victoria, Melbourne	Presentation about the OLT Benchmarking project to Tabor Victoria staff	15
4.12.2012	SANTPEN Teaching and Learning Day, Tabor Adelaide	SANTPEN Teaching and Learning Day – sharing of teaching and learning information, including grants and projects information	25
2.7.2013	HERDSA Conference, Auckland, New Zealand	Paper presented by Jane Fernandez – <i>Negotiating the Third Space in Collaborative Research</i>	8
25-27.9.2013	Higher Education Research Group of Adelaide Annual Conference, Adelaide	Assessment Moderation Among Private Higher Education Providers – What, Why and How? – Higher Education Group of Adelaide annual conference presentation.	15

17-19.10.2013	Workshop for all staff of Theology and Education Faculty , Melbourne	Implication of findings/results of data analysis of the project in terms of utilisation of results in policy and programme planning.	8
25.10.2013	Christian Educators' Fellowship national conference, Sydney	Research Issues – Benchmarking/Moderation Research Project funded by OLT, presentation and discussion of research issues pertaining to Christian Higher Education in Australia	10
18.11.2013	Assessment Moderation Workshop, Tabor Adelaide, Adelaide	The OLT Benchmarking Assessment Moderation Project – results and putting the results into practice; Assessment Moderation data from 4 Colleges to improve assessment moderation in disciplines and across an institution.	20
1 .02. 2014	School of Education and Humanities	Professional Development Seminar	8
8.05. 2014	School of Education and Humanities	Update on OLT project	8
17.2.2014	Benchmarking of assessment moderation discussion with the School of Education, Tabor Adelaide	Review of the combined colleges assessment moderation comparison report with the Tabor Adelaide School of Education	8
7.05.2014	Avondale, School of Education	Meeting with School of Education representatives – Moderation Policy Review and Discussion	2
14.7.2014	Meet and Greet Programme, Avondale, Nursing Campus	The project was cited at the Greet & Meet Programme for piloting Krause et al Assuring final year subject and programme achievement standards through inter-university peer review and moderation	10
13.08.2014	The University of Melbourne	Peer Review of Assessment Network - National Workshop Series	15

Publications

Dachs, T., Fernandez, J., Morgan, D., & Tuovinen, J.E. (in preparation). Assessment moderation in four higher education institutions in Australia. *ERGO*.

Fernandez, J., Dachs, T., Morgan, D., & Tuovinen, J.E. (in preparation). Towards a Formative Assessment Moderation Framework. *Higher Education Research and Development*.

Tuovinen, J. E. (under review). Battle of the benchmarking model. *ERGO*.

Tuovinen, J. E. (2012). *Assessment Moderation – essential quality assurance or undesirable burden?* SANTPEN Teaching and Learning Day, 4 December 2012, Tabor Adelaide.

Tuovinen, J. E. (2012). *Battle of the Benchmarking models*. ERGA2012 Annual Conference. Adelaide: The University of Adelaide.

Tuovinen, J. E. (2012). *Benchmarking Models: Diversity and Inclusion*. Avondale College Teaching and Learning Conference 25 October, Cooranbong NSW: Avondale College.

Tuovinen, J. E., Dachs, T., Fernandez-Goldborough, J., & Dobson, P. (2013). *Assessment Moderation – Report on OLT Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Project*. HERGA Conference, 25-27 September 2013. Adelaide.

Conclusions

It became evident in this project that assessment moderation is a multi-faceted construct, with a greater variety of meanings than are commonly associated with it. These meanings were found to underpin the processes and policies valued and adopted by the academics and senior staff in the four colleges.

Assessment moderation was perceived as a means of ensuring fairness and equity in assessment, a form of quality assurance and accountability, a way of ensuring comparability of assessment across boundaries and as a learning and research process for improving assessment. However, the balance between these dimensions was questionable, with too much emphasis being placed on external accountability and too little emphasis on the learning and improvement dimensions.

Five aspects of assessment moderation impact were identified, i.e. the learning and research impact, the comparability impact, the impact on quality assurance, the impact on students and the impact on fairness and equity of assessment.

A number of difficulties and potential solutions to those difficulties were also suggested. The areas causing difficulties were thought to be time issues, procedural issues, consultation issues, resource issues and professional development issues.

In the final survey many of the identified assessment moderation issues were revisited after the participants had experienced interviews, received feedback about the composite findings from the interviews and had opportunities to reflect on their current practices, devise alternative approaches to assessment moderation and to reflect on the value such changes. Many similar concerns to those voiced earlier were noted, leading to some major overall conclusions.

The range of assessment moderation meanings noted above provided the basis for developing a *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool*. It is envisaged that this tool may be useful in assessment moderation reviews or evaluations, e.g. it can help in the selection of the target areas for assessment moderation reviews, or suggest fine grain categories of assessment moderation to be considered in reviews. It may also be used as a teaching resource about assessment moderation or as a starting point for research into assessment quality improvement and moderation.

The needs of part-time lecturers were identified as possibly requiring more urgent action than the needs of the full-time academic staff, in improving assessment moderation processes. Their needs ranged from induction and training, adequate consultation, provision for participation in professional conversations about quality and assurance issues, to suitable funding of the time and effort devoted to such activities. However, due to the limited data on this issue available from this study, it is recommended further research be conducted into this area.

In order to address the imbalance between the accountability, i.e. meeting external standards, and professional learning (and research) for intrinsic improvement of learning and assessment a *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* was developed and ways to employ it were suggested. This Framework strongly supports the Garlick and Pryor (2004) benchmarking model, which was selected as the conceptual basis for this project, as the focus is firmly placed on the learning and improvement aspects of reviewing, comparing and evaluating assessment moderation, i.e. benchmarking assessment moderation. Thus the emphasis this framework places on specific actionable ways to improve assessment and assessment moderation programmes by the people at the coalface, rather than on simply collecting data for remote decision making, can be seen as a logical way of concretely operationalising the Garlick and Pryor benchmarking model in one particular academic learning context, the process of improving assessment and its moderation, based on the learning and research undertaken in this project.

Formative Evaluation

The project holds formative value for the project team and the conversations round assessment moderation and practice have been valuable for all participants of this project. Further value was added through the feedback received from the evaluator. The project acknowledges the role of the evaluator from its initial planning stages. The evaluator was provided with information on the progress of the project at various stages of the project. The comments provided by the evaluator accounted for some of the good-practice exchanges between the four institutions.

The evaluator's comments have been discussed at team meetings and then used as part of the team discussions with the participating departments/faculties in each partner institution.

The evaluator was sent minutes of meetings, progress reports and report on analysis of the *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Project* interview questions and the final survey results.

On the basis of the above conclusions and outcomes, the following are seven recommendations of the project.

Recommendations

1. That institutions prioritise assessment moderation as an urgent research agenda to improve Scholarship of Teaching and Learning and that the *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool* and the *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* be tested and validated in practice.
2. That private and public higher education providers seek to improve inter-institutional collaboration on assessment moderation by streamlining and formalising review and evaluation processes by establishing clear guidelines and employing constructive strategies to facilitate such conversations.
3. That institutions seek out and test and validate available tools in their particular contexts, such as the *Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool* provided here, as a basis for professional discussion, learning, analysis, research and evaluation about the assessment moderation process and its comparative value.
4. That greater intentionality is applied in decision-making and strategic planning around the induction, induction training, and consultation needs of part-time academics in relation to assessment moderation
5. That the focus on academic learning and improvement be targeted as a key performance indicator of quality assurance processes with respect to assessment moderation outcomes.
6. That models, such as the *Formative Assessment Moderation Framework* provided here, be evaluated and adapted for particular institutional contexts for structuring assessment moderation processes and workflows to facilitate formative value-building for stakeholders.
7. That institutions develop local contexts for supporting Garlick and Pryor (2004) benchmarking processes to focus more strategically on personal and professional learning which can be viewed as a grass roots form of institutional learning, rather than accountability.

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Appendix A – Benchmarking Questions Transcript Template

Benchmarking Questions Transcript Template
Interviewee:
Interviewer:
Date of Interview:
Interview Questions:
1. (a) How would you define moderation?
(b) In your opinion what impact does the assessment moderation process have on the quality of teaching and learning?
(c) What are the purposes of moderation of assessments?
2. What is your understanding of the assessment moderation process in your college?
3. What processes does your department/faculty/school employ to ensure your assessments are fair to your students?
4. What processes for quality assurance of assessment are you aware of in similar departments/institutions elsewhere in Australia?
5. Do you know what assessment moderation processes your college or your school used in the past? If so, please describe it.
6. Do you know what assessment moderation processes are used in the other faculties or schools in your college? If so, would you please describe them?
7. How did you find out about the assessment moderation process you now undertake?
8. (a) What induction/training in assessment moderation did you undergo?
(b) When?
(c) How effective was it?
9. (a) Has your assessment process been moderated in the past 12 months?
(b) If so, how often?
(c) Who conducted the moderation?
(d) How was the process conducted each time?
(e) Did the assessment moderation lead to any useful validation of your assessment methods and/or improvements to them?
10. What challenges or difficulties have you faced in undertaking the process of moderation at your institution?
11. (a) Reflecting on the assessment moderation process, what aspects were useful and helpful to change your teaching for the better?
(b) Why were they helpful?
12. (a) What aspects of assessment moderation need changing?
(b) Why?
(c) What would be a better way of conducting assessment moderation?
13. (a) Would you like to find out more about how other departments/colleges carry out their assessment moderation?
(b) What aspects would particularly interest you?
(c) Why?
14. Why do you think we should moderate our assessments?

15. Would you like to review and revise your assessment moderation process in view of what other professionals think about it,
(a) in your field?
(b) in other fields?
16. Should there be a 'one size fits all' moderation process? Should moderation processes vary depending on the size of institutions, or other factors? What comments or suggestions would you provide in this context?

Appendix B – Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool

Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Evaluation Tool
J. E. Tuovinen, T. Dachs, J. Fernandez, D. Morgan
8 September 2014
Background
Underpinning the structure of this Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation tool is a survey of eight departments of academics from four higher education institutions. The staff in these departments (Theology and Education) were asked about the meaning of assessment moderation, and their answers provided the basis for the categories of interrogation of assessment moderation policies, process and practices addressed by this tool.
The tool is constituted as a set of <i>qualitative questions</i> about various aspects of assessment moderation, which may be used as a basis for professional discussion, learning, analysis, research and evaluation about the assessment moderation process. It can also be used as a set of organising themes for comparison of assessment moderation within and between subjects, teaching teams, courses, departments, schools or faculties, institutions, in other words as a basis for <i>Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation</i> .
Categories of Issues to Consider
Five major categories of issues were identified as being important in consideration of assessment moderation in tertiary education. They are
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment Moderation – Concern with Fairness and Equity • Assessment Moderation as Quality Assurance • Assessment Moderation as Comparability of Assessment Across Boundaries • Assessment Moderation as a Learning and Research Process for Academics Aiming for Assessment Improvement • Characteristics of Assessment Moderation
Assessment Moderation – Concern with Fairness and Equity
How does the design of assessment within the context of the subject and degree address fairness to students , e.g. levels of difficulty, currency and relevance of resources, word limits, flow of skill building, assessment descriptions, desired changes to subject outlines, published levels of study and criteria?
How well does the Assessment Moderation act as a check of assessment consistency across markers , especially adjuncts?
How well does the Assessment Moderation ensure fair marking and grading of students?
What opportunities does the Assessment Moderation allow for student involvement in the process , e.g. with regard to future planning of assessment, students own moderation of assessment, ad hoc surveys of assessments to get feedback, opportunity to raise student voice, feedback about assessment in classes, student access to markers, and opportunity for remarking?

How fair is the implementation of assessment to students , e.g. invigilated open book examinations vs closed book examinations?
How suitable are the post-assessment activities for students , e.g. appropriateness of feedback from assessment, and clarification of learning and assessment processes for students?
How well does the discipline context , e.g. involvement in church pastoral activities, prepare the marker to exhibit pastoral concern for students?
Assessment Moderation as Quality Assurance
<i>(a) Assessment Moderation as Internal Process within an Institution</i>
How well do the policy settings work with an institution , e.g. a formal institution-wide policy, standard sets of learning outcomes, processes in quality assurance system?
What bodies/people are responsible for assessment moderation , e.g. academic standards committee, meetings of examiners, quality processing officers?
What is the overall purpose of assessment moderation , e.g. as a process to affirm the value and quality qualification for employers?
How does the assessment moderation process assist in matching educational provision to the requirements , e.g. ensure assessment is appropriate to discipline, ensure quality of unit content and learning outcomes, and evaluate standards of achievement in each unit?
What are the focus issues in assessment moderation , e.g. moderation of the purposes of assessment, measuring level of teaching performance, i.e., consistent standard of teaching, grade distributions, moderation of Fail papers, reviewing cases of plagiarism, and moderation as a spot check?
What is the historical background of assessment moderation at this institution , e.g. has the moderation process evolved from nothing in the past, to formal process now, or has the moderation process has remained the same for a long time?
What systems are used to support assessment moderation , e.g. a learning management system, such as Moodle could be used as an electronic record of assessments, or quality assessing could be accomplished via a purpose-built Quality Assurance system, and the system may include methods of approval which may lead to amending unit guides?
Is collegial moderation employed, and if so, how is it implemented , e.g. informal internal moderation, formal internal moderation conducted by colleagues within department, changes to assessments reviewed by colleague before implementing?
How is the marking and moderation quality assured , e.g. markers might be given examples of pre-marked papers, internal moderators given sample assessments, unit outline, assessment task and internal school form; assessment moderation is treated as internal checking of work against standards and benchmarks assessments being internally second-marked, benchmarking against internal standards, internal process - range of marked exams / assessments given to colleague, including any 'fails', for cross marking?
How is the student voice included in assessment moderation , e.g. does moderation include peer review of student evaluations, by perhaps student feedback sheets submitted anonymously to central institutional assessment department, which generates reports back to lecturers?
<i>(b) Assessment Moderation as External Process between Institutions</i>
How effectively is assessment moderation utilised as a means of benchmarking , e.g. could be used as benchmarking against other similar institutions; or treated as a process of quality assurance, to verify work is of a good standard benchmarked against industry standards and peers at other institutions; or treated as external check of work against standards and benchmarks?
How well is assessment moderation used as an audit mechanism , e.g. as external audit of academics' work, i.e. markers being externally assessed, judgements of standards how assessors mark; or as an external check of the subjects and grading, i.e. feedback is provided by external assessors on unit content, fairness to students – whole process?
How useful is assessment moderation for course and institutional accreditation , e.g. for supporting accreditation process; as compliance with AQF and TEQSA requirements, i.e. benchmarking against government standards; and can it be achieved by way of accreditation panel check?

How effective are the frequency and processes of external assessment moderation , e.g. should each unit be externally moderated at least once in each accreditation period or more often? Should assessment samples and rubric be sent to moderators for review with letters from central institutional assessment department and the moderators then report back to central institutional assessment department, which is then passed to head of school to share with lecturer?
How can the quality of the external moderation process be ensured , e.g. should external moderators have doctoral qualifications and should they specialize in the relevant field? If theology external moderators usually come from colleges, not universities, how does that affect the quality of the process?
How well does the assessment moderation process ensure successful learning outcomes for the profession?
<i>(c) Assessment Moderation as Internal and External Process between Institutions</i>
What is an optimal approach to assessment moderation , e.g. is it both external and internal process, and/or Independent peer review?
What is the purpose of internal/external assessment moderation , e.g. is it for quality assurance, or is it for accountability?
What is the main focus of internal/external assessment moderation , e.g. is it moderation of the processes of assessment, or moderation of timing of assessment, or should it be a second examination of assessment and assessment tools, including an external review of sample of papers?
What aspect of the learning process is the focus of assessment moderation , e.g. is it a means to achieve successful learning outcomes for students, i.e. where assessments are helpful to students or is it a check effectiveness or is assessment moderation a means to achieve successful learning outcomes for staff?
Assessment Moderation as Comparability of Assessment Across Boundaries
<i>(a) Assessment Moderation as an Internal Comparability within Institutions</i>
How well does assessment moderation address comparability across markers and subjects , e.g. as an internal comparative marking process (internal cross-marking to ensure equitable grading across unit / degree) and as a check of assessment consistency across suite of subjects?
What process issues are important in assessment moderation , e.g. should there be a discussion between lecturer and cross-marker about any discrepancies in marks, and should a third party involved if difference greater than 5%? Should subject coordinators oversee visiting academics?
What is the level of assessment moderation desired in institutions, and should it be benchmarked between institutions?
<i>(b) Assessment Moderation as an External Comparability between Institutions</i>
How well do the academic assessment standards match across institutions , e.g. is there comparability of academic standards and consistency in assessment across institutions or should assessment moderation be a cross-faculty alignment across institutions?
What are the quality criteria for inter-institutional assessment moderation and moderators , e.g. should external moderators come from universities or college peers/academics? Should they be engaged from all different places? Should the lecturer select the external moderator and should an external moderator be someone not used recently?
Assessment Moderation as a Learning and Research Process for Academics Aiming for Assessment Improvement
<i>(a) Assessment Moderation as Academic Learning</i>
How effective is assessment moderation as a peer learning activity , e.g. learning from colleagues, planning assessments in a group, co-teaching as moderation, i.e. discussion about assessments between lecturers who co-teach a unit, by way of a senior colleague observing practical assessment

task performance by students, conversation between lecturer, marker and moderator re expectations, as feedback to academics about the assessment to give further direction?
How well is assessment moderation operating as an individual staff learning process , e.g. by way of self-moderation, lecturers making their own notes about their assessments, or as learning process for new academics?
How effective are the training and professional development processes for markers?
What benefits do the academics derive learning from assessment moderation , e.g. do they gain affirming, encouraging, positive feedback?
What outcomes demonstrate and document academics' professional learning from assessment moderation , e.g. do lecturers write responses to moderators' reports, implement changes, and ensure/improve quality of assessments?
<i>(b) Assessment Moderation as Research</i>
What research benefits can be seen arising from assessment moderation , e.g. as developing aspect of quality research and informing academic research in the field?
What teaching and educational delivery benefits can be identified deriving from assessment moderation , e.g. how well does the collaborative research inform teaching, and does assessment moderation lead to parity of best practice in educational delivery?
Characteristics of Assessment Moderation
<i>(a) Positive Aspects of Assessment Moderation</i>
What are the peer process benefits from assessment moderation , e.g. are staff involved in an active participation process, where it is treated as a two-way process, and the Importance of peer review is recognised?
How well do the institutional or school groups involved in assessment operate , e.g. examination boards?
<i>(b) Difficulties and Threats in Assessment Moderation</i>
What conceptual difficulties/threats might be involved in assessment moderation , e.g. cross-marking may be somewhat 'blind', and cross-marking is not a comprehensive moderation?
What procedural problems can be identified in assessment moderation , e.g. subject proforma may not be included in moderation requests, and the payment for moderation from other colleges might be sub-standard?
What negative effects for academics can arise from assessment moderation , e.g. it might be seen as difficult aspect of academic work, i.e. not regarded as part of standard academic workload, can prove threatening, and may discourage innovation?
How can time limitations impact assessment moderation negatively , e.g. student/lecturer ratios in particular schools/faculties may not allow time for cross-marking, and there may be excess amount of cross-marking in other schools/faculties?
<i>(c) Variation in Frequency of Assessment Moderation</i>
How does the frequency of internal and external moderation vary within schools/faculties, and between schools/faculties and between institutions?
References
Tuovinen, J. E., Dachs, T., Dobson, P., & Fernandez, J. (2013). <i>Report on the analysis of assessment moderation project interview questions</i> . Tabor Adelaide, Avondale College, Tabor Victoria, Christian Heritage College.

Appendix C – Benchmarking Assessment Moderation Final Survey

This survey is intended to explore your experience in the Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Project. There are not right or wrong answers. Please choose the most suitable answer from your perspective in each case.

This survey is important in order that your experience can be used to guide the policies, practices, and future directions of the participating colleges and other institutions that can learn from the project experiences. Thus your answers to all questions will be very valuable and will be much appreciated.

Questions About You

At which college are you employed (tick the box on left for aspect that applies to you):

<input type="checkbox"/>	Avondale	<input type="checkbox"/>	CHC
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tabor Adelaide	<input type="checkbox"/>	Tabor Victoria

What is your employment status:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Part-time
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What is your level of employment:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Tutor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lecturer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior Lecturer
<input type="checkbox"/>	Head of School
<input type="checkbox"/>	Professor
<input type="checkbox"/>	Senior college administrator

Your sex is:

<input type="checkbox"/>	Male
<input type="checkbox"/>	Female

How long have you been employed at this college:

<input type="checkbox"/>	1-2 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	3-5 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	6-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/>	More than 10 years

Questions About Assessment Moderation

Has the moderation of assessment ever been a topic in university-level subjects you have studied?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No
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If yes, what was the name of the course? _____

When have you experienced moderation of assessment processes (tick all that apply):

<input type="checkbox"/>	In my current role
<input type="checkbox"/>	In previous role(s) in the college

	In other colleges of higher education
	In one or more universities
	In other types of employment, e.g. school system(s)

How clear are you about the moderation of assessment policy of

	Very clear	Reasonably clear	Not sure	Very unfamiliar
Your college				
Your school or department				

In the Benchmarking project interviews people expressed various views about the meaning of assessment moderation. Indicate how important you believe the following aspects are (do not tick the shaded sections):

	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Assessment Moderation – Concern with Fairness and Equity					
Design of assessment, subject and degree					
Check of assessment consistency					
Fair marking and grading					
Student involvement in assessment moderation					
Assessment implementation					
Post-assessment activities					
Pastoral concern for students					
Assessment Moderation as Quality Assurance					
Internal process					
External process					
Internal and External process					
Assessment Moderation as Comparability of Assessment Across Boundaries					
Internal process					
External process					
Assessment Moderation as a Learning and Research Process for Academics Aiming for Assessment Improvement					
Academic learning					
Academic research					

How important do you believe the following suggested improvements to assessment moderation are in your college (each one was mentioned by 4 or more people):

	Very important	Important	Undecided	Only slightly important	Not important
Because of lack of time, operate moderation in cycles; allocate more time to it.					
Clarify institutional procedure; develop an easy to follow, common criteria that every subject can be externally moderated under. Could also develop one for internal moderation.					
Know how frequently you are going to be moderated externally and internally; get feedback from surveys quicker; get feedback from internal and external moderation quicker and more regularly.					
Would like to see face to face communication with external moderators.					
More consultation; allocate time; arrange for consultation about moderation.					
Make a plan for more consistent moderation across the school / college.					
Develop a current list of potential external moderators; establish inter-institutional agreements.					
Mentoring - take more time to induct new staff in assessment moderation; visit other colleges and observe same subject teaching and assessment; all new staff should have training.					
Provide better information about assessment moderation; define moderation - internal vs external and processes; better induction; work through the assessment moderation process.					

What other improvements to assessment moderation should be considered?

Describe the extent of the benefit you gained from this project with regard to the following aspects (use the key: 5 = extensive, 4 = substantial, 3 = some, 2 = small, 1 = minimal, 0 = Nil):
[If you were not aware of the Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation project before this survey please indicate here (tick here): _____]

Benefit Aspects	Extent
Had personal perspectives on assessment moderation confirmed	
Gained better understanding of assessment moderation	
Perceived blind spots in current processes	
Discovered ways to improve the assessment moderation processes	
Other – please describe:	

What changes (if any) has your department/college made to your assessment moderation processes as a result of this project and how beneficial were the those changes (use the key: 5 = extensive, 4 = substantial, 3 = some, 2 = small, 1 = minimal, 0 = Nil)?
[If you were not aware of the Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation project before this survey please indicate here (tick here): _____]

Description of changes	Value of changes

What is the level of need for further training/education in assessment moderation in your department/school for the following people (use the following key: 4 = very high, 3 = high, 2 = moderate, 1 = minimal, 0 = Nil):
[If you were not aware of the Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation project before this survey please indicate here (tick here): _____]

Staff category	Need for training
Heads of schools/departments	
Senior lecturers	
Lecturers	
Tutors	
Part-time staff	

In what aspects of assessment moderation do you need further training/education?

In what aspects of assessment moderation do you believe the rest of your college needs further training/education?

Do you have any other general comments about the process of assessment moderation at your college?

Do you have any general comments about the Benchmarking of Assessment Moderation Project?

Thank you for your contribution to improving the assessment process in your college and beyond.