Ideologies, principles and philosophies
underpinning moderation
in Australia

Outcomes of the Inaugural Conference of Australian Moderators,
Brisbane, 24, 25 June 1991
PREAMBLE

The following paper is an outcome of the Inaugural Conference of Australian Moderators held in Brisbane at the Offices of the Board of Senior Secondary School Studies (Queensland) on 24, 25 June 1991 under the auspices of the Australian Conference of Assessment and Certifying Authorities.

As a finale to the conference a workshop was conducted by Mr Graeme Withers at the request of the delegates listed on the following page.

The workshop sought to identify the common ideologies, philosophies, and principles that underpin all these processes which constitute the machinery of moderation in this country.

The discussions held over the two days of the conference provided a rich and invaluable source of information from which delegates could readily synthesise statements about commenalities throughout Australia.

Mr Withers developed the concept map presented on the following pages and invited delegates to write statements in sentences in any area of the map in which they felt they had particular experience or expertise.

The numbered statements in Roman are the edited versions of those written during the workshop. The connecting commentary in italics has been written by Dr Bob Dudley, who has acted as editor for this document.

A first draft was circulated amongst delegates for comment. A second draft, which attempted to encompass editorial, and commonly expressed comments was re-circulated. The delegate from South Australia was not available for comment. The delegates from New South Wales expressed concern about statements 14, 38, 53, and 54. All other delegates expressed support for the second draft which is presented in the following pages.

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Director
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For the purposes of this paper the following definition of moderation has been adopted:

moderation: a range of procedures which are aimed at enhancing the quality of, and degree of comparability between, various statements of student performance or achievement. These achievements may be within:

- different classes following the same syllabus in the one school;
- classes following the same syllabus in different schools;
- different courses in the one domain or discipline, or even (in certain circumstances) across the domains of learning.
POLICY DIRECTIVES

Central certifying authorities are publicly charged with the responsibility of ensuring that students are, in fact, taught the courses of study which the authorities have approved as being appropriate for them:

1 Processes should enable the Authority to be satisfied that courses of study are followed within prescribed limits.

Delegates frequently acknowledged that financial restraint was an important consideration throughout Australia in the current and readily foreseeable economic climate. The following statement is a bold acknowledgment of fiscal reality:

2 Moderation procedures should be cost efficient.

Moderation processes could, if not considered and implemented carefully, interfere with high quality teaching and learning in the classroom:

3 Moderation procedures should not unduly intrude into the teaching/student learning process and should, ideally, enhance and support teaching and learning.

QUALITY OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES

While possible negative effects of moderation were warned against, it was also stated that moderation could and should have a positive influence on learning experiences:

4 Processes should ensure that students have the opportunity to participate in a range of learning experiences appropriate to the course.

5 Moderation should promote high quality learning experiences for all students who undertake a course of study.

The sharing of responsibilities between teachers and central certification authorities was frequently commented upon:

6 Authorities and teachers should ensure that quality learning experiences are provided.
SYLLABUS/FRAMEWORK DESIGN

The first stage of the moderation process is usually the framework provided by the syllabus for a subject for the State or Territory. Syllabuses are legal documents in so far as they are approved by the central certification authority which has the legislated responsibility for doing so:

7 Syllabuses/frameworks provide the legal common foundations upon which all teachers make judgments about student performance.

The understanding that assessment is an integral part of curriculum was strongly stated here and under other headings:

8 Syllabuses should provide an integrated framework of all curriculum elements including assessment.

9 Syllabus and syllabus framework statements should be developed so that curriculum and assessment issues are regarded equally, are discussed simultaneously, and are not separate from each other.

10 Moderation procedures should ensure that assessment is an integral part of the curriculum as planned by the central authority and enacted by teachers and students.

If summative assessment is developed separately from other elements of the curriculum it is probable that, because of its public importance in terms of certification of achievement, it will dominate the rest of the curriculum:

11 Curriculum should determine the assessment procedures used. Assessment should not drive the curriculum.

The needs for a syllabuses to be inclusive of various groups of students and philosophies of education were expressed in the following way:

12 Syllabuses should enable and encourage teachers to develop appropriate programs which address needs of particular groups.

The essential role of teachers in developing syllabuses was stated by two delegates, one more strongly than the other:

13 Teachers need to participate in the development of syllabus/framework design.

14 Syllabuses/Frameworks or Study Designs should be initiated by teachers in conjunction with authorities.
ASSESSMENT PRINCIPLES

The notion of assessment being an integral part of curriculum was re-stated under this heading:

15 Assessment should be an integral part of the curriculum.

The formative nature of assessment in helping students learn was pre-eminent in delegates’ comments:

16 [Assessment] ought to primarily support learning.

17 A major role of assessment is to provide feedback to students to help them improve their learning.

18 Students should be fully aware of assessment requirements and, at times, have opportunities to plan their own assessment programs in consultation with their teachers.

One delegate offered fairness as being an important principle:

19 Moderation should ensure that assessment of students is fair and is seen to be fair.

ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Some common themes were re-stated under this heading: that formative assessment is of utmost importance; that teaching and learning should not be adversely affected by assessment; and that a harmonious partnership must exist between teachers and the central certification authority:

20 Moderation should help to ensure that students know what is expected of them in order to succeed.

21 Assessment practice should enhance learning.

22 Intrusion into the process of teaching and learning should be kept to a minimum.

23 The philosophy which underpins moderation in Australia is one which calls for harmony between teacher practice and judgments, and the intention of the central certification authority to moderate those teachers’ judgments.
Once again teachers were considered to be of vital importance but they need support to be aware of appropriate assessment processes and to implement these:

24 Teachers are the best judges of the performance of their students relative to the rest of their group.

25 Teachers should be fully aware of the forms of assessment and moderation they need to perform.

26 Teachers require support in the development of appropriate assessment strategies and instruments.

The notion of cost efficiency was also raised again:

27 Processes should maximise the use of available resources.

Statements regarding quality and range of assessment practices were also made:

28 The quality of assessment instruments is more important to the moderation process than the quantity.

29 Assessment practices should be varied and assess a range of knowledge and skill areas.

STANDARDS SETTING

A great deal of the discussion during the conference was centred on the various schemes of criteria and standards for the awards of achievement levels that were being developed or implemented in the States and Territories:

Some statements were made about the process of setting standards:

30 Standards setting should involve identifying the types of knowledge and skills that students can reasonably be expected to demonstrate at particular levels of achievement within the context of what they have been taught.

They are not predictors of student achievement.

31 "Student assessment exemplars" demonstrate the interpretation of the objectives/criteria.

32 The setting of standards should be based upon intended outcomes illuminated by collective classroom experience.

33 The distribution of grades should not, necessarily, remain static over time.
Other statements highlighted a major purpose of criteria and standards setting - to make these known and understood by teachers and students:

34 ...may include grade related descriptors to provide teachers with a summary view of the "standard".

35 Teachers should know what standards students need to reach to be given a particular award.

36 With regards to moderation processes students should know what standards they need to achieve.

Once again, the involvement of classroom teachers was seen to be essential:

37 With regard to moderation procedures a principle involving the setting of standards should be that these are not externally imposed but that teachers are involved in the process.

38 Classroom teachers establish the student assessment outcomes (through a process of consensus) which becomes the 'expert interpretation' of a syllabus.

VERIFICATION

39 A principle within moderation procedures should be that authorities incorporate a stage of verifying assessments reported on certificates.

Common themes of teacher involvement, minimising intrusiveness and openness of procedures were re-stated under this heading:

40 Teachers should be involved in the verification processes.

41 The degree of intrusiveness of the verification process upon schools must be minimised.

42 It is necessary for the verification procedures to be open and easily understood.

Inevitably, verification procedures should enhance comparability:

43 Procedures developed by an Authority should enhance comparability within a subject.
COMPARABILITY/EQUITY

Various statements about the purposes of moderation were made:

44 Moderation should seek to address the issue of comparability between classes in the same subject, between classes in a school and between schools.

45 Moderation processes should aim to achieve the highest degree of comparability possible in the local environment.

46 Moderation should be employed to ensure comparability between groups of students.

Reasons for ensuring comparability were stated:

47 Statewide school/class comparison must occur if the certificate outcomes are to be credible.

48 Students should have confidence in the community acceptance of the quality of the learning programs and expectations associated with those programs.

49 "Comparability" of assessment should be sought in the interests of students, teachers, authorities and the community.

The inclusion of equity in this heading elicited the following statements:

50 Moderation should ensure that statements of students' achievement are not influenced by factors other than the performance of the students.

51 A principle that should be adhered to is that the verification process is FAIR and EQUITABLE to students.

52 Students expect that the judgments made on their achievement be fair and reliable.

And finally:

53 Moderation should involve the simplest approaches possible while still retaining accuracy.
CERTIFICATION

The prime importance of the formative nature of assessment was re-asserted:

54 All assessment should be for learning purposes on the part of the teacher and student, thus certification should be a by-product of appropriate assessment procedures.

A reiteration of dealing with achievement and not potential was made:

55 Certification of actual student achievement (not potential) should be reported on certificates.

Central certification authorities were charged with the responsibility of educating the public about the certificates they issue:

56 Authorities should seek to report to students and the community the meaning of information collected and recorded on certificates.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Issues of fairness and openness were again stated as well as the notion that authorities should be held accountable for the certificates they issue:

57 To be accountable, authorities must ensure that the moderating processes applied to student work are thorough enough to provide fair judgments of student work.

58 Authorities are accountable to the users of certificates that whatever is certified should be valid.

59 The procedures used to moderate student assessments should be open to scrutiny by all interested parties.

CREDIBILITY

Both teachers and central certification authorities were held accountable for the credibility of the various aspects of moderation:

60 Teachers should ensure that the assessment and moderation procedures they use are seen as credible by students, parents and employers.

61 A credible moderation system underpins the issue of equitable treatment of exiting students by potential employers.
Certificates are credible in so far as the issuing authority has publicly defensible procedures to ensure validity of the certificate.

The authority ought to be able, and willing, to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of the moderation process it employs.
Information regarding this publication may be obtained from

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