Tip sheet – Moderating grading and feedback

Moderation of assessment forms part of the Assessment Practice Procedures (4. Moderation). As discussed in the good practice guide on moderation, moderation is a process where colleagues and/or students review aspects of assessment (in the case of this tip sheet the grading and feedback) to ensure their appropriateness, consistency, fairness and/or transparency. As indicated in the Tip sheet – Moderating assessment design, assessment is often high stakes with possible long-term consequences for both staff and students. Moreover, there are situations in which the assessment relies solely on one person's professional judgement. It is therefore important to ensure the integrity of assessments and the grades and feedback provided to students. By asking colleagues with skills and experience in assessment and subject knowledge in the area to moderate results this can be better achieved. There are various forms that the moderation of judgements may take, including, "peer scrutiny, double and collaborative marking processes, random checking, and consensus moderation discussions" (Jackel, Pearce, Radloff, & Edwards, 2017 p. 22). This Tip sheet focuses on moderating grading and feedback to reduce the incidence of different outcomes being produced for equivalent work, misunderstandings related to feedback and discontent or confusion for students and staff when grades and feedback are returned. Ideally, the three moderation resources identified above will be used as a package (Gingerich, Kogan, Yeates, Govaerts, & Holmboe, 2014).

Adhering to policy

Two aspects of the Assessment Practice Procedures: 4. Moderation and 5. Feedback are related to this tip sheet and each component indicates responsibilities linked to specific roles. Rather than repeating the content of the procedures, this tip sheet focuses on indicating ways of adhering to it. The Topic Coordinator is responsible for ensuring both grades and feedback to students are moderated, and as indicated in the Tip sheet – Moderating assessment design, a marking meeting should occur where a number of staff are involved in assessing students. Those involved in moderation need to have expertise in assessment practice and wherever possible subject content.

Planning for moderation

Moderation requires input from colleagues and may require minor changes to grades or feedback before it is presented to students. The process therefore needs to take place within the two weeks between student submission and the return of work to them (or the time students are expecting the return of their assignments, whichever occurs first). To ensure meetings run smoothly the following activities may be included:
- engaging all markers in a group exercise to agree standards
- having staff double mark either a random selection or highest and lowest graded assessments
- careful review and discussion of any discrepancies across these activities

Marking meetings

Marking meetings provide the opportunity to discuss grade distribution and ensure both grades and feedback provided to students as part of a fair and equitable process, this does not mean that all assessments need to be graded by more than one marker. It also just need to be a discussion which takes into consideration how the grades were derived and whether or not they are appropriate, for example it may be feasible for all students to receive high grades if all met the learning outcomes and addressed the criteria indicated in the rubric at a high standard.

Where only one marker is involved, their grades and feedback should be discussed with at least one other person who has knowledge of the assessment being applied and of the topic content. As indicated above, these meetings (including those involving only the marker and moderator) need to occur in a timely manner.

Moderating grades

Moderation is not about remarking but testing the reliability of grades. Whether it occurs via a large marking meeting or with one other person it is essential that the grades given to your students are checked by someone else to determine they are fair and equitable so that:
- grades take into account the appropriate learning level (AQF)
- within a topic, assessments are graded using an equivalent approach with comparable grades awarded for similar work
- students are not discriminated against for any reason (the work is judged, not the student)
- overall grades are awarded following careful consideration of agreed criteria and the grades reflect student competency linked to their achievement of learning outcomes (usually based on a rubric or marking guide)
- grades appropriately align with the Grading Scheme

Moderating feedback

It is also essential to ensure feedback is moderated to ensure it is:
- timely, clear, useable and supports performance improvement and progress
- clearly linked to achievement of learning outcomes and provides elaboration on rubric/marking guide descriptions
- provided electronically where assessment activities have occurred in this format
- includes a completed rubric as a minimum response when marking tests and/or exams

Programmatic assessments

Programmatic assessments occur when assessing competency-based education, it is often used across medical programs (including at Flinders). It is described as "an approach in which routine information about the learner's competence and progress is continually collected, analysed and, where needed, complemented with purposively collected additional assessment information, with the intent to both maximally inform the learner and their mentor/coach and allow for high-stakes decisions at the end of a training phase" (Schuwirth, van der Vleuten, & Durning, 2017, p. 211). Where these assessments are included it is essential that they are also moderated to ensure staff are aware of any amendments or other matters linked to progression and all assessment decisions are well informed by data, are consistent and robust.

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