ASSESSMENT MODERATION POLICY AND PROCEDURES

1. Preamble

Effective moderation of assessment is fundamental to the ongoing development of academic quality. Moderation is undertaken to enable a reasonable level of assurance that assessment activities have been designed and implemented appropriately so that students and staff can be confident that the results provided are fair, valid and reliable.

2. Policy

Study Group Australia Pty Ltd (SGA) is committed to the processes of assessment moderation at the systemic and individual levels.

3. Definitions

The key definitions, abbreviations and acronyms are covered in the SGA Glossary of Terms

4. Purpose

The fundamental purpose of moderation is to promote quality and ensure consistency.

Five foci are specified to address this purpose:

   a.   Ensure courses and units meet AQF standards
   b.   Courses and units are comparable with other higher education providers
   c.   Courses and units meet the standards of external accreditation authorities
   d.   The currency of professional academic standards is maintained
   e.   SGA's commitment to quality and standards is communicated externally

5. Principles

Within the context described above, moderation can be viewed as a set of tasks and actions undertaken internally and externally. To guide the tasks and actions, the following principles and responsibilities have been developed to facilitate effective moderation:

- Procedures for assessment are explicit, fair, valid and reliable and these procedures are made public to all stakeholders
- Assessment tasks reflect the learning outcomes and performance criteria as stated in the unit outline
- Students are made aware of assessment requirements in the first week of trimester
- All assessment tasks are graded against a marking scheme (rubric) that is consistent with the assessment criteria
- SGA maintains transparent and fair mechanisms for marking and moderating grades
- Moderation processes are evaluated periodically

6. Moderation Levels

Moderation at the Systemic level

Moderation processes at the systemic level can be undertaken externally and internally:

External moderation includes, but is not limited to:

- Course accreditation through TEQSA and resultant outcomes
- Moderation partnerships with other higher education providers
- Benchmarking processes with industry bodies (e.g. ACPET)
- Employer/university satisfaction feedback

Examples of Internal moderation include, but are not limited to:

- Use of expert advisory panels in course development
- Oversight from the Academic Board of SGA's academic quality processes
- Formalisation of committees (e.g. Teaching and Learning Committee) to assess internal academic processes
- The use of checking processes to moderate the grading of assessment tasks

Moderation at the individual level

Individual teaching staff are required to be actively engaged in ongoing moderation processes, for example:

- Active engagement in scholarship
- Demonstrated commitment to academic standards
- Liaison with academic peers

7. Scholarship and Professional Development

The maintenance of assessment standards is a core value of academic work. Further, maintaining the currency of assessment processes and tasks complements this value. Accordingly, it is expected of academic staff to adopt processes to ensure that the setting of assignments and their grading is consistent with the expectations and standards of their discipline.

To assist in maintaining assessment standards, academic staff are encouraged to undertake external moderation procedures to ensure standards are consistent with those expected across the relevant higher education discipline. Specifically, external moderation through collaborative cross-making with assessors from university partners serves to aid academic staff in monitoring the standards they using to assess student work.

It is expected that external moderation procedures are:

- undertaken in a systematic manner
- conducted in conjunction with appropriate discipline-specific academic staff
- recorded and results reported to the State Academic Director/Dean and Teaching and Learning Committee

8. Responsibilities

The following responsibilities underpin moderation processes at SGA:

Academic Directors

Academic Directors are responsible for the overall consistency of assessment throughout the course. Consistency of assessment is reviewed as part of the normal quality assurance monitoring process. Academic Directors report on a range of quality metrics to the Teaching and Learning Committee and the Academic Board.

Academic Directors liaise with academic teaching staff to provide opportunities for staff to discuss aspects of assessment design, timing, consistency and implementation. The Academic Directors report to the Teaching and Learning subcommittee on any issues that may arise through the marking and moderation process.

Unit Coordinators

Unit coordinators are responsible for the alignment of their unit and the coherence of the assessment tasks included within it. If there are multiple teachers/markers in the unit, Unit Coordinators convene unit meetings to discuss similar curriculum and assessment issues as above, in relation to the unit.

Course Advisory Committees

The course advisory committee for each course is responsible for the review of all unit outlines on a three year cycle to ensure, *inter alia*, that assessment tasks, grading and other related assessment information is appropriate.

Assessment Subcommittee

The assessment subcommittee is responsible for reviewing all unit grades on a trimester basis to ensure compliance with the SGA Assessment Policy.

Teaching and Learning Committee

The Teaching and Learning Committee is responsible for reviewing the distribution of grades on a trimester basis to ensure compliance with the SGA Assessment Policy.

9. Tasks and Actions

Within the broader responsibilities listed above, the following tasks and actions are used as moderation mechanisms.

Unit Outline Development

All unit outlines and assessment tasks are required to be checked by an academic peer. This includes checking and providing feedback in relation to the:

- alignment of assessment tasks with the unit's learning outcomes and in relation to the level of study
- clarity of the task description
- criteria and standards by which the tasks will be marked
- clarity and usefulness of any accompanying assessment rubric
- ways in which students will receive feedback
- guidance available for markers
- workload of the assessment tasks

Review of Assessment Items prior to use

All exams and a range of non-exam assessment such as assignments, research projects, class presentations and tests are reviewed for issues of English expression, mark allocation, design and formatting as well as review of content of the exam against the learning outcomes of the unit.

This is achieved through

- a second lecturer to be appointed to review each exam and selected non exam assessment tasks
- external reviewers to be sued if internal lecturers are not available
- each reviewer to produce a brief report, making recommendations as necessary
- State Course Coordinator to meet with the lecturer and the external reviewer to discuss and implement agreed changes

Moderation by review of marking and grading

A key aspect of moderation is the review of a sample of students' marked work to determine whether the marking is consistent with the assessment criteria and undertaken at the appropriate standard.

Some examples of marking and grading review strategies are:

- blind marking of the papers or a sample of papers, i.e. the marker does not know the identity of the students whilst marking
- second-marking or sampling, by a different assessor, concentrating at the boundaries of grade classifications (i.e. pass/fail or distinction/high distinction etc.). There should be no indication of the first assessor's grades or comments. A reasonable sample would be 5% of the papers or 10 papers (whichever is the larger).
- marking by an assessor external to the unit, ideally by someone who has taught the unit before
- assign the same marker to certain questions in assignments or tests so all those questions are marked by the same assessor across different tutorial groups
- use computer aided marking (for example, machine readable multiple choice quiz sheets, on-line automated marking)
- use of the same marking criteria rubric by all assessors
- comparison with model answers for the question type
- pre-marking assessor comparability meetings to trial mark and set marking standards.

10. Moderation Plans

The Academic Director/Dean is responsible for the development of a moderation plan each trimester. The moderation plan will include tasks associated with one or more of the marking and grading review strategies listed above, with assigned responsibilities for completion of the tasks and dates and times for completion of the tasks. The activities of the moderation plan must occur in the period following the initial marking and recording of results at the end of each trimester and before the meeting of the assessment subcommittee to ratify the grades.

Version Control

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