Making assessment rigorous, fair and consistent: moderation in an academic English program

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Outline

• PEP- program overview
• Challenges and issues
• Moderation and stages in the assessment process
• Moderation practices
• From verification of marks to blind marking
• Blind marking in PEP
• Challenges
• Moderation as PD
• Feedback from teachers
• Conclusion
Pre-enrolment English Program (PEP) 
A brief introduction

• 20-week program

  Wks 1-5  →  Wks 6-10  →  Wks 10-15  →  Wks 16-20

• PEP Advisory Committee (PAC) - academic oversight
• Curriculum & final assessment process redesign project
Challenges and issues

- Increased teachers accountability
- Limited time for induction
- Large assessing team
- Teaching staff – different standards
- Difficulties associated with achieving and maintaining consistency
- The type of work assessed - rely on the subjective judgement of teachers.
- Different interpretations of assessment criteria

Serious concerns about standards & considerable variation among the teachers in terms of marking, feedback and interpretation of the rubrics;
Moderation practices and stages in the assessment process

- Assessment tasks design
- Calibration/Benchmarking
- Monitoring evaluation
- Judgement video
- External validation & Comparison

(Adapted from Bloxham, Hughes & Adie, 2016)
Informal moderation


Formative tasks: Blogs, reports, OPs, seminars, practice essays, Integrated Reading & Writing tasks

Summative task: Final Independent Research Paper OP

Moderation methods:

• Peer-review
• Teachers as external assessors
• Meetings/at workstations in the staff area

Teachers develop a sense of belonging & connectedness (Crimmins et al, 2016).
Formal moderation process

- Practice Exam Essay (formative)
- Referenced Essay (summative)
- (Final Integrated Reading and Writing (IRW) (summative)
- Final Exam Essay (summative)

- Structured
- Guidelines to be followed
- Teachers allocated in groups

Final moderation with Consultancy Panel(s): 2 academics members of the PAC; where there is a difference in grades they discuss and moderate those exams
## Formal moderation process - Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>Small group of teachers and coordinator</td>
<td>Select 3 exams as samples-borderline/representing grade classification (F P C)</td>
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<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Teacher individually</td>
<td>The 3 samples are marked (rubric/grades &amp; justification)</td>
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<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Small groups + facilitator</td>
<td>Discussion/clarification (calibration) consensus/ facilitators make notes</td>
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<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Facilitators meeting</td>
<td>Discussion/clarification (calibration) consensus/notes/S-drive</td>
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Formal moderation process
Final Exam Essay

Exam day
- Pre-marking moderation

In the following week
- Final Exam Moderation session with Consultancy Panel(s)
  Consultancy Panel: 2 academics members of the PAC; where there is a difference in grades they discuss and moderate those exams

Final Exam marking moderation:
- Until 2014: verification of marks
- From 2015: blind-marking
Verification of marks x blind marking

Before - Verification of marks

Original grades and comments were visible; Verifier influenced by original marker grades and comments
Using original grades as an ‘anchor’ (Garry, McCool & O’Neill, 2005)”.
Some of the verifiers never disagreed with the original marker.

There was discussion during the process-power relations between teachers which impacted on verifiers judgement.

In a few occasions, the class teacher confronted the markers;
Some sessions were long because of the discussion teachers had during the session.

Now - Blind marking

Rubrics are placed in envelopes before the session; no annotations on exam papers; Second markers don’t know the grades and are not influenced by the original grades or comments.
Second marker reads and grades the exam; they have to make a decision;
First markers don’t know the second marker grades. There is no discussion during the session.
Codes are used to preserve the anonymity of the markers;
The teachers blind mark (second marker) and compare grades (recorder)
Formal moderation process
Blind marking - Role Play

Assessor A will blind mark exams marked by C; Assessor A will compare & record grades of essays marked by B & C

Assessor B will blind-mark exams marked by A; Assessor B will compare and record grades of exams marked by A & C

Assessor C will blind mark exams marked by B; Assessor C will compare grades of essays marked by A & B

Consultancy Panel

Consultancy Panel
Blind-marking - groups
Challenges

• Time investment:
  – To make up codes & email each teacher
  – To write a step-by-step process to guide teachers and facilitators
  – To prepare documents
  – To organise exam distribution
  – To allocate teachers to moderation groups where their students’ exams are not being moderated;
  – To oversee the moderation session (AM & PM)

• Staff:
  – To make effective use of staff time
  – To ensure that teachers understand the process;
  – To ensure that teachers follow instructions (exams in alphabetical order)

• Budget:
  – To use resources effectively
Screening Panel Sessions

- Moderate final results in some situations
- Academic representatives + class teacher(s)
- PAC oversight

Screening panel is not needed only when the student meets the criteria in all areas and successfully completes the PEP.
Moderation as professional development

- Learn about marking standards through discussions (Reimann et al. 2010, in Bloxam & Boyd, 2012).
- Have the opportunity to become familiar with the program, expectations, marking requirements/assessment criteria.
- Think about their marking.
- Reflect on their teaching practices.
- Have the opportunity to see how other teachers mark and justify their grades.

“... a systematic, situated moderation assessment process can demonstrate accountability and transparency in academic practice as well as helping sessional staff to connect, develop a sense of belonging, and develop teaching and learning knowledge and skill through regular professional conversations and calibration (Crimmins et al., 2016).
Feedback from teachers

• Having never been a part of this moderation system, I liked it in the way it seemed to reduce bias in the marking.
• The instructions are very explicit and clear.
• The system worked really well and will run more smoothly when we are all more familiar with it.
• It seemed to me that the moderation today went easily. We just had to take it one step at a time to make sure we didn't get out of step. We had a few pauses to make sure we were doing the right thing.
• Thanks for the system. I thought it worked well in spite of my own mistakes which I blame on tiredness. It was possible to be completely objective and not be influenced by other markers.
• Moderation worked smoothly and efficiently. A good idea that the verifier did not know the grade given by the external marker. Important that all essays and rubrics stayed in alphabetical order - it saved time. Great planning.
• Generally it went smoothly but I had one teacher who struggled a fair bit with the different 'hats', which meant I took longer to mark my essays as I had to walk them through it several times over and over again.
Conclusion

The PEP assessment process is as rigorous, fair and consistent as possible.

It benefits:

– The students
– The teachers
– The program


