Stage 2 school assessment and moderation

The SACE Board has quality assurance procedures in place to ensure the results that students receive are fair, valid and reliable.

Moderation is one of these quality assurance mechanisms.

At Year 12 or Stage 2 level, SACE subjects are 70 per cent school-assessed and 30 per cent externally assessed by the SACE Board.

To ensure all SACE students receive fair and consistent grades for their school-assessed work, this work is reviewed or moderated by the SACE Board.

What is moderation?

Moderation is a process in which samples of school-assessed student work are reviewed to make sure the assessment decisions (grades) are consistent with the performance standards for that subject. Performance standards describe the level of achievement.

Moderation confirms teachers’ interpretations of the performance standards before students receive their final grades in the subject. Moderation is based on evidence provided through samples of student work.

Sometimes grades need to be adjusted up or down to ensure work is graded consistently for all SACE students.

How does moderation work?

Schools send in samples of school-assessed work from each Year 12 (Stage 2) subject for moderation.

Moderation occurs at the end of Semester 1 for the Stage 2 Research Project and the end of Semester 2 for other subjects.

At these times, the SACE Board coordinates subject experts, generally current subject teachers, to review and moderate the samples of student work.

These moderators undergo training to ensure they can consistently interpret and apply subject performance standards, and moderation processes. They work in pairs, reviewing samples of work against the subject performance standards.

Moderators do not re-mark or read all of the student work; they look for evidence to confirm the grade level assigned by the teacher is correct.

Initially moderators review samples of student work independently. The pair then discuss how the sample aligns with the performance standards.

Finally moderators discuss their recommendation to confirm or adjust grades with a supervisor. The moderators and supervisor must agree on the final grades before results are confirmed or adjusted.
How is student work selected for moderation?
The SACE Board asks for at least one third of the work in each class as a sample, including work across the range of grade levels (A+ to E-). The sample includes material from each assessment type. For classes of ten students or fewer, all student work is included in the sample.

What’s the difference between marking and moderation?
When marking an externally assessed assignment or examination, SACE Board appointed markers read and assess the entire piece of student work and assign a grade based on the performance standards.

During moderation, moderators only view a sample of student work. Rather than grading work, moderators are looking for evidence to confirm the grade that has already been assigned by a teacher.

How does the SACE Board select moderators?
Moderation is a collaborative process which depends on the partnership between teachers, schools and the SACE Board. All parties are working towards the same objective - fairness and accuracy in assessment and grading.

Teachers, with the support of their schools, can express an interest in moderation (and marking) at the beginning of the school year.

The SACE Board appoints moderators from the three school sectors, from both country and metropolitan areas, with a preference for current subject teachers.

When moderation dates are set, teachers, with the support of their schools, confirm their availability.

Are teachers keen to be involved in moderation?
Teachers volunteer for moderation because through being involved in the process they gain a greater understanding of performance standards and marking. Moderation also provides teachers with the opportunity to network with colleagues across the state as well as view a wide variety of student work and teachers’ task designs.

They are then able to share this knowledge with other teachers back at their school.

Are schools supportive of the process?
Schools support teachers’ involvement as it helps to inform their teaching practice by giving them greater confidence in the interpretation of performance standards, and knowledge of task design. When this knowledge is shared, the outcome is better results for students.

How does moderation improve student outcomes?
After results are released, the SACE Board provides data and feedback confirming the application of the performance standards to all schools. Schools incorporate this feedback into their improving and planning processes for the following year.

The planning and improving phases are part of the SACE Board’s four phase quality assurance cycle.

These are followed by the clarifying phase in which teachers are guided in the interpretation and application of performance standards; and the moderation phase follows.

Overall, school assessment decisions are generally consistent with the performance standards and this continues to improve. In 2012, 77 percent of grades were confirmed (unchanged); in 2013, 82 percent of grades were confirmed.

Does the SACE Board scale student work?
The SACE Board does not scale student work; it assigns grades ranging from A+ to E-.

The grades of students who have applied for an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) are provided to the South Australian Tertiary Admissions Centre (SATAC) which undertakes a scaling process.

Grades have an underlying numerical equivalent so that students can be ranked for entry to university. SATAC converts the numerical equivalent to a scaled score in order to provide students with an ATAR.

Further information about this process, including a video, is available on the SATAC website (www.satac.edu.au/pages/scaling).