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The role of moderation in the National Senior Certificate examination

A B S T R A C T   With the results of the Senior Certificate Examination (SCE), previously, and the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examination, currently, under constant scrutiny, evidence of the authenticity and credibility that proper moderation processes can give, is becomingly increasingly important. This article focuses specifically on moderation processes applied to English First Additional Language, which was one of the first subjects to be assessed in the form of a national paper, prepared by the National Department of Education. In the Senior Certificate Examination that was written until the end of 2007, two of the three papers were compiled nationally but the literature paper was still assessed on a provincial basis. A writing portfolio was also assessed and moderated provincially. A question that needed to be asked was whether all the papers and portfolios were standardised and whether the moderation processes were equally valid and effective in all provinces. Furthermore, the question whether the national papers were moderated sufficiently, also arose. With the NSC the portfolio plays an even bigger role and the question remains whether moderation processes really guarantee the validity of the assessment and final mark allocated to each learner. Assessment as well as moderation procedures for English First Additional Language are discussed but the main focus is on how the full process can be quality assured.

Keywords: National Senior Certificate; English First Additional Language; moderation; assessment; quality assurance

1. Introduction

Since the amalgamation of the different ex-departments of education in South Africa in 1996, great discrepancies in the quality of teaching, learner responses, classroom method and internal assessment has become increasingly obvious, so much so that in 2004 three senior educationalists, J. Muller, the Deputy Dean of Research, Humanities, University of Cape Town,

Nick Taylor, CEO of Jet Education Services, and Penny Vinjevold, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Education (in Taylor, Muller & Vinjevold, 2004:82), concluded that the South African school system has proved almost impervious to a decade of reform. Their research, inter alia, found that principals were not ensuring that teachers cover the curriculum, district officials were not supporting schools, provinces were underspending and the National Education Department was not assuring the quality of the teachers' work. As a result, learners are not learning what they are supposed to learn.

Moreover, since the introduction of the National Senior Certificate examination papers in 2000 there has also been increased speculation that the standards of the papers have been lowered to make them more accommodating and to provide for possible discrepancies in the quality of the teaching. Findings published in *Nova* (2005) confirmed these speculations, stating that in reality only 17% of all matriculants had passed in 2005 and that a statistical manipulation of marks was introduced to ensure a pass rate more aligned with the previous years' results.

In 2007 *Beeld* specialist reporter on education, Alet Rademeyer (2007), referred to research findings by the ABET specialists and research specialists, Hough and Horne, showing the English proficiency of applicants at tertiary institutions, who are non-mother-tongue Afrikaans and English speakers, to be below the acceptable level for Grade 8 learners. Horne and Hough furthermore found that only 12% of urban African language mother-tongue speakers who completed Grade 12 at the end of 2004 are functionally literate. According to this research institute, this result likely points to why 85% of all African language mother-tongue speakers do not complete their studies at tertiary level. More recent results, published by the same company show little improvement – only 15% of the black matriculants of 2007 were functionally literate (*Beeld*, 11 April 2008).

If this situation is to be reversed, a proper system of moderation and quality assurance should be in place, because proper moderation of assessment does not only help ensure that proper standards are upheld nationally, but can be used to help diagnose exactly where problems occur in the teaching and assessment processes. During moderation of the answer sheets an error analysis can be done to establish where there are gaps in either the teaching by the educator or the comprehension of the learners.

Currently, the moderation and quality assurance of the National Senior Certificate examination (NSC) are the joint responsibility of the nine provincial Departments of Education, the National Department of Education (DoE) and Umalusi, the independent quality assurance body established in terms of the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance Act, Act 58 of 2001, whose main purpose is to assure the quality of the assessment processes leading to the issuing of certificates to learners at Grade 12 level. The DoE and Umalusi adopted a variety of quality assurance measures to try and ensure the integrity, validity and reliability of the NSC examination. Among these measures are internal and external moderation of provincial and national examination papers; editing and quality control processes of all NSC papers (in Gauteng); three-tiered moderation, verification and statistical moderation of the CASS mark; monitoring of the conduct of the examination, the marking process, and auditing and standardisation of the examination marks. However, that the implementation of these measures may fall short, is clear from a remark by Umalusi CEO, Dr Peliwe Lolwana (*Beeld,*

20 October 2005), who in announcing findings of a national evaluation of assessment systems of the Senior Certificate Examination (SCE) in 2005, expressed concern over the lack of qualified examination staff for all provinces and discrepancy in capacity and expertise between certain provinces like Gauteng and Limpopo. She also stated that in most provinces quality assurance mechanisms, for example, the editing, proof-reading and technical quality control of the examination papers and sufficient monitoring of schools during the examination period were not in place and this should receive immediate attention by the respective provincial departments of education.

To get an idea of where this problem may have originated, it is necessary to understand what took place in the aftermath of the nationalisation of the National Senior Certificate Examination papers 1 and 3 for English Additional Language in 2000, which are currently set by national examination panels. During the first three years of the implementation of the national paper for English Additional Language, the nine provinces nominated one or two examiners from their existing panels for the national papers, and from these nominations the National Department of Education selected the best qualified examiners. It was the task of the External Moderator of Umalusi, who administers the papers of all nine provinces, to provide direction to the appointment of the best examiners based on the ability of each examiner, thus assuring the quality of the examination process. However, in 2003 an open invitation was extended nationally to all teachers who considered themselves qualified to set the National Senior Certificate examination papers, in the process sidestepping the External Moderator who no longer had any role in the selection of the panels. As a result, the current appointment process of examiners for the papers lacks the necessary guarantees that the best examiners are appointed.

To get an idea of the kind of problem that could materialise during moderation and that should be acted upon, we refer to the Gauteng moderation system for the CASS portfolio and papers 1 and 3 of the National Senior Certificate Examination for English First Additional Language. Currently, a three-level moderation system is in place for the portfolio. The process starts with *desktop moderation* at provincial and district levels, whereby the averages of each school are compared to its performance in the previous year's exam, with an allowance of a discrepancy of between 7% and 10% on the assumption that while many Gauteng learners may speak English fairly well, their performance in writing may be weaker as there is more room for spelling and grammatical errors. Research by district offices, however, indicates that many, if not most, of the Gauteng schools are pitching their oral marks too high, with discrepancies ranging from 20% to 50%. This finding is corroborated by *moderation at the schools*, usually done on a set appointment, where six candidates, covering a range of marks, are nominated by the facilitator; usually two good, two average and two poor performers. Moderation of both listening and prepared and unprepared speaking and reading skills is to be carried out. Here too, research shows that in many instances, the oral marks submitted are too high. Moreover, teachers often admit that they 'load' the marks to enhance the learner's chances of attaining a better mark at the end of matric. On top of this, in many cases assessment of the writing component too proved to be flawed, with the original mark and the moderated mark differing in particular instances up to 40 per cent. After monitoring a number of moderation sessions, it has become clear that the majority of Grade 12 teachers are not equipped to deal with internal assessment at National Senior Certificate level, which is evidenced by incomplete educators' and learners'

portfolios, the lack of standardisation across districts and the province, and spelling tests of 10 marks that are submitted as fully-fledged term tests. However, rather than act to remedy the problem, the weighting of the internal assessment for National Senior Certificate purposes has been increased to 25% of the final mark with the introduction of the CASS portfolio.

In view of the above, the necessity for quality assurance of the assessment process and the improvement of the moderation system is indicated. Nationalisation of the NSC papers has contributed to the same standard of assessment and moderation being used nationally, but consistency in quality of teaching and internal assessment is still lacking. A 'same standard of assessment and moderation' does not guarantee an *appropriate standard* and the development of a reliable and valid national system of assessment and moderation is an imperative for assuring valid NSC examination.

2. Understanding assessment in order to understand the role of moderation in quality assurance

Because the development of assessment materials takes place before any moderation can be done, proper assessment is a prerequisite for a properly functioning moderation system.

Assessment is defined as any method used to gauge the knowledge students have acquired up to a certain point (Dietel, Herman & Knuth, 1991:1). Methods of assessment are determined by beliefs about learning. Early theories of learning assumed that after basic skills had been learned by rote, they could be assembled into complex understandings and insight. However, evidence from contemporary cognitive psychology indicates that all learning requires that meaningful learning is reflective, constructive and self-regulated (Dietel, Herman & Knuth, 1991: 5).

In keeping with contemporary theories about learning, an important trend in assessment is a move away from traditional, multiple-choice tests to alternative assessment, the so-called authentic or performance assessment, which includes a wide variety of strategies such as open-ended questions, hands-on execution of experiments, computer simulations, writing in many disciplines and portfolios of student work over time. As a result here is also in the South African educational context an increased emphasis on continuous assessment and portfolio work. The National Curriculum Statements make it clear that every subject should show evidence of all forms of assessment.

Below we discuss the four most frequently used forms of assessment in English First Additional Language:

2.1 Forms of assessment and their aims

The four most frequently used types of assessment in English First Additional Language are *summative, formative, diagnostic* and *baseline* assessment.

Summative assessment forms the backbone of the National Senior Certificate examination. This type of assessment gives an overall picture of a learner's competence or progress at any specific moment, for instance at the end of a learning activity, unit of learning, cycle, term, semester or year. It should be planned and a variety of assessment strategies should be used. According to Trice (2000:7) summative assessment is an important component of grading,

although there are important differences between the two processes. Whereas grading is an administrative process, which may include information other than summative information and may be subjective, summative assessment takes place once the final product of formative assessment is submitted.

Formative assessment is a crucial element of teaching and learning. It monitors and supports the learning process with constructive feedback. Stakeholders use it to acquire information on the progress of the learners. Trice (2000:7) maintains that formative assessment is largely an evaluation of teaching and shares with diagnostic assessment an emphasis on teachers' accountability in developing appropriate instruction and less emphasis on evaluating individual students. An example in classroom practice would be process writing for the portfolio.

Diagnostic assessment is used to discover the cause/s of a learning barrier or barriers. It assists in the finding of support strategies or the identifying of the need for professional help or remediation. Item analysis can be included here.

Baseline assessment is used to establish what learners already know and can do. It helps in planning activities and learning programme development. Its recording is usually informal. It is extremely useful when an educator receives a new group of students whose language proficiency levels are not recorded or with whom the educator is unfamiliar.

2.2 Principles of assessment

Proper assessment practices should be based on valid principles. The draft document of the National Curriculum Statements (DoE, 2002:43) already stipulates that assessment should be transparent and democratic, clearly focused, integrated with teaching and learning, based on pre-set criteria of the Assessment Standards, use a variety of instruments, allow for expanded opportunities for learners, be learner-paced and fair, flexible, valid, reliable, consistent, and authentic. Below we explain the most important of these principles:

2.2.1 Assessment should be reliable

According to Trice (2000:29) '(r)eliability is the extent to which an assessment accurately measures what it was designed to measure … the extent to which error is eliminated from the assessment process'. However, he also acknowledges that no test is completely reliable; it may be assumed that teachers will have a one to two per cent error margin on something even as straightforward as grading multiple-choice tests.

For Alderson, Clapham and Wall (1995:6) reliability is measured by the extent to which test scores are consistent. If candidates took the test again tomorrow after taking it today, would they get the same result (assuming no change in their ability)? Reliability is also relative to the candidates taking the test: a test may be reliable with one population, but not with another.

The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (OCSLD, 2004:1) states: 'If a particular assessment were totally reliable, assessors acting independently using the same criteria and mark scheme would come to exactly the same judgement about a given piece of work.' It is also stated that learning outcomes and assessment criteria should be explicitly given to learners when the task is set to achieve reliability.

Cooledge, Cooledge and Weihe (2000:1) define reliability as the consistent measuring of characteristics by using criteria standards and rubrics, a view also held by Bailey (1998:3), who maintains assessment is reliable when a test or a rating system measures students' performances consistently.

2.2.2 Assessment should be valid

According to Henning (1990:89) validity refers to the appropriateness of a given test or any of its component parts as a measure of what it is purported to measure, a view shared by Bailey (1998:2). Seeking validity in the truth of the test and its relation to what it is intended to test, Davies distinguishes five forms of validity (1990:21, 23), namely face, content, construct, predictive and concurrent validity. And Alderson, Clapham and Wall (1995:172), making a similar distinction, differentiates three main types, namely *internal* (face, content, response), *external* (concurrent, predictive) and *construct* validity.

Following Davies (1990:23, 24) and Alderson, Clapham and Wall (1995:176, 177) *face validity* is established with reference to the appeal of a test to lay judgement; while *content validity* is established with reference to professional judgement, usually that of a teacher or a tester, real (for achievement testing) or imagined (for proficiency testing) or of the theory or model (for aptitude testing); *response validity* with reference to test-takers' responses to test items in a growing range of qualitative techniques like self-report and self-observation; *predictive validity* with reference to the predictive force of a test, like proficiency tests; *construct validity* with reference to how well you translated your ideas or theories to the assessment and *concurrent validity* with reference to a criterion already at hand, usually another test, which may be a parallel version of the criterion test or a simplified version thereof.

Based on these principles, Davies (1990:24) developed the following matrix for the establishment of the relation between test purpose, test use and test validity:

2.2.3 Assessment should be relevant and transferable

Test purpose	Test use	Test validity
To measure progress	Achievement	Content
To evaluate programme	Proficiency	Predictive/Concurrent
To investigate learning	Aptitude	Construct
To illuminate syllabus	Diagnostic	Content

One of the main points of criticism against pre-outcomes-based teaching methods is that pupils learnt by rote and could not apply what they had learnt to other contexts. A lack of transferability remains a major obstacle in the language classroom. Learners often question the relevance of reading Shakespeare or many of the prescribed works. In addition, many language items are also taught without any reference to their possible use in 'real' situations, e.g. the teaching of the passive form according to the structural approach. Whether this lack of transferability has been solved by the shift to outcomes-based education remains to be seen. However, the question arises whether transferability is not perhaps a skill that needs to be taught separately. The Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development (OCSLD, 2004:1), for instance, argues that when devising assessment tasks, teachers and assessors should ensure that these tasks

address the skills learners are required to develop. These tasks should be contextualised with a sense of real purpose behind why the tasks are to be undertaken and a sense of a real audience, beyond the tutors for whom the tasks are to be performed.

2.2.4 Assessment should be fair

Fairness in assessment exists when assessment is appropriate, that is when it is personalised, natural and flexible, can be modified to pinpoint specific abilities and functions at the relevant level of difficulty and promotes rapport between examiner and student.

The question now arises how are these principles translated into sound assessment practice?

2.3 Assessment practice

Currently four basic types of assessment practices are commonly used (DoE, 2002:44): *quantitative*, *qualitative*, *norm-referenced* and *criterion-referenced* assessment.

In *quantitative assessment* a mark is allocated to a test or project, as is the case currently in the CASS component of the National Senior Certificate Examination. In *qualitative assessment*, rather than awarding a numerical mark, teachers will apply labels such as *Good* and *Excellent* or write descriptive comments to students or parents (Trice, 2000:9). Often teachers will use both quantitative and qualitative assessment, particularly in the area of writing and oral reports. Assessment in the foundation and intermediate phases are often qualitative. *Norm-referenced* assessments rank students' performance in comparison to others. In practice, it appears that most classroom assessments are *criterion-referenced*, in which case a students' performance are compared to a pre-established standard of performance, the criterion (Trice, 2000:8). The National Senior Certificate examination too falls in this category.

Teachers' assessment of learners' performance must have a great degree of reliability and should be standardised across different times, assessment items and markers. Assessment practices should also show a great degree of validity and be made on the aspects of learning that were assessed. In order to ensure a high degree of validity and reliability, decisions regarding learner progress must be based on more than one assessment, which is also the underlying principle of continuous assessment. CASS is an assessment strategy that bases decisions about learning on a range of oral, written and performance assessment activities and events that happen at different times throughout the learning process, using various kinds of assessment methods such as tests, exams, projects and assignments, which are often included in a portfolio.

2.3.1 Collecting evidence for assessment

There are various methods of collecting assessment evidence. Currently the National Senior Certificate examination includes the following methods (DoE, 2002:45): *observation-based assessment, test-based assessment, task-based or performance assessment,* and *self-, peer and group assessment.*

Observation-based assessment methods tend to be less structured, allow educators to record different kinds of evidence for different learners at different times and are often based on tasks that require learners to interact with one another in pursuit of a common solution or product. Observation should be intentional and conducted with the help of an appropriate observation

instrument. Oral assessment is usually done in terms of the unprepared speech component where the educator observes classroom discussion of a particular topic.

Test-based assessment is more structured and enables teachers to gather the same evidence for all learners, in the same way and at the same assessment opportunity, creating evidence of learning that is verified by a specific mark or score. Tests and examinations remain an important part of the National Curriculum Statements because they give good evidence of what knowledge has been learned if they are used correctly, but they do not provide evidence of the development of practical skills, values and attitudes.

In the past, tests were often incorrectly considered to be the only method of assessment. Most of the testing in the secondary phase is test-based.

Task-based or performance assessment methods show the extent to which learners can apply the skills and knowledge they have learned in unfamiliar contexts or contexts outside the classroom. Assessment activities are structured and although evidence collected from different learners may differ, the evidence should show whether learners can effectively choose which part of their learning is needed to solve a problem or task and then use that learning to complete the task successfully. This approach relies on the professional judgement of the educator in assessing the performance of learners against a set of pre-established criteria, which are to be described in advance in rubrics or task lists. The CASS portfolio falls in this category.

In *self-, peer and group assessment* the outcomes and assessment standards are transparent. Learners know what is expected of them and can, therefore, play an important part in assessment by pre-assessing work (self-assessment) or by assessing one another's work (peer assessment) before it is finally submitted for formal examination. The ability to work effectively in groups is one of the critical outcomes. Assessing group work involves assessing the extent to which learners work effectively as a group.

Data collected during assessment must be evaluated and made available in an accurate and understandable way.

Recording and reporting involve the capture of the required data (DoE, 2003:46).

2.3.2 Recording and reporting of assessment tasks

It is often difficult to separate the different methods of recording from methods of evaluating (or marking) learners' performances (DoE, 2003:46).

The following types of recording are currently in use: *rating scales task lists,* and *rubrics*.

Rating scales are any system where a symbol (such as A or B) or a mark (such as 5; 10 or 50%) is defined in detail. Traditional marking, assessment and evaluation used rating scales, but they often did not provide descriptive detail. Consequently it was not easy to determine learners' strengths and weaknesses in terms of intended outcomes. Bachman (1990:36) suggests that when developing a rating scale, the point on the scale should typically be defined in terms of either the types of language performance or the levels of abilities considered distinctive at different scale points. To be rated precisely, these scale points must be defined so as to represent clearly distinct levels or bands. The more levels there are, the more precise the rating scale

will be. An example of a rating scale for an oral assessment may look like this:

    0 - 1   Extremely limited vocabulary; no cohesion; poor organisation

    1 - 2   Small vocabulary; very little cohesion; poor organisation

    2 - 3   Vocabulary of moderate size; moderate cohesion; poor organisation

    3 - 4   Extensive vocabulary; excellent cohesion; excellent organisation
           (Bachman & Palmer: 1983:3)

Task lists or check lists consist of discrete statements ticked off to describe a learner's performance in a particular task (DoE, 2002:47).

Rubrics are a hierarchy (graded levels) of standards with benchmarks that describe the minimum level or standard of acceptable performance for each criterion (DoE, 2002:48). Two types of rubrics may be distinguished – holistic rubrics that assess a piece of work as a whole and analytic rubrics that focus on discrete features of the work to be assessed. In order to design a rubric, teachers will have to decide what the task is, which elements constitute it, what kind of evidence should be collected, which parts of the performance should be assessed, what knowledge should be evident, which skills should be applied or actions taken and which issues should be expressed as personal opinions, values or attitudes. It is often crucial that teachers share a rubric with learners before they perform the required task, so that the rubric then becomes a powerful tool for self-assessment.

In English First Additional Language the current marking grids were developed by the external subject moderator, subsequently refined in 2004 and used nationally for the assessment of the writing sections of the portfolio and Paper 3.

3. Assuring the quality of the SCE: The role of moderation

Quality assurance refers to structures and systems that operate from the school level up to national level to ensure that a specified degree of excellence, standard and quality is achieved (SAFCERT, 2000:1). Moderation can be seen as one of the quality assurance measures adopted at various stages of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment has been conducted in line with agreed practices, so that the results can be declared as fair, reliable and valid (Umalusi, 2002:4).

For moderation and other quality assurance measures to take place, systems and structures must be established to handle the logistics of the task. (Singh, 2004:60). Quality assurance measures include internal and external moderation of question papers, the CASS portfolio and oral marks, monitoring of the conduct of the examiners and the marking process, and auditing of the examination marks (Umalusi, 2002:4).

National Senior Certificate examination papers are subjected to a moderation process to ensure that the assessment tool is of an appropriate standard and adhere to the requirements stipulated in the subject syllabus and provincial or national guidelines. All examining bodies, including the Gauteng Department of Education, are compelled to submit their papers for external moderation by Umalusi. External moderators are all acknowledged subject specialists, mostly involved in Higher Education.

As English First Additional Language is one of the subjects currently having national papers set, assuring the quality of the papers lies with the Department of Education (DoE) and Umalusi. The internal moderator is appointed by the DoE and the external moderator by Umalusi. Moderation of the national papers is done on site at the DoE offices in Pretoria, where both moderators have separate meetings with the examining panel to discuss any problems. However, an examination paper is just as valid and of appropriate standard as the capacity of the examining panel and the internal and external moderators allow for. In this context it is very true that the paper is just as strong as the weakest link in the assessment and moderation chain.

The DoE has a contingency plan in the form of back-up papers for each national subject and each province also sets its own back-up paper in case of a leaked paper. The latter undergo exactly the same type of moderation process as the national papers, except that the provincial internal moderator does the internal moderation before the paper is submitted for external moderation to the Umalusi moderator. The content of these provincial papers is underpinned by the national subject guidelines disseminated by the DoE to all examining bodies.

3.1 Moderation and the role of moderators in quality assurance

For qualifications to be certified by Umalusi learners have to have achieved prescribed outcomes to a standard maintained throughout the country and comparable with international standards. These learner achievements are measured by individual assessors against criteria that are linked to the outcomes of the learning programme. But to ensure that standards are maintained, requires that a process must be in place to benchmark external standards and establish, maintain and measure internal standards against the external benchmark. This process through which individual judgements are aligned with the applicable general standards is called moderation (IEB, 2004:53). When moderating SCE papers, the criteria encompassed by the requirements of Report 550 for each subject are considered the general standards that apply. A moderator, then, assesses the validity of the assessments (e.g. SCE papers) in order to ensure that the individual assessors (the provincial and national examiners) conducted the assessments to the prescribed standards.

Because syllabus or learning programme statements or outcomes are open to a range of interpretations, keeping interpretations consistent is a crucial first step in the quality assurance process (IEB, 2004:53). With regard to the SCE papers, the annual roadshows in Gauteng where the examining panels meet matric teachers to discuss, amongst other aspects, the interpretation of the syllabus, are crucial to ensuring consistency in interpretation and therefore a first quality assurance measure.

Thereafter it is the responsibility of the moderator to ensure that standards are maintained consistently within and across different learning sites, which in the case of the SCE papers include all the English Additional Language classrooms across South Africa.

Moderation can be carried out internally as part of a learning site's quality assurance system – including the first two levels of CASS moderation and oral moderation – or externally as part of a process to verify and standardise assessment results within a province or country, as is the case with the NSC papers. In this case moderators are responsible for a learning site's contribution to external quality assurance processes and also for ensuring that internal adjustments are aligned with national standards and policy.

Currently the moderator of the NSC papers is linked directly to Umalusi, while in other sectors of the NQF moderation forms part of the overall quality management system, underpinning quality in learnerships, skills programmes and qualifications. All assessors and moderators at school, provincial, national and tertiary level are required to be successfully accredited assessors and moderators in education courses, which entail them having submitted evidentiary portfolios.

Internal moderators ensure that all elements and procedures relating to assessment have been properly followed and the external moderator that the applied standards are compared and standardised against the results of other similar sites, thereby ensuring nationally consistent standards.

In the case of the CASS portfolio, the provincial moderator is required to ensure that marking and moderation sites are quality assured and that provision of education and assessment of outcomes (learner achievements) are standardised. The process includes verification of the quality of site-based assessment activities, moderation, quality of provision, recording of learner achievements, quality management systems, and learner achievements before certification by the band ETQA (Umalusi).

3.2 The moderation process

The moderation of all assessment materials is crucial for valid assessment and should not be done randomly. Every aspect of assessment should be moderated, either internally or externally.

3.2.1 Drawing up a moderation plan

For NSC papers the full paper must be moderated to ensure that standards are maintained. Comparisons with previous years' papers are also advised.

Moderation must be conducted at regular intervals, in agreed timeframes. In Gauteng the internal moderator will have an initial meeting with the full examination panel to discuss division of work; question types and weighting; whether the paper will be thematic or not (for example, in the Language paper a central theme can be developed around an anchor passage for all the sections); deadlines for submission, and date of the next meeting.

Moderation is not a once-off process for the NSC papers – the panel will meet at least three times with the internal moderator so that the latter can monitor the progress and the quality of the product. After each moderation, the panel will correct everything the moderator has indicated unless there is a difference of opinion about the validity of some of the recommendations, in which case negotiation and discussion will take place until a compromise has been reached. However, the internal moderator has the authority to veto a decision taken by a panel if there is a strong difference of opinion, but this is not an advisable option – mediation by the external moderator could be a solution.

There must be clarity about who is moderating what, when, where and how. This will be more of a problem with the CASS moderation where there is a panel of moderators and the chief CASS moderator does the division of work.

3.2.2 Confirming that assessors are trained or registered

Any assessor who assesses learners at an NQF level must have achieved the outcomes of ASSMT 01 Unit Standard: 'Plan and conduct assessment' as a minimum, either by RPL (Recognition of

prior learning) or certification. This Unit Standard is based on sound assessment principles and targets assessment skills (outcomes), which were previously implicit and underdeveloped.

Assessors should also have met the registration requirements of the SETA (Sector and Training Authority) or band ETQA (Education and Training Quality Assurer) for the field in which they are to assess, for example a teacher would be registered with Umalusi.

3.2.3 Providing support and guidance to assessors

The moderator plays a crucial role in mentoring the assessor. He or she must establish whether the assessor is competent and must support, guide, advise and mentor the assessor to ensure that he/she is able to function effectively and follow best practice within a constantly changing environment. In terms of the NSC papers the internal moderator has a definite mentoring role as equity regulations often result in the appointment of inexperienced assessors. For the first year at least the internal moderator should guide the examiner on sometimes the most elementary level to set a paper of an appropriate standard.

A moderator must 'know more' than the assessor about the subject and assessment methods to be able to advise the assessor regarding policy at provincial and national levels.

3.4.3 Confirming that assessment is administered in ways that conform to an assessment policy

The moderator must be familiar with the assessment policy, which could indicate what type of questions are required; mark allocation; subject content to be assessed; acceptable layout of a paper; time allocation.

3.4.4 Confirming that assessment was done according to the principles of the NQF and stated national policy

The NQF stipulates that assessment should be:

Open: Learners can contribute to planning and accumulation of evidence. Assessment candidates understand the assessment process and applicable criteria.

Consistent: The same assessor would in similar circumstances make the same judgement again, similar to that made by other assessors.

Appropriate: The method of assessment is suited to the performance being assessed.

Fair: The method of assessment does not present any barriers unrelated to the evidence requirements to achievement.

Manageable: The methods used make for easily arranged, cost-effective assessments, which do not unduly interfere with learning.

Integrated: Evidence collection is integrated into the work or learning process when appropriate or feasible.

Valid: The assessment focuses on the requirements set for the learning outcomes and is fit for the purpose.

Direct: The activities in the assessment mirror the conditions of actual performance as closely as possible.

Authentic:	The assessor is satisfied that the work being assessed is attributable to the person assessed.
Sufficient:	The evidence collected establishes that all the criteria have been met and that performance to the required standard can be repeated consistently.
Systematic:	Planning and recording is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that assessment is fair.

(IEB, 2004:56)

3.4.4 Dealing with learner appeals

A moderator must deal with learner appeals according to the policy or system if a learner feels that the assessor has not dealt with the matter satisfactorily and with teacher appeals in the case of the provincial moderation of the CASS portfolio. The right to appeal is an assessment principle but the interpretation at school level has to be handled sensitively as it can be used as a disruptive process.

3.4.5 Moderating the recording and reporting process

Records must be accurate, sufficient and organised according to policy requirements. Reports must be supported by evidence and have a formative function.

3.4.6 Preparing and submitting a moderation report

A moderation report must be submitted to the quality assurance body. Its format and status must be clearly understood at all moderation levels within a province and must not become a formality as it must be used to review moderation systems and contribute to and develop the assessment process.

3.5 Monitoring the conduct of the examination, the marking process and the auditing of the examination mark

The conduct and administration of the National Senior Certificate examination is regulated by the National Education Policy on the conduct of the National Senior Certificate examinations (DoE, 2001:1).

State-of-readiness visits by the DoE and Umalusi to all the examining bodies are undertaken long before the examination commences, to check the security measures adopted by the different bodies to conduct examinations. A detailed report is then submitted to the Minister of Education.

Similar monitoring exercises are carried out by Umalusi and the DoE during the writing of the papers (aspects such as seating arrangements, display of examination time-table, number of invigilators, competence of invigilators, handling of irregularities and conditions for writing of the examinations), the marking sessions (the DoE and Umalusi quality-assure a sample of marked scripts to ensure that the correct marking guidelines were followed and that the moderation of the marked scripts by the internal moderator/chief marker/deputy chief marker has been done) and the capturing of the marks.

3.6 Standardisation of examination marks

Immediately after the marking of examination papers and before the release of the learners' results, standardisation of the Grade 12 examination marks takes place, according to Umalusi (2002:4) to ensure that the final results in each subject do not differ markedly from one year to the next, because changes in the ability of candidates or the effectiveness of teaching and learning seldom result in significant changes in examination results within the short space of year.

The raw marks of English First Additional Language, being a national subject, are standardised against a common norm, calculated by averaging the raw marks of the past three years of all the provinces. This procedure is followed to promote equity and fairness for the national subjects at all schools (DoE, 2001:5).

3.7 Moderation reports

The key function of the moderation report is to report moderation findings to designated role-players in the moderation system. The Independent Examinations Board (IEB) (2004:128) illustrates the positioning of the moderation report as follows:

Graph 1: The key function of the moderation report in the moderation process
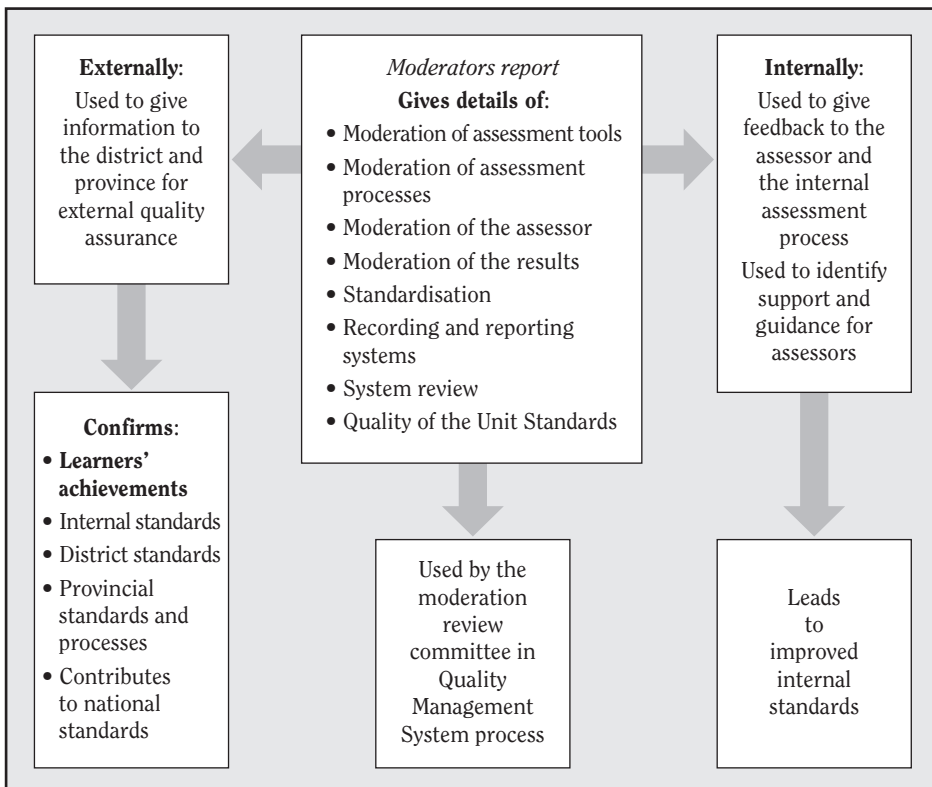
From the above illustration it is clear that the compilation of the moderation report requires reflective thought and thorough planning. It is also diagnostic in nature, with as main purpose

the prevention of the same problems occurring in future assessment materials, and most importantly the improvement of the quality of assessment materials.

Moderation is a very distinct process and requires some reflection. If a moderator operates at provincial level, support is given to moderators at district level. District level, in turn, must give direct support to assessors.

4. Conclusion

If all teaching, assessment and moderation principles and procedures were in place provincially and nationally, all papers would have been of an appropriate standard and all learners would have received quality education, which would have prepared them sufficiently for the NSC examination, as well as possible tertiary study. Unfortunately, if one takes into consideration the research statistics concerning the functional literacy levels mentioned in this article, it is evident that neither teaching nor assessment and moderation of English Additional language are on par. If, however, the suggested assessment and moderation processes are followed, this situation could be improved considerably.

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