

**ALTC Strategic Priority Project Application:  
Priority 1 External moderation and coursework<sup>1</sup> assessment**

**Project Title:** *A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation*

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### **Abstract**

This proof-of-concept project will produce resources to guide inter-institutional moderation for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards. Eight universities will identify common final year subjects across eight disciplines aligned with the ALTC discipline standards project. Subject convenors will share subject outlines and selected assessment artefacts for review by at least two other project universities. The moderation process includes inputs (e.g., subject outlines, assessment tasks, marking criteria) and outcomes (i.e., assessment samples). External blind peer review of both inputs and outcomes will determine the consistency of subject-level standards and how these compare with comparable final year subjects in other universities. Where relevant, capstone subjects will be used and program learning outcomes considered to identify approaches for assuring program achievement standards through inter-university moderation. The project addresses the TEQSA imperative to demonstrate sector-level, self-regulated, robust approaches for assuring quality and standards and highlights the role of peer review. Guidelines for practice will be sustainable and owned by academic disciplinary communities.

### **Summary Project Outcomes**

This project will yield a validated, robust approach for assuring subject achievement standards through inter-university moderation in common final year subjects across disciplines. It will also trial approaches for moderating and assuring program achievement standards, building on ALTC discipline standards. Project resources will assist universities to implement sustainable, self-regulatory moderation processes for monitoring subject and program standards.

### **Rationale for the project**

The rationale for this project is threefold.

- a. It addresses ethical and educational imperatives to ensure that Australian universities have demonstrably effective processes in place to assure the quality of assessment processes and outcomes for students across the sector.
- b. It supports social and economic imperatives associated with demonstrating to key stakeholders, such as industry and community members, that universities have robust approaches for assuring assessment quality and standards that are aligned to achievement of whole-of-program graduate capabilities and learning outcomes.
- c. It takes account of the higher education policy and regulatory environment which requires the sector to make explicit its processes for assuring quality in assessment processes and outcomes through a combination of institution-level systems and policies, as well as inter-institutional benchmarking and assessment validation practices. Explication of this kind adds value to the Australian sector, both

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of terms: i) coursework: curriculum covered at unit/subject and course/program level. ii) program/course: whole-of-degree program. iii) subject/unit: an individual unit taken as part of a whole-of-degree program. iv) capstone subject: a final year culminating subject taken at the end of the program in which students showcase capabilities and competencies developed during the program.

nationally and internationally, as student mobility increases and as credit transfer arrangements in the context of processes such as Bologna become increasingly important.

### **Project Research Questions**

The following research questions are informed by the theoretical framework and will guide the project methodology:

- To what extent might a robust and validated inter-institutional moderation strategy contribute to the need for universities to demonstrate self-regulated approaches for monitoring and maintaining standards across disciplines?
- To what extent can consensus be reached on input (e.g., assessment focus, criteria, valid assessment tasks and guidelines) and outcome (i.e., student achievement in subject-level assessment as evidenced in assessment samples) standards in disciplines?
- What processes and resources are required for engaging academic staff in final year subject level moderation across universities and disciplines?
- What disciplinary and institutional differences are evident in processes for managing inter-institutional moderation at subject level and what are the implications for accommodating such diversity in ongoing implementation?
- In developing a proof of concept for assurance of program-level achievement standards, how might inter-institutional final year subject level moderation practices contribute to peer review of whole-of-program threshold learning outcomes in disciplines?

### **Deliverables and dissemination**

Deliverables for the project will include:

- i. a website comprising ready-to-use, downloadable moderation guides, step-by-step strategies for replicating and implementing the project across the sector, including FOE-specific user guides and guidelines for initiating subject-level moderation practices at university and sector-wide level;
- ii. guidelines for reviewing subject-level assessment quality and practices in the context of program-level outcomes and standards;
- iii. investigation of the potential to use IT-enabled systems to gather and review sample assessment items to assist in the standards-setting process and capacity-building for academic staff across disciplines – e.g. the potential to use tools like *Confluence*;
- iv. evaluation of user views on utility, feasibility and validity of the proposed inter-institutional moderation model in assuring quality in different fields of education. Key motivators will be explored through a survey of participants including views about the connection between inter-institutional moderation activities and leadership in learning and teaching, integration into promotion criteria etc.;
- v. a database of existing examples of assessment (i.e., actual assessment 'artefacts' at different grade levels x FOE with explanations of why they attracted the grade received)
- vi. a report on key findings, with recommendations for systemic implementation. It will include an overall framework within which to locate this project and show how it links to and complements parallel projects and initiatives including ALTC-funded projects, TEQSA developments, institutional consortia moderation activities and AQF developments;
- vii. two national Assessment Quality and Standards (AQS) Summits, including senior university leaders, state and national government policy makers, ALTC and AUQA/TEQSA representatives, school and VET representatives. The AQS Summits will include the following elements:
  - identify and discuss models for assuring quality and standards in assessment and program-level outcomes across the sector;
  - examine issues relating to operationalising these models and their implications for cross-sectoral collaborations; and
  - disseminate examples of good practice.