

ETHICS AND THE INTERNAL MODERATOR

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“Moderation ensures that people who are being assessed are assessed in a consistent, accurate and well designed manner. It ensures that all assessors who assess a particular unit standard or qualification are using comparable assessment methods and are making similar and consistent judgements about learners’ performance.”¹

This definition of moderation implies that the internal moderator (and the external moderator for that matter) must have sufficient knowledge to evaluate different assessment methods and that they must have enough subject matter expertise to judge whether or not assessors are making accurate and consistent judgements. Yet, unfortunately, too many moderators (again, both internal and external) do not have sufficient subject matter expertise and sufficient knowledge about assessment. This lack of knowledge can lead to the learners being disadvantaged and it can lead to unfair and invalid assessment practices.

The SAQA system devolves the responsibility for internal moderation to the accredited provider. SAQA (and the SETAs) trust the provider and internal moderator to be (amongst other things):

- Objective
- Fair
- Truthful
- Accurate
- Knowledgeable about the subject
- Knowledgeable about assessment practices
- Senior enough to overturn decisions (if need be) and reprimand/coach assessors where necessary

But on too many occasions the internal moderator is neither sufficiently knowledgeable about the field nor sufficiently skilled as an assessor. Too many moderators are being trained who have never assessed a unit standard in their lives, let alone designed assessment tools or assessed a full qualification (this in spite of the fact that the moderator unit standard, 115759, states *“The credit calculation is based on the assumption that learners have previous assessment experience when starting to learn towards this unit standard, and in particular, recognition for the unit standard: NLRD 115753: “Conduct outcomes-based assessments”. It is recommended that candidates should*

¹ SAQA – Criteria and guidelines for assessment of NQF registered unit standards and qualifications

achieve NLRD 115755: "Design and develop outcomes-based assessments" before attempting this unit standard).

This can lead to a situation where the internal moderator becomes simply a 'rubber stamp'. They go through the motions but are clueless about what they should be looking for. How can a moderator:

- Who has never assessed quality assure assessors and assessments?
- Who has never designed assessment tools evaluate the assessment tool design of others?
- Who knows little about the subject decide if the assessor has made a correct judgment about competence?
- Who does not have matric maths (or even grade 10 maths) themselves moderate NQF 4 mathematical literacy?
- Who cannot speak a second language themselves moderate NQF 4 second language?

The reality is that they can't – but there are moderators who are practicing, who have been given the scope to moderate by the SETA who simply are not qualified or experienced enough to perform the role they are being paid for. And the quality of the entire educational system is being compromised.

Internal moderators are also (usually) employed by the provider. Sometimes they are not senior enough to give constructive feedback to the assessors and their comments are over-ruled and ignored. The internal moderator may also be 'incentivized' (along with the assessors) to have a high competency rate – this leads them to turn a blind eye to invalid assessment practices. Again, the quality of the entire educational system is compromised.

SAQA is clear: *"The roles of the internal moderators who are designated such in learning institutions/sites should be experienced assessors who other assessors have confidence in. They should also have undergone training in internal moderation and have knowledge of the learning area."*²

So, the role of the internal moderator has a huge responsibility to both the learners and the SETA to ensure that they (at the very least):

- Are suitably qualified (at least one NQF level above that which they are moderating);
- Are sufficiently skilled in the subject matter;
- Are qualified as an assessor, assessment tool designer and as a moderator;
- Have sufficient assessment and assessment tool design experience.

² SAQA – Criteria and guidelines for assessment of NQF registered unit standards and qualifications

Are you an internal moderator? Do you meet the criteria? If not, you should step down – you are putting the learning process at risk. Your inexperience could be making the assessment process at your provider invalid and learners may be compromised. To stay in the role for your own gain is simply unethical.