



# Small group moderation

## Frequently asked questions

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The following questions have been collated from previous Small Group Moderation sessions. The responses to these questions aim to provide further guidance for schools operating in a small group moderation partnership. Small group moderation partnerships are only required for Year 12 ATAR courses.

### 1. Does my school need to be in a small group moderation partnership?

Where a school has a projected number of fewer than six ATAR course examination candidates in a particular ATAR course, they must become involved in a small group moderation partnership to increase the combined group size to six or more students for the pair of units.

For Materials, Design and Technologies (MDT), a course typically offered in multiple defined contexts (Metal, Textiles, Wood) within a school, a small group partnership is only necessary if the total number of candidates across all contexts is less than six.

The projected number should make allowance for groups where you initially have six or more students but feel there is a strong possibility that several students may drop out before the end of the year.

### 2. Why is a small group moderation necessary?

Underperformances of a few students in the ATAR course examination may unfairly affect the degree of statistical adjustment of the school marks of other students in the class.

### 3. What are the responsibilities of each school in a small group moderation partnership?

The responsibilities include:

- initiating the establishment of a small group moderation partnership
- informing students that they are in a small group moderation partnership
- registering the partnership with the Authority online
- ensuring that the partnership operates effectively.

Partner schools in a small group moderation partnership must be:

- doing the same pair of units
- using the same assessment outline
- teaching the course content in the same sequence
- delivering the same defined context (MDT) or the same specialist field (Engineering Studies)
- conducting all assessment tasks under the same agreed conditions
- using identical assessment tasks and marking keys
- co-developing and documenting agreed marking strategies to ensure comparability of marking.

This should ensure that marks from each partner school are on the same scale and will have the same value; for example, a mark of 80 in one partner school will represent the same standard/achievement as a mark of 80 in the other partner school/s.

#### 4. How do schools in small group moderation partnerships assign grades?

All students across the partner schools are treated as one large class. At the completion of the pair of units, create a single ranked list of all students based on the weighted tasks in the common assessment outline.

Once the single ranked list is generated, the Authority requires schools in a partnership to:

- identify, from the ranked list, points where a change of standard is evident
- examine the work of students on either side of these points with reference to the grade descriptions
- communicate and discuss with partner schools the determination of the cut-offs.

Pre-established or automatically generated cut-offs are not to be used.

Note:

- For courses with a practical examination, schools use one ranked list based on the final mark, inclusive of both written and practical tasks, to assign the grades for the units. Only one final grade is required to be determined.
- For Materials Design and Technology (MDT), the ranked list of students must include all students in all contexts (Metal, Textiles, Wood) being delivered by the partner schools. For example, where the partner schools are both delivering ATAR MDT in the context of Wood, and one is also delivering ATAR MDT in the context of Textiles, all students from both contexts at both partner schools must be included on the common ranked list (some adjustment of marks may be needed so marks are comparable regardless of context).

#### 5. How are results submitted for schools in a small group moderation partnership?

At the end of the year, each partner school separately submits to the Authority the school marks and grades for their students. Even though the results are submitted separately, the Authority processes them as coming from a single group. In other words, the partnership is like a virtual classroom. To confirm the results for all students in the partnership, final marks and grades are provided to all schools in the partnership late in November to ensure that each school has submitted the agreed marks and grades.

Any discrepancies in grades, such as one school allocating a B grade for a mark of 64 and another school in the partnership allocating a C grade for the same mark, can be identified through the Student Information Records System (SIRS). These need to be addressed in consultation with the partner school/s and may require some negotiation to resolve.

## 6. Does advice from other moderation activities impact on the partner school/s?

The Authority conducts a number of moderation activities throughout the year to support schools in the delivery and assessment of courses and to help ensure comparability.

Should a school in a partnership be involved in such activities, particularly documentation and grading reviews, they are required to share any feedback on common documentation, assessments and marking with the other schools within the partnership. If, as a result of a documentation review or grading review by the Authority, one school in a small group moderation partnership is required to modify their assessment outline and/or adjust their grade cut-off points, then it is the school's responsibility to forward this information to the other partner school/s, and for all partner schools to work collaboratively to ensure that the marks and grades for all students reflect the feedback provided.

It is the school's responsibility to share the Grading/Documentation review report with partners. This also applies to other moderation activities; for example, the Syllabus Delivery Audit.

## 7. When is a small group moderation partnership retained?

After the ATAR examinations are marked, a review is conducted by the Authority for every small group moderation partnership in every course to determine whether the marks are comparable. Comparable means that there is a similar pattern of performance by each school in the examination compared to school assessment. This review is conducted by Authority officers to ensure the atypical performance of one or a few students from any of the partner schools does not advantage or disadvantage the other students in the group. Students are protected from any potential underperformance of another student.

Marks are comparable where the students in the partner schools perform in the examination in a pattern consistent with that indicated by the school marks. Comparable means there is no distinct difference between overall performance within each school.

If the analysis shows that the school marks and examination marks across the schools are comparable, then the partnership is unaltered, and statistical moderation is conducted for the group.

## 8. When does the Authority split a small group moderation partnership?

Once the ATAR examinations are marked, if the analysis indicates marks are not comparable, the partnership is split and each school is moderated separately, or the partnership is partially split for Small Group Moderation (SGM) groups that include more than two schools.

For courses with a practical component, this analysis is conducted separately for the practical and written components. As such, a school may remain with its partners for the practical component but be split from its partners for the written component.

Such intervention occurs where the uniformly inconsistent examination performance of students from one or more of the partner schools would have an advantageous or disadvantageous effect on the marks of students at the other partner school(s).

The decision to split a partnership is made to maintain a fair moderation of school marks, to best reflect the students' performances in the examination (the common assessment). It is not what will give the students the 'highest mark'.

Schools with six or more candidates may have already chosen to be split from partners for moderation purposes.

## 9. Are school marks for schools with a large population impacted by the performance of a school with a small population?

For a school with a larger population in a partnership, marks will never be affected by the smaller school. For schools with 15 or more students in a course, the school marks are statistically moderated separately before the commencement of the analysis of the group; however, while the partner schools are not included in the moderation of this larger group, the school/examination marks of the larger group may be used to moderate the smaller partner school, thus providing the protection of a larger group for schools with small numbers in a course during the statistical moderation.

This is the premise of small group moderation.

## 10. What are the options for schools in a small group moderation partnership?

Early in Term 4, the Small Group Moderation Partnership Declaration form is signed by the Principal and returned to the Authority.

For courses where the number of ATAR course examination candidates is:

- 15 students or more, the school will be moderated independent of partners (automatically Option B on the declaration form)
- fewer than six students, the Authority will determine the fairest alternative (automatically Option C)
- between six and 14 students, the school can choose to be statistically moderated without partners (Option B) or to allow the Authority to choose the fairest alternative (Option C). Option B is usually selected by schools that accepted the partnership to assist a school with a smaller population but want to assure that the achievement of students from other schools involved in the partnership will not impact their students.

## 11. Where can schools receive feedback on moderation and their small group partnership?

Feedback on moderation and small group partnerships can be obtained from SIRS reports, such as STS036 and STS022.

STS036 shows statistical moderation and concurrent validity of school assessments. It is a graphical representation of each school's marks in relation to state-wide school marks.

An individual school will be shown as a blue dot on the report.

The vertical axis shows the difference between school assessment and moderated school assessment, the amount the school mark was moderated. The range of acceptable scores is perceived as being a moderated score of  $\pm 10$ .

The horizontal axis shows the correlation, reflecting the accuracy of the school mark ranked order versus examination performance.

STS022 shows Year 12 ATAR course school statistics and information on the final status/outcome of the small group partnership. Point 4 on the report provides detail of the small group moderation partnership after the analysis process and outlines whether the school moderation population was used (S) or whether the group moderation population was used (G). Point 5 provides the names of schools in the original partnership and the remaining partners if there has been a partial split.

## **12. What happens if a school is unable to form a small group moderation partnership?**

If a school is unable to establish a partnership, they must notify the Authority as soon as possible.

If the school is approved to not form a partnership, they must notify the students (and their parents/guardians/carers) in writing of the possible consequences of this situation. As part of this notification, the school must inform all parties that 'students at a school with a small candidature may be exposed to statistical moderation anomalies because of atypical underperformances of a student or a few students in the ATAR course examination, and this may unfairly affect the degree of statistical adjustment of the school marks of other students in the class'.

## **13. What happens if my school is in a small group partnership that is not operating effectively?**

All partner schools need to consider the likely consequences for the students involved before seeking permission to dissolve a partnership.

Where a partnership is not functioning effectively, the school must apply in writing to the Authority's Executive Director of Examinations, Certification and Testing to have the partnership dissolved. Once written approval from the Authority has been received, schools are required to inform students of the consequences (see question 12).

Trying to get the partnership to work is preferable to breaking up the partnership and potentially exposing students in a small group to statistical moderation anomalies. Schools in a partnership need to work collaboratively and implement a variety of strategies to achieve comparability.

Speak with the Deputy Principal at your school. They may be able to support you by speaking with your partner school/s.