CHALLENGES OF MODERATION PRACTICES IN PRIVATE TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS IN NEW ZEALAND

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Declaration

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This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project entitled: CHALLENGES OF MODERATION PRACTICES IN PRIVATE TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS IN NEW ZEALAND is submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of

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CANDIDATE’S DECLARATION

I confirm that:

● This Thesis/Dissertation/Research Project represents my own work;

● The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.

● Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

   Research Ethics Committee Approval Number: 2018 1027

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ABSTRACT

The research problem is that many private training establishments (PTEs) are failing the expectations of New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) that they will carry out effective moderation of assessments. The main focus of my research is to explore the challenges related to moderation of assessment as a quality assurance process in other PTEs'. The aim of this research is to investigate the challenges that the private training establishments could be facing in moderation. One qualitative research method was used in this research which is semi-structured interviews with the Academic Leaders and the Assessors. This method is used to investigate the challenges of moderation faced by private training establishments in New Zealand. The data gathering began with the researcher engaging in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the three Academic leaders and three Assessors from various different private training establishments. The first key finding in my study is related to purpose and process of moderation. The second key finding in my study is related to the role of middle level leaders which are the academic leaders and how they collaborate staff/assessors/lecturers. The third key finding in my study is the challenges faced by the middle level leaders and assessors regarding the Internal and external component and the feedback loop in moderation of assessments. A conclusion I can draw from my study is that the practice of moderation of assessments is valued and robust in the institutions sampled in this research. In all three institutions they are clear about the mistakes made in the past and now they have aligned practices with the official stated purposes and processes of moderation. They further mentioned about the aspects of moderation that are working and then provided the details of challenges of moderation. Last but not least, they have stated some actions being taken by the academic leaders and the assessors to overcome those challenges in order to establish much more effective and efficient moderation practices for the sustainability of the private training establishment. From my study it has become clear that moderation is an important practice and that in order for it to be effective there needs to be clear communication about expectations. If practice is to be improved, then the institutions should be prepared to align the practices directly with the purposes of moderation.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

New Zealand’s tertiary education sector comprises of tertiary education institutions called universities, institutes of technology/polytechnics, and Wananga. There are also a large number of Private Training Establishments (PTE) and some other providers including smaller community providers such as Rural Education Activities Programmes. In New Zealand there are two agencies currently responsible for quality assurance: these are the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) which publishes policies that govern assessments and moderation and Universities New Zealand (through the Committee on University Academic Programmes). Under the Education Act (1989) NZQA’s services span the secondary and tertiary education sector. It administers the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEAs) for secondary schools and is responsible for the quality assurance of the non-university tertiary education organisations and their courses and moderation of assessment activities. One of its objectives is to enhance the quality of education and training.

Background

Private training establishments are working in a highly dynamic global environment of increased accountability. According to Watty et al., (2013), because of the ever changing and dynamic environments, the higher education institutions are under immense pressure of providing evidence of quality and of achievement of quality assurance standards. According to NZQA quality assurance is important to ensure that the students get exceptional education and support from their educational establishments, who are accountable to their stakeholders. Bloxham (2009) asserts that institutional accountability in regards to evaluation of students’ assessments has been a priority in the recent years.

Issues in tertiary education moderation of assessment

Many private training establishments are failing the expectations of NZQA of carrying out effective moderation of assessments. Adie, Lloyd and Beutel (2011) describes moderation as a quality assurance process that is a critical component of the teaching, learning and assessment cycles in tertiary education institutions. They further asserted
moderation as one of the key components of assessment and the process of moderation in higher education is usually governed by institution policies and practices. NZQA (1992) refers to moderation as a broad term or a concept which is related to the unit standard based qualification system and covers activities to ensure standardised interpretation and application. According to Te Kete Ipurangi (2011) moderation is a mechanism through which teachers share their expectations and information regarding standards in order to improve the consistency in their decisions in regards to the students’ learning. Tertiary Education Organisations work in partnership with the NZQA to ensure that valid, fair, accurate and consistent internal assessments are made (NZQA, 2011b). Moderation activities at TEOs can be divided into four main categories: (1) pre-moderation; (2) post-moderation; (3) internal moderation; (4) external moderation.

Implicit in moderation practices is the need to ensure quality assurance in student assessment so that organisations can be confident that the qualifications awarded are worthy of being awarded, that they are well deserved and that they have meaning and value in the broader society. Blom (2008) and Murdoch & Grobbelaar (2004) insist on the following rationale for moderation:

- The standardisation of assessment practices within and across institutions
- Monitoring and evaluation of assessment practices
- Monitoring and evaluating the design of assessment tools for appropriateness and alignment to intended learning outcomes
- Monitoring and evaluating assessment processes and practices. Providing support to practitioners and learners.

Assessment of student performance is the key aspect of higher education for the review of student learning, evaluation, improvement and overall growth. NZQA (1992) asks organisations to self-assess their own ability to use an integrated and rigorous quality assurance system where the components of self-assessment, entry processes, maintaining of quality, external evaluation /review and managing risk support each other. Moderation of assessment is essential to assure quality in an assessment process. It is a challenging demand.
Rationale for this study
The research problem is that many private training establishments are failing the expectations of NZQA that they will carry out effective moderation of assessment. I know this because the institution in which I work has failed to meet NZQA requirements and improvements in practice and are being carefully monitored in the area of moderation of assessment. The main focus of my research is to explore the challenges related to moderation of assessment as a quality assurance process in other PTEs. Moderation and assessment of student performance are both key aspects of teaching in higher education. After working in higher education for the last ten years, I have realised that moderation of assessment has become a matter of increasing concern. This may be due to lack of adequate leadership, limited training and development of the staff, lack of new knowledge and failure of the previous problem solving.

Moderation practices provide one way to ensure quality assurance in student assessment so that we can be confident that the qualifications awarded are trustworthy. It is worth researching because of the value and benefits it will offer to the different stakeholders including students, assessors, the PTEs themselves as a business and NZQA. Ultimately, the goal for all the educators is that the students will receive a quality education with high standards through which can add value in the broader society in which we all participate. Assessors can use the process of moderation that values quality and improvement, as the most beneficial tool that will help them to reflect on their teaching, learning and assessment practices.

Purpose of this research:
The purpose of this research is to investigate the challenges that the private training establishments could be facing in moderation.

Aims:
1. To investigate the purpose and process of moderation in private training establishments in New Zealand.
2. To examine the roles and responsibilities of academic leaders and assessors in the moderation of assessments.
3. To examine challenges experienced by academic leaders and assessors in the
moderation of assessments.

**Research questions:**

1. What is the purpose and practice of moderation of assessment in private training establishments?
2. What are the roles and responsibilities of academic leaders and assessors in the moderation of assessments?
3. What are the challenges experienced by academic leaders and assessors in the moderation of assessments?

**Overview of the dissertation**

The dissertation is organised into five chapters:

**Chapter One**

This chapter has covered the background and described the issues in the tertiary institutions along with the rationale of this particular study.

**Chapter Two**

This chapter provides critical review of the literature. The first section analyse the importance, purpose, processes and practices of moderation. The second section focuses on the New Zealand policies of moderation of assessments, with the roles and responsibilities of the middle level managers or leaders. The third or the final section analyse the success and challenges of moderation.

**Chapter three**

This chapter begins by explaining the choice of research design and describes the selection of an appropriate methodology, methods, sampling and data analysis used in the study. The qualitative approach utilized allowed for a range of differing perspectives, which have provided rich, deep and interpretive data. This chapter also addresses research validity and reliability with regards to triangulation and ethical considerations.

**Chapter four**

This chapter provides an outline of the research findings and provides an analysis of
the data gathered from the one data gathering method of semi-structured interviews, with Academic Leaders and Assessors. Research is organised under the following headings of purposes and processes of moderation, followed by the roles and responsibilities and finally the success and challenges of moderation.

Chapter five
This chapter brings the academic leaders and assessors findings together to critically analyse the alignment and non-alignment of these two perspectives. It also employs the relevant literature from chapter two to further critique these findings and to gain further insights into the understanding, purpose and challenges of moderation. The summary of findings presented in this chapter is based on research questions. The in-depth analysis of the purpose and practices of moderation and challenges experienced by the academic leaders and assessors lead to recommendations. Limitations of the research study are identified and possible future foci for research are provided.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction
This section outlines the literature related to the challenges of moderation of assessments in the private training establishments in New Zealand. Firstly, the chapter begins with an overview of what is assessments, moderation and importance of moderation. This is followed by the review on purposes, processes and practices of moderation. Next, is the New Zealand policies of moderation along with the roles and responsibilities of the middle level managers or leaders. The chapter concludes with the success and challenges of moderation faced by the academic leaders and the assessors of the institutions.

Assessments
Assessment plays a fundamental and crucial role in teaching and learning, and is not a simply a process of comparing performance against standards which is assessment ‘of’ learning (New Zealand Qualification Authority, 1992). According to Gipps (2002) whether the assessment is written or oral, it is a vital aspect of the teaching and learning process and must be considered as important part of the teaching framework. Gipps (1999) states that assessment is the vital component of student’s learning experiences and the ultimate outcome which is student learning. Davidson and Mackenzie (2009) state two distinct purposes of assessment:(1) assessment of learning which is a measurement of what and how students have learned and should incorporate and involve various dimensions of validity, reliability, utility and consistency. They further state that assessment of learning has been overemphasized and burdened by Tertiary Education Organisations’ policies, practice guideline, rules, regulations, moderation which results in taking a back seat to quality assurance; (2) assessment for learning is focused on using assessments to assist students improve and move forward in their learning through the help and intervention of academic staff. According to Brown (2002) assessment is a complex and highly important process. She further asserts, there is a need to refresh our approaches to assessment in order to improve and enhance the students' engagement with learning and there is a need to look at the current practices in order to ensure that assessment is for learning rather than just of learning.
Moderation of assessments

Moderation is a quality assurance process that is a critical component of the teaching, learning and assessment cycle in higher education institutions. Moderation is the key component of assessment. The process of moderation in higher education is usually governed by institute wide policies and practices. NZQA (1992) refers moderation as a broad term or a concept which is related to the unit standard based qualification system and covers activities to ensure standardised interpretation and application of assessments.

Moderation of assessment is an increasingly critical component of learning in tertiary education. Blom (2008) suggests “moderation ensures that people are in a consistent, accurate and well-designed manner” (p.302), which means that moderation of assessment is the process of ensuring quality standards. Alternatively, Nual (2007), sees moderation as a process for ensuring that grades awarded are fair, reliable and marking criteria is applied consistently. The one similarity in the above mentioned definitions provided by two writers is the idea of consistency in moderation. According to Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2012a) and Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2010) moderation is much more than just checking of evaluation marks; it is the quality guarantee technique which underpins the improvement of each component to ensure that the entire assessment process is honest, fair, valid and reliable, allowing equivalence and comparability.

James (2003) describes moderation as a cyclical process which occurs in the course of teaching, coaching and learning instead of a summative exercise which takes place at the end of marking. Similarly, Adie, Beutel, and Lloyd (2013) emphasise that moderation is a first-class warranty system that plays an important position in the coaching, learning, and assessment cycle in higher education. They further state that learning and teaching are attracting more attention and have been researched globally more than assessment and the process of moderation. They further add that in a context of heightened responsibility and more transparency inside the tertiary sector, the formalizing of moderation approaches has no longer been part of established practice. These authors endorse the need for moderation to be considered holistically as an inherent part of coaching and learning, and the need for ongoing personnel improvement. This need has been further supported by Bloxham, Hughes and Adie (2016), who agree with the views of other writers, highlighting that the term moderation in tertiary education generally refers to post-judgment procedures undertaken to negotiate settlement of grades. This
is evidence of a broader concept, moderation as a cyclic process, that is being adopted by a number of higher education establishments. Chapman & King (2005) state their view regarding moderation as a way of checking whether the students are being assessed efficaciously and fairly, but they say that a complete moderation framework should surround technique that runs around every other procedural and process assessment. Guthrie (2011) states moderation is a review practice, to check the overall grade consistency that is awarded for an assessment through sampling, and involves second marking as well as ensuring the consistency of feedback being provided by all markers. According to several authors Bloxham (2009), Hughes (2008) and Sadler (2010) moderation is an institutional mechanism by which we are able to guarantee the quality of evaluation and assessment process within higher education. Castle & Kelly (2004) and Sanderson et al., (2010) assert the principle of moderation of on-shore assessments along with the offshore or transnational programs which have been promoted in order to ensure quality and sustainability in the Australian universities. Crimmins et al., (2016) describes the two main functions of assessment moderation which are quality assurance and professional development as distinct practices or aims.

**Purpose of moderation**

Afrin (2011) states the purpose of moderation is to uphold the value and quality of education and is thus significant in gaining, sharing of knowledge and learning. According to Sallis (2002), quality control is the oldest quality concept. It involves detection of error focused on an after event process carried out by inspectors as quality professionals. He further stated quality assurance, places responsibility on the work force and is concerned with preventing faults reoccurring and it occurs before and during the event process. Whereas quality management is an essential part of management for an organisation weaving together processes of accountability and development through the praxis of evaluation (Sachs, 2003), essentially concerned with teaching, learning and research (Ramsden,1998). Adie, Beutel and Lloyd (2013) recognised the four different purposes of moderation that influenced the focal point and therefore the outcome of the moderation exercise for individuals, which have been identified as equity, justification, accountability and community building. These are beneficial in articulating an inclusive purpose for moderation that’s firmly related to assuring standards. They explain (1) equity which shows the main goal of moderation
is to attain consistency and equity for students. Moderation can achieve fairness whilst results make sure that tasks allow all students to illustrate intended outcomes, in which all assessors are given opportunities to increase common understandings of standards and requirements, and when students’ work is consistent with agreed standards and comparable inside and throughout institutions; (2) moderation as justification which means academics having confidence in their decision they have made on student work, justifying grades to their students as well as providing quality and constructive feedback. According to Bloxham (2009) and Sadler (2010) success standards encompass multiple dimensions of information, talents and higher order questioning techniques. This complexity makes standards difficult to define (Coates, 2010) and creates one of the fundamental tensions facing academics in the better training zone: the way to determine and make judgments with consistency and comparability according to standards which continue to be complicated and elusive. Turning the reason of moderation in the direction of themselves, moderation supplied teachers with confidence inside the choices that they’d made, so that they might justify their selections to students if queried as well as providing high quality feedback; (3) accountability is referred to as responsibility to assembly systemic requirements in phrases of techniques that includes second marking and its effects and proper grade distributions; (4) community building emphasises on collaborative efforts, review and evaluation of assessment tasks, criteria, standards, mastering stories and teaching strategies, growing shared know-how of standards is thought as being ‘created through a social manner regarding communicate and experience and using artefacts’ (Bloxham, 2009). Sadler (2013) agrees that the above mentioned activities have the capability to calibrate academics’ judgments through building shared interpretations of criteria standards and requirements. In conclusion, the purposes reflect key potential aims for moderation and are directly related to assuring standards and high level quality in higher education establishments.

**Process of moderation**

*Internal and external moderation feedback loop*

Internal and external moderation share a common purpose – the quality assurance of assessment. The difference lies in the perspectives from which they view the assessment process. Afrin (2011) describes internal moderation as having two
processes, pre-moderation and post-moderation, that are done internally by staff within the organization. She further describes pre-assessment moderation (internal) which is focused on the appropriateness of the assessment tool, the selected assessment method and the alignment of the assessment tasks with the learning outcomes. Afrin (2011) describes the two processes of moderation as directly related to the learners’ assessments in relation to the qualifications being undertaken by them. She further describes the process of pre-moderation as designing, checking, validating and changing of assessments if required against the outcomes which are stated in the relevant NZQA prescription. This is in fact a very crucial stage to ensure the assessments are aligned with the expected learning outcomes. Afrin (2011) further described the process of post moderation which follows after when the students complete and submit their assessments which are then marked by the assessors/lecturers who teach them in the class. Then there is a small sample which is further marked by the other lecturers/teachers in order to monitor the consistency of the marking. According to Grainger, Adie and Weir (2016) the objectives of any moderation process is (1) reaching consensus through conversations and professional dialogue in regards to their judgements of the overall achievement of the students (2) ensuring consistency in judgements about the students’ assessment results through shared understanding as moderation is a significant assurance activity (3) to interpret and apply standards in a common way which is an evidence of the differing qualities of performance (4) last but not least, to share and grade representative samples of student work across different standards. This is ideally moderated prior to its application in the classroom and is largely an internal review of the assessment to be used.

The Australian Catholic University (2008) asserts quality assurance process is essential to ensure the appropriateness, clarity, fairness, standards of assessment tasks and last but not least the resources which are used for the assessment. In addition, Australian Catholic University (2008) suggests that internal moderation should ensure that the assessment task focuses on higher order learning i.e. focused on the upper three levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, namely, analyze, evaluate and create. According to the Guidelines for Tertiary Education Training Providers (2016) identifies that post moderation involves the moderation of completed assessments and ensures
that the assessors’ decision in regards to the student’s work and performance should be consistent and fulfill requirements listed in the unit standards. If the institution is committed to internal moderation of assessment as a best practice approach, then external moderation will proceed in a harmonious and collaborative manner. Murdoch and Grobbelaar (2004) suggest that moderators should have both content (subject) and assessment expertise. They go on to suggest that an internal moderator should fulfill the following outcomes within the institution, i.e. to oversee, plan, formalize and implement moderation systems and procedures. Biggs and Tang (2011) asserts that an external moderator should be seen as an advisor or a consultant to the institution whose role is to improve practices rather than find fault and take a punitive action against the institution. In implementing a moderation system within an institution, the starting point is the appointment of an accountable person tasked with implementation. This implies that the internal moderator should be accountable for the entire moderation function within the institution. Specifically Murdoch and Grobbelaar identify the following functions of an internal moderator: (1) ensuring systems in place to ensure standards; (2) consider the specific requirements of individual faculties and customize the system to accommodate these; (3) monitor consistency of assessment records and ensure effective record keeping processes; (4) coordinate assessor meetings; (5) liaise with external moderators; (6) provide appropriate and necessary support to assessors of interest was the suggestion by Bloxham (2009) of communities of practices as one of the benefits of moderation specifically when inducting new staff into the assessment practice within the institution. These communities of practice she suggests, also enables the process of continuous professional development of staff. Whilst internal moderation is inwardly focused and aimed at inculcating and integrating a culture of quality within the organization, external moderation is aimed at ensuring consistency and fairness across all institutions specifically instances where different providers are delivering education and training against the same qualification (Blom, 2008a). NZQA (1992) makes clear the need for adequately qualified and experienced assessors whilst Murdoch and Grobbelaar (2004) suggest that assessors must be credible among their peers having assessment and subject matter expertise. Specifically, NZQA (2016) articulates the role of external moderator as follows: (1) ensuring the effective and appropriate use of the assessment tools and is fit-for-purpose; (2) scope and extent of external moderator’s involvement; (3) judge whether
the assessment process and the learners evidence delivers a consistent, fair, valid and reliable assessment outcomes.

New Zealand policies for moderation of assessment
NZQA publishes an upgraded manual every year to assist TEOs with effective moderation, for example, the National External Moderation Manual for Tertiary Education Organizations (2017). It explains the process and requirements for national external moderation of unit and achievement standards managed by the NZQA.

Preamble:
“NZQA is responsible for protecting the integrity of New Zealand qualifications listed on the NZQF and therefore assuring the quality of programmes, standards and education organisations to provide them”

NZQA guidelines for Internal and External Moderation for TEOs.

Internal Moderation: “Internal moderation must be embedded in the quality management system of every TEO. Internal moderation includes pre-assessment moderation of assessment materials and post moderation of learner work”.

NZQA (2017) articulates the role of external moderator as follows: (1) ensuring the effective and appropriate use of the assessment tools and is fit-for-purpose; (2) scope and extent of external moderator’s involvement; (3) judge whether the assessment process and the learners evidence delivers a consistent, fair, valid and reliable assessment outcomes.

The qualifications authority -NZQA (2017) guidelines on National External Moderation draws attention to several important issues confirming that quality assurance is a central feature. For example, the guideline states:

National external moderation is undertaken to provide assurance to the standard setting body, learners, employers, communities and others that, regardless of where the learning has been assessed, learners have achieved
the assessment standard outcomes to the required performance criteria. The design of the national external moderation system takes into account the:

- type and nature of evidence gathered in assessment
- risks associated with inappropriate assessment practice and decisions
- cost effectiveness and operational manageability. (p.14)

All education organizations with consent to assess must participate in the appropriate national external moderation system, which, according to the NZQA (2017) guidelines must ensure assessment practice is fair, valid and consistent:

- be appropriate to the nature of the outcomes and assessment evidence collected
- provide confidence that learners have achieved the performance criteria
- provide confidence in the reliability and consistency of assessor judgments about learner performance
- be cost effective
- focus on improving assessment practice
- specify roles and responsibilities within the moderation system
- specify the requirements for collecting assessment samples and moderation activities
- state reporting requirements
- specify the reconsideration and dispute resolution process. (p.8)

Roles and responsibilities

The assessors

The people who do the main work of moderation are the lecturers (or assessors) who teach, assess and then engage in moderation of assessment. The literature suggests that moderation is a social task (Sadler, 2013) and is an occasion for assessors to collaborate.

According to Sadler (2013), social moderation has often been interchangeably used with the term ‘consensus moderation’ which emphasizes collaborative discussion
around the allocation of marks. Similarly, Stoll & Bolam (2005 as cited in Millwood, 2007) asserts that social moderation takes place in a professional setup where teachers come together to share ideas and assist each other. They further added that collective knowledge, such as sharing in a network, can assist teachers to participate in tactics of deconstructing, reconstructing and co-constructing knowledge and capabilities. Similarly, Gipps (1994) envisages social moderation as a technique that involves instructors discussing and negotiating judgments made approximately about students’ work with the intention to reach a consensus and common knowledge of learner’s work standards. According to Klenowski and Adie (2009 as cited in Hipkins & Robertson, 2011) there are three different types of social moderation (1) calibration model: a sample of students’ work is graded by instructors individually, the teachers collectively then discuss their judgments and responses with the purpose of achieving a consensus as well as shared understanding and knowledge of standards. Crimmins et al., (2016) says that quality assurance and professional development will be well supported if the social moderation process of calibration is well embedded, which can further enhance the tutor collegiality, feeling of connectedness, inclusion as well as integration of the casual staff into academic departments (2) the conferencing model: students’ work is graded by an instructor, then samples of work which reflect different levels of performance against the standards are collaboratively selected and discussed with an the intention to reach consensus and shared understanding of the standards; (3) the expert model: where the teachers mark their work which is then submitted to moderation expertise, who in return provide them the feedback, whether or not they have applied or interpreted the standards in the correct way. According to Adie, Lloyd and Beutel (2013) tutors cited the significance of the social moderation system in a group helped to overcome high-quality and bad bias in terms of students’ work, discouraged subjectivity and tunnel vision, and recommended detachment from students. This ensured that it was the first-rate work that is being graded and not the students.

Afrin’s (2011) model of effective moderation pointed out three main stakeholders directly involved in the moderation process. These are the lecturers and assessors; the Tertiary Education Organisations and NZQA. It is the lecturers and assessors who participate in social moderation which involves staff meetings. Sadler (2009, 2010,
2013) identifies four interconnected inhibitors which are: (1) organizational dynamics; (2) impost of seniority; (3) agreeing to disagree; (4) conceding to the common, crucial for the success of consensus or social moderation.

**The academic leaders**

The people who are given responsibility to manage teaching and learning are also responsible for the moderation of assessment which is part of teaching and learning (James, 2003). Some literature that relates to the overall role of academic leaders (also called middle-level leaders) is reviewed here because it is relevant in my research to understand the nature of this role.

In higher education, educational leadership is called an academic leadership. Cardno (2012) provides the four different roles and functions which are considered to be dominant facts; (1) organisational leadership which is responsible for setting directions and unit planning, contributing to academic decision making, inter-departmental communication and interaction, compliance meeting Treaty of Waitangi objectives; (2) Curriculum leadership which involves setting programme areas direction, leading continuous improvement, creating a culture of research, managing quality assurance processes, managing external stakeholders, marketing and promoting programs; (3) academic management which involves managing performance, development and staff appointments, serious student issues, budgets, teaching and learning environment, securing external research as well as consultancy revenue; (4) academic currency which involves maintaining teaching and researching involvement, a publishing profile and developing oneself.

Scott et al., (2008) provides similar functions and refers to them as five areas of major work focus which involves: academic activities as scholarly research, networking with the internal and external stakeholders, management and administration duties including budgeting, dealing with complaints and meetings, strategic planning which includes policy development and last but not least managing staff as well as their performance and development. Ramsden (1998) suggests that academic leadership is focused on teaching which ultimately improves learning outcomes. He outlines four functions or responsibilities of academic leadership which is central to the quality of
teaching itself: (1) responsibility for vision, strategic action, planning and managing resources; (2) responsibility for enabling, inspiring, motivating and directing academic staff; (3) recognizing, assessing and developing performance; (4) responsibility to learn to lead and improve institutional leadership which requires effective teaching, evaluation and improvement of courses and teaching. Ramsden (1998) further adds that academic leadership is about having sound knowledge of good teaching and must be able to dispense resources which can ultimately support the academic needs of the staff for their excellent performance. This idea of supporting staff is relevant to my study because the academic leaders in a PTE must support the assessors who carry out the moderation.

The middle managers hold different roles based on the management in higher education around the twin discourses of collegiality and managerialism. According to Ghoshal and Bartlett (1998) middle management is seen as representing the core values of an organisation because it is understood that these roles have been addressed, as the middle leaders work collaboratively with senior management to build a sense of shared organisational goals in which the middle managers enhance the linkages that demands intensive knowledge transformation. Kanter (1986 cited in Clegg & McAuley, 2005) find academic middle leaders more likely to be conservative on organisational issues, in order to protect the ideas from lower levels to be taken to the senior management. During the 1980s and 1990s, middle leaders are reinvented as corporate bureaucrats, professionals and experts, who undertake institutional planning, develop and maintain quality assurance, and implement human resource management. Clegg & McAuley (2005) asserts that middle managers who are transmitters in the organisation are concerned with the management of organisational goals, linking knowledge and best practice across the organisation and developing the individual practices and policies in order to achieve an environment for learning; and they also develop skills and capabilities, the knowledge and understanding of colleagues within the organisation or departments. In other words, leaders in the middle management embrace basically working with and through other people (Bush & West-Burnham, 1994; Partington & Stainton, 2003). Academic middle leaders embrace a number of managing and leading functions within the institution. Busher, Harris and Wise (2000) propose that subject leaders as middle managers practice
their leadership functions associated with five dimensions or aspects of the organisation including; the curriculum, operational development and resources management, human relationships, symbols and culture, and context of decision-making. This is supported by Partington and Stainton (2003), who assert that middle leaders get involved in a number of activities within the organisation such as organising, planning, monitoring, resourcing, controlling and evaluating, as well as leading.

**Challenges of moderation**

Bloxham (2009) has critiqued the four assumptions of moderation practices which are considered as strengths: (1) marking of students assessments is accurate and reliable has been criticized by her saying inaccurate marking will be identified through the internal moderation procedure, and if not picked up at this stage, then the external procedures will become aware of it sooner or later and if the inaccuracies aren't discovered at this particular level, it will definitely be picked at the verification stage which is the final award stage; (2) internal moderation process delivers fair and appropriate standards of marking and procedures are implemented to ensure appropriate standards of marking but then been criticized by her saying these processes and procedures are there to increase the workload and the responsibilities of the markers thus ignoring the real purpose of the moderation which is to provide accurate and reliable grades to the students and lacks feedback to the students on time which results in higher cost for the organization. Similarly Afrin (2011) asserts the biggest challenge for internal post-moderation is excessive workload and responsibilities which can hinder the progress of the lecturers, assessors and the markers in terms of proper grading and objective feedback; (3) the central task of external moderators is to interrogate the examination scripts and assignments in order to determine the standards applied and the comparability of these standards across students and across institutions, whereas she criticized by saying that the variation in interpretation of the criteria, marking schemes and the reliability of assessor’s skills can have a lot of impact on the final grades and thus comparability will be challenged; (4) last but not least, the final award of qualification should be reflecting achievement in a consistent way across all institutions which is challenged as the assessment and moderation practices engaged in are aimed at assessment for certification rather than assessment for learning.
In my study I am investigating the way the roles of academic leaders and assessors are linked to moderation. Afrin (2011) in her research asserts that collaboration does not happen without the leadership responsibilities or leaders taking responsibility for oversight of moderation. Her research clearly suggests that moderation is not only the teachers’ and assessors’ responsibility but also the leaders within the higher education organizations, who are accountable to oversee effective moderation practices. There needs to be a partnership between the academic leader and assessors for moderation to work well.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction
In this chapter, I have presented my research approach and methodology. Then I have outlined one method which is semi-structured interviews that I have employed in this research. I have further commented on data analysis, validity and ethical issues.

Research approach and methodology
Research design can be named as the master plan that throws light on how the study should be conducted. It shows how all of the major parts of the research study— the samples, groups, measures, treatments or programs work together in an attempt to address the research questions. The research design can be seen as actualisation of logic in a set of procedures that optimises the validity of data for a given research problem. According to Mouton (1996) the research design is used to maximise and increase the validity of findings and facilitate in planning, structuring and executing the research. The selection of a research approach was influenced by the study being undertaken. The study involved a range of perspectives from the academic leaders and the assessors on the challenges of moderation being faced by them in the institution. It explored the complexities and challenges faced by middle leaders and assessors when performing the role. This study lent itself well to using qualitative research. This will require me to gather the perceptions of assessors and academic leaders in various private establishments in New Zealand. Thus, I adopted an interpretative epistemological position. Davidson and Tolich (2003) define the interpretative paradigm as an organized, efficient and systematic analysis of social meaningful action through the detailed and direct observations of the people in natural social settings. They further state that this whole process can help to create understanding and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds. According to Bryman (2012), interpretive researchers believe that reality consists of peoples’ subjective experiences which is the result of exposure to the external world. Reeves and Hedberg (2003) further present their observation in regards to interpretivist paradigm which stresses the need to put analysis in context and make it more meaningful. Because the interpretive paradigm is related to the subjective experiences of individuals it is appropriate to use meaning oriented
methods such as interviewing, to establish a subjective relationship between the researcher and the subjects.

Following the guidance of several writers (Cohen et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Neuman 1997) an interpretative epistemological position is suitable for this study because: (1) This study is a small study (Newman, 1997); (2) the participants and the context of this research would be contextually challenging and interesting to the participants of the private training establishments (Neuman, 1997); (3) the study is associated with understanding and translating the individual's perceptions and experiences, intellectual traditions and understanding their environment and situations (Cohen et al., 2007; Davidson & Tolich, 2003); (4) the values and perceptions of the participants (academic leaders and assessors) are considered as an integral part of their working situation as well as this research project (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Neuman, 1997).

Every researcher makes a decision on the methodology to be adopted, prior to initiating the research project. According to Merriam (2009), interpretive research is located in the same methodological position where qualitative research is, where there are multiple realities or interpretations of a single event. She further adds that qualitative researchers are interested in knowing and understanding people's interpretation of their experience, construction of their worlds and last but not least the meaning they attribute to their experiences. The qualitative approach that has been adopted from my research primarily aimed at understanding the relationship of the human behaviors and their environment through the use of a naturalistic and an interpretive approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). According to Mutch (2005) qualitative research methodology allows researchers to explore and discover small areas in-depth which is suitable for educational purposes. A qualitative approach is suitable for my research, which aims at exploring the circumstances, perceptions, situations and interpretations of the assessors and academics regarding challenges in the moderation of assessments in their institution. I am particularly interested in a deep understanding of the participants’ perspectives in regards to opportunities and challenges of moderation of assessments.
**Research method: Semi-structured interviews**

One qualitative research method was used in this research which is semi-structured interviews with the Academic Leaders and the Assessors. This method was used to investigate the challenges of moderation faced by private training establishments in New Zealand. The data gathering began with the researcher engaging in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with three Academic leaders and two Assessors from three different private training establishments.

The data collection method is semi-structured interviews. This allowed me to access data through six interviews in three different private training establishments. I interviewed three academic leaders (N=3); three assessors (N=3), which is appropriate for this research. The study would investigate the perspectives of academic leaders and assessors in regards to the challenges experienced by them in the moderation process. The semi-structured interview, however, adopts a middle ground as the interviewer does have a sequence of inquiries and questions to be asked but having said that has considerably more freedom to change the sequence, wordings and time allocated to each question based on the needs of each separate interview (Robson, 2002). The semi-structured interview is usually a combination of both structured as well as unstructured formats. In this research, the semi-structured interview approach will be employed using broad open-ended questions. Furthermore, the open-ended question also allows a room for follow up questions and prompts, based on the answers given by the participants. The study is quite small; aiming at six interviews altogether. Therefore, all participants needed to be particularly informative, knowledgeable and should be able to provide detailed perspectives throughout the interview. To be specific, the targeted participants are expected to show a broad understanding of the research topic. Lichtman (2013) suggests individual in-depth interviews for the qualitative research as the most adventurous, provides an opportunity to listen to the experiences and interpretations of the participants and thus provides a greater breadth than other types. Bell (2010) suggests that the interview should be recorded so that the researchers can listen to it several times to be able to categorise the data, for the purpose of coding, summarising and taking notes of comments which are of particular interest without having to try to write them down during the course of the interview.
As the research questions were focused around exploring the understanding, practice, and challenges of moderation in private training establishments in New Zealand, semi-structured interviews were selected. There are three main types of interviews – structured, unstructured and semi-structured. But for this particular research, semi-structured interviews are chosen as the only method of this study’s data collection. Brown, Lyndsay and Durrheim (2009); Roulston (2010) considers interviewing as the primary way through which qualitative researchers gather data. Semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate, as I had a particular focus and questions framing my study. The study would investigate the perspectives of academic leaders and assessors in regards to the challenges experienced by them in the moderation process. The semi-structured interview, however, adopts a middle ground as the interviewer does have a sequence of inquiries and questions to be asked but having said that has considerably more freedom to change the sequence, wordings and time allocated to each question based on the needs of each separate interview (Robson, 2002). Wallace (1998) says that semi-structured interviews allows more flexibility within each interview so that optimal information is obtained from participants. Which means it allows the researcher to explore the interviewee’s perspectives and knowledge in regards to the concepts. The semi-structured interview is usually a combination of both structured as well as unstructured format.

In this research, the semi-structured interview approach has been employed using broad questions (See Appendix 1 for the Interview Schedule). The interview schedule is divided into four parts: (1) the purpose of moderation; (2) the process of moderation; (3) challenges of moderation faced by academic leaders; and (4) challenges of moderation faced by assessors. Hinds (2000) says that a semi-structured approach is suitable when the research—needs in-depth information, or subject matter is potentially sensitive, or the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification, who further classifies the semi-structured interview as structured and unstructured.

A suitable time and place to meet with leaders and assessors was arranged by email. Interview questions were sent a week prior to the arranged date to allow time for the participants to reflect and also to ensure quality answers. Interview was recorded by
the researcher and permission was obtained before the interview to use a recording device. Transcription is considered as one of the important components of the interview. It was important for each participant to be provided with a transcript of their responses and two weeks were given to check accuracy and make any corrections or changes necessary (Hinds, 2000).

**Data analysis**

I structured the analysis in three broad categories which were purpose, roles and challenges. Then I analysed data using elements of narrative theme analysis to investigate the inductive themes embedded within the participants’ personal stories (Boje, 2010). Lofland, Snow and Anderson and Lofland (2006) define analysis as a transformative process of converting raw data into findings and results. I immersed myself in the data through the act of transcribing interviews. Lofland, Snow and Anderson& Lofland (2006) propose six different strategies to generate analysis more reasonably and in a methodical manner: (1) through using social science framing; (2) through normalising and managing anxiety; (3) through coding; (4) through memoing; (5) through using diagrams; (6) thinking. They further assert that the qualitative field analysis begins with activities of coding and memoing. They further define coding as the process of sorting and organising data to make it more meaningful. They further suggest filing and computer data-basing as two different methods of coding. A number of levels of theoretical coding and analysis techniques were employed in line with inductive research conventions. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggesting that codes help in data labeling, data retrieval, knitting large chunks of data, thus speeding up analysis. Bell (2010) suggests that the interview should be recorded so that the researchers can listen to it several times to be able to categorise the data, for the purpose of coding, summarising and taking notes of comments which are of particular interest without having to try to write them down during the course of the interview.

Similarly, Watling and James (2007) assert that the structuring, order, and coding underpin the key research outcomes and can be used to shape the data to refine, test or confirm an established theory, to apply theory to new circumstances and situations or to further use it to generate new theory, framework or a model. All of the interviews are going to be thematically analysed. Braun & Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within
data (p.79). They further state that thematic analysis is the only independent and reliable qualitative approach to the analysis.

**Validity**

Cohen, Maion and Morrison (2011) define validity as the crucial and the most important key to an effective research and further add that validity is the requirement for both qualitative and quantitative research. Winter (2000 cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison; 2011) asserts that in present times the validity related to qualitative data is expected to be much more honest, in-depth, rich and covers the scope of data achieved. According to Davidson and Tolich (2003), validity is the extent to which a question or variable accurately reflects the concept the researcher is looking for. Similarly, Bryman (2008) states that validity requires the researcher to ensure whether the questions collected as data, effectively measures the concept which is being researched. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) assert that validity and reliability hold a different meaning in qualitative and quantitative research which should be stated clearly by the researcher as well as its crucial for the researcher to demonstrate fidelity to the approach and to abide by the principles of validity and reliability. Maxwell (1992) who describes interpretive validity in qualitative methods as an ability of the researcher to understand and catch meanings, intentions and interpretations which is akin to the notion of fidelity. In this particular research project, I ensured the validity by making sure that the aims of my research were crystal clear before preparing the search questions. In addition, I prepared some guiding questions for the interview so that no one could get off track during the interview process. This means themes that are to be discussed during the interview were interconnected to the aims of the research project.

The qualitative data can address both internal and external validity. Campbell and Stanley (1963), Bracht and Glass (1968), and Lewis-Beck (1993) has given a stark comparison between internal and external validity. The writers further refer internal validity which is concerned with the question and emphasize on experimental treatments and making difference in the particular experiment while under scrutiny whereas external validity is about asking a question giving demonstrable effects. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2006b) define internal validity as the reality, true value, consistency, applicability, dependability, and credibility of interpretations, summaries
and conclusions within the context or the settings. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) emphasizes on the following issues of internal validity: (1) authenticity issues which is about fairness in terms of completeness of data, representation of multiple realities which comes from multiple perspectives, and constructions of a situation, removing cultural blindness, generating appreciation of understanding and addressing ethical issue of beneficence. In my research I investigated the practices of moderation from two perspectives. Hearing about this from assessors and the academic leaders allowed me to make some useful comparisons. This is called data triangulation by Cohen et al., (2011) and this practice increases the credibility of my study.

**Ethical considerations**

Ethical issues are especially significant for this research project for many reasons. The research topic, challenges of moderation of assessments in private training establishments in New Zealand is considered highly crucial and important as some of the data collection could be interconnected to power, competency, training and knowledge and privacy issues, and attentive educational policies. Thus, I have to provide the organisational leaders, academic leaders and assessors with detailed and sufficient information about my research in order to receive their consent before the research takes place. According to Bryman (2012), when research is dealing with human capital, there are four ethical considerations to take into account—lack of informed consent; harm to participants; invasion of privacy; and deception. He further states that harm entails different facets of physical harm, any harm to participant's development, stress or loss of self-esteem. I would consider three ethical issues which are relevant to this research: informed consent; harm to participants; confidentiality and anonymity of information. In my study I provided participants with information sheets (see Appendix 2) and they signed the consent forms (see Appendix 3).

Several writers (Bryman, 2008; Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Wilkinson, 2011) highlight that all participants must be informed about the aims of the research, information on their role involved in the research, and that they must voluntarily participate in the study. To conduct this research, I would be writing a summary of my research proposal as a formal document to be sent to the leaders of the organisation to get their approval as well as permission to enter the site. All participants are going to be informed in regards
to the aims and objectives of the research, verbally as well as in writing. Once they are fully informed of the aims and objectives of the research, the participants will be then asked to give their formal consent through a participant consent form before the actual interviews would take place.

Several writers (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011; Davidson & Tolich, 2003) suggested that in terms of confidentiality and anonymity, all information related to the participants must be very confidential and also the researchers must ensure that the data should be kept in a secure place with limited access to those who are not supposed to access data. In my research, the data that am going to collect in the form, electronic files, and hard copies, will be stored and locked in a safe and secure place under a computer coding system. I must ensure that all the names of the participants and their institution are identified by a special coding system in order to protect the data. Also, all the participants are going to be also informed that only my supervisor and I would have access to the data in this research. Last but not least this research project that would be complied with UNITEC According to the principles and guidelines of Research Ethics Committee, the data collection process will not proceed further unless until UREC approval is granted (UNITEC Research Ethics Committee, 2009).
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction
This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered during the research on the challenges of moderation in private training organisations through semi structured interviews with Academic Leaders and Assessors.

The semi-structured interview questions were arranged in three main categories: the purpose of the moderation, the roles and responsibilities and the success and challenges. These categories were influenced by the literature reviewed. For presenting the data, pseudonyms have been used: the academic leaders are named Alan, Alister and Alice and the assessors are named Steve and Sara. These pseudonyms were used to avoid identification of the academic leaders and the assessors. This enabled the individual tracking of responses.

Purpose and processes of moderation

The voices of academic leaders

Academic Leader A: Alan
Alan started off with stating the what moderation is:

“Moderation for me is about assuring that the assessments are robust and fair”

He explained the two stages of moderation which are pre and the post moderation. He further explains the process of the moderation and how its linked with the quality assurance. The pre-moderation stage is all about ensuring the validity of assessment task, meets the learning outcomes of the programmes whereas the post moderation is the assessor's decisions and feeds into the professional development and the decisions around results. In regards to the organisational documents around moderation Alan stated:

In terms of organisational documents or moderation specifically or the moderation templates, you also have policies in procedure around moderation requirements, it sits in either QMS or in this case just policies and procedure system”
Then he explained the purpose of moderation is about validating the assessment tasks and the assessment decisions. He stated, in terms of quality assurance, his role is to make sure that the assessment task is valid and that there is accuracy in the marking of assessments by the assessors to ensure the credibility of the results to stand up to the scrutiny from the regulator and to match the quality standard set up by the regulators.

Academic Leader B: Alister
Alister started off talking about moderation as a part of their quality management and quality assurance process, where the assessment tools are developed to assess the students to the appropriate level. He stated the second important thing is that the content that needs to be in accordance to the prescription of that particular paper and related the quality assurance to moderation:

“For example if the prescription covers five learning outcomes, the assessment tool should cover all five learning outcomes including their key elements and appropriate ranges so when we talk about quality assurance or moderation we closely look at the assessment to see if its developed appropriately, assessed at the right level, it shouldn't be over assessing or under assessing students”

Alister explained the process of moderation at two different stages pre-moderation and post-moderation. He added that the pre moderation process is to ensure that the assessments include the four components of quality content which are fairness, consistency, accuracy in terms of totaling of the marks and especially in terms of the English language quality of the international students. He said:

“These four components are quality content. Assessments of the students should be fair, consistent to the marking guide and total should be accurate, the last thing is that their English quality should be accurate and assessor should identity if there are any issue in the English quality and also there is any issue related to plagiarism, citation. Assessor should identify all those issues”

He explained that all the private training establishments are registered with NZQA and the policies, procedures and relevant forms related to moderation or quality assurance
are all contained in their institution's QMS (quality management system) and that they have their own moderation process flow chart that talks about the pre and post moderation or overall moderation of particular assessment tool or the assessment of the students work should be done. Alister described how they conduct internal pre-moderation process which is after conducting the assessments which are then sent to the assessors for marking, where they moderate and that confirms the fairness and recklessness of the marking. He stated that previously they used to send all the papers, at least 30 to 40 in number, to the external moderator which used to be according to a planned schedule, but said that it is not possible to send that many papers now. He stated:

“We always develop a schedule and send for external moderation and our external moderators collectively look on the assessment tool and the assessment decisions to basically give their verdict, give their judgement that how we are doing”

He further mentioned moderation as a quality assurance process and it's not just about the rechecking of the papers but it's a process of continuous improvement as well. He kept on stating moderation was a quality assurance process:

“Moderation is a quality assurance or a quality management process. Now days we call them a quality management process rather than a quality assurance process”

He further stated, the external moderators need to be highly knowledgeable and sound in their judgement, because it's the post moderators' judgement upon which NZQA makes decision regarding the fate of PTE’s and Polytechnics. He said that if the assessors' decisions are appropriate and the educational performance is good, then the overall percentage of pass rate doesn't matter. He added, if the educational performance is good, that’s when the work is quality assured and said that moderation plays a key role. He explained that moderation is the core to reach the decisions made by NZQA as well as for further or future improvements. He then explained the process of how the moderation is done in his institution, he stated that quite a while back the
assessors used to prepare the medium, best and the lower sample very well for the moderation but now, for almost one and half years, they have transitioned into the process of random moderation which is all about the random selection of samples by the moderators not the assessors. He said that this particular process of random moderation has added a lot of value and helps them to identify issues and then incorporate a lot of improvement. He insisted applying Kaizen technology which is a method of continuous improvement practices.

Academic Leader C: Alice
Alice mentioned the purpose of moderation right in the beginning:

“Well the purpose of moderation is to ensure that the consistency and quality of assessments. It really is the core of the quality of the training of the school”

She mentioned moderation as the core which helps in the quality training of the school and is deadly related to the compliance by NZQA. They have to ensure that they as an institution are actually delivering the educational qualifications to the students. She explained that the purpose of moderation is included in the moderation policy and procedures and also in the departmental moderation panel and in the assessment moderation package that accompanies every module and unit standards. She reinforced the fact that moderation is about measuring the effectiveness, accuracy, consistency of the assessments and thus measuring the skills and knowledge that is set out in the learning outcomes in every module. She stated:

“And so its seen as a core function of my job and also within school, is to make sure that, it has a number one slot in importance really”

She further stressed the fact that moderation is a quality assurance process and it's in the QMS which is a quality management system, within the academic side of the school. She said that it's the key process, a resource that informs the staff of what they need to change or not and how well the assessments are actually doing their job.
Key finding (Academic Leaders):
1. All the three participants mentioned about moderation as a quality assurance process. They further mentioned about the two stages of moderation which are called pre and post moderation and their strong linkages to quality assurance, continuous improvement and professional development. They all mentioned about the quality management system and that the moderation forms are located in this QMS. Overall there has been a heavy focus on quality.

2. All three participants mentioned the same purpose of the moderation which is about determining the assessments being valid, fair, consistent and quality assured. In regards to the process of moderation all the participants explained the two stages of moderation - pre and post which ultimately helps in the continuous improvement and professional development of the assessors.

The voices of assessors
Assessor A: Steve
Steve didn’t start stating the purpose of the moderation but said that they got consistent practices internally between the lecturers, with the learners and to make sure that they are compliant in terms of the needs of external moderation in order to ensure that the assessments meet the industry benchmark. He further added that in terms of moderation, it’s very important to take into account the feedback from the industry experts, organisations in order to fill or feed them into the assessments and it’s a kind of a loop. He stated that moderation is a cycle that involves a number of people, where in the end the quality of the pre and post moderation of assessments is being judged. He then mentioned the importance of moderation for an organisation:

“ I think you could see in the industry what’s happening now is kind of all institutions have closed due to this issue of moderation. So it’s critical to the sustainability of the organisation”

He said that when he joined as a Lecturer, he was made very clear through his job description about the moderation being the key aspect of his role and how it’s been made aware through induction, employment agreement as a key performance
indicator for the lecturers/assessors and also talked about the moderation documentation online that are shared amongst the colleagues by the top management in the meetings. He said that moderation helps identify if their plagiarism software is working or not, is it being implemented by the teachers, whether the teachers are picking up the issues of plagiarism, whether the marking is done with integrity, has it picked up the proxy writing or not. He finished by saying:

“If we take the quality seriously or do the moderation with a lot of pride and integrity and making sure that everything is authentic, that ties into quality assurance so that it results be a part of and can confidently defend”

Assessor B: Sara
Sara started off with stating the purpose of moderation:

“Purpose of moderation to me is you want to make sure that the students are right, because once we say that level 5, you want to make sure that we want to assess them, not over assess or under assess”

She said that the assessments are the way to make sure that the students learn appropriately. She started explaining the pre-moderation process in which they ensure that the learning outcomes are covered, as per they are given in the prescription, and to make sure that they cover all the major important details mentioned in the learning outcomes as a part of student learning. Then she described the post moderation, in which it is important to make sure that the marking is fair and consistent with the marking guide and all with the right totaling. She explained about the modes of moderation they have followed as assessors over the last few years which is that previously the assessors used to select top three papers for post moderation and now they have changed it to submitting the whole bundle, thus the post moderator chooses the top, medium and low. She said previously the assessors used to make sure that they assessed the top three but now they have to make sure they assess each script properly. With pre-moderation, they started having the checklist in order to make sure that they have followed all the assessment instructions properly. Upon the finishing of the course they have to make sure that learning outcomes in the assessment grid
have proper remarks and that the variance is less than 10%. She further explained the post moderation process is a bit simple as they have to just check the consistency of the marking guides with the scripts, the feedback should be written in the second page of the document, that the students have signed the second page of the feedback form and to double check that the marking inside and outside the front page is fine. In terms of quality assurance, she said, that they make sure that the assessments are properly done, students are assessed properly, they should be easily able to get jobs in their relevant field, submission of the assessments or the external moderation documents are done with NZQA. Last but not least, she said confidently they have almost passed most of the moderation and that they have a good team to do it.

Key finding(Assessors):

3. Both Steve and Sara are aware of how important moderation is for the sustainability of the organisation and as a part of quality assurance. Steve stated the fact that almost all the private training establishments have been shut down, thus emphasising on the importance and the purpose of moderation. Both the participants mentioned and explained the process of moderation which comprises of two stages- pre and post. Finally, they emphasised quality and how moderation is a quality assurance process.

Roles and responsibilities

The voices of academic leaders

Academic Leader A: Alan
Alan described his role as an Operations manager which is regarding care of the academic side of the education. He then spoke about his role in moderation:

“My role in moderation is to oversee and implement a moderation plan and liaise with NZQA when required”

He said that his role is to make sure that all the assessors are well equipped with the resources and training to successfully deliver all the assessments in terms of validity and meeting the requirements. He talked about his responsibility to gauge the pre-
and the post moderation stages and to make sure that the external moderator has enough knowledge and information to be credible enough in terms of moderation. Also, his major responsibility is to monitor the results, and to ensure if any additional resources required as a result of a feedback of moderation which could be in terms of physical equipment or any additional learning materials and to ensure that the students should get their results in timely fashion.

Academic Leader B: Alister
Alister said that he performs three different roles simultaneously, as a chair of an academic board, head of the engineering department and overseeing the workloads of other departments and the actual teams of other departments. He closely manages three programmes within the institution. In terms of moderation of assessments, he mentioned that they have a hierarchy at the institution, have an academic team and a quality team which are basically answerable to the Head of the departments. He further added that the academic team is involved in the delivery of the content, preparation of the assessments, whereas the quality team is responsible for assuring and managing the quality of assessments as well as the delivery of the content. He talked about the leadership style being an Academic Leader. He said:

“As you can see leader needs to lead from the front. As an academic leader and especially in this particular, in this new era where everything is quiet uncertain, leader should be authentic and they can also use the technique of servant leadership that I normally adopt because I run my team on agile basis, so my team is self organised. They are the one who identify they choose, who have already identified the assessment tool, they identify if any new tool to be developed. If that's the case, they develop the tool or modify the tool”

In terms of moderation he explained his role as:

“I provide them all the facilities they require. I also provide them with the facility of moderation and that is through our quality team. Not only am a part of quality team and also the assessors team as well because am teaching too. I have a very close understanding of moderation process and most of the time I also pre-moderate myself, I can see that consistency amongst all the papers and they should be according to best practices as defend by NZQA, by many of the
researchers, universities etc. And also according to the policies of our QMA system. So these are basically roles that I play"

Academic Leader C: Alice
Alice started off by mentioning her role as:

“I am responsible for the academic side of the school and quality of academic results and generally over viewing the delivery of the training from management perspective”

She added her role in terms of moderation as:

“My role in moderation is to make sure that it happens and to overview it from kind of management perspective”

She stated that moderation is a key area of great importance in school and that they are focusing on it for all programmes and developing an integrated system for assessment and moderation that is held online. She talked about setting up an interdepartmental moderation panel which involved all the academic staff, trainings, pre-moderation of assessments from each department which she referred to as a key learning facility and resources as well as the calendar system which meant the delivery of assessments before the pre-moderation of assessments. She said:

“And then they are externally moderated by staff, those assessments I look at and check the moderation system”

Then she added all about the findings from the moderation are then discussed at the departmental level, any changes made accordingly and any issues identified are then referred to the higher level management. She mentioned that her focus is mainly on the organisational development, staff development and more on quality and improvement. But she stated that her main role is to work closely with the Director and an Assessor/Moderator who has the hands on experience in moderation.

**Key finding (Academic Leaders):**

4. All leaders emphasised that for them the meaning of overviewing or overseeing moderation meant doing it from a distance. The name of their role is an academic leader and overviewing is a part of their role. All three of them
mentioned their roles and responsibilities in terms of what they do in the organisation. Alan and Alice performs the roles of an Operations manager, in which academic leadership is embedded. Whereas Alister performs three different roles which are: chair of academic board; head of the department and overseeing the workloads of other departments. All three mentioned about their major responsibility in terms of facilitating, ensuring that all the staff especially the assessors are well equipped with the resources and training they require in order for the successful delivery of the assessments, and last but not least monitoring of the results and making sure the whole work is quality assured.

The voices of assessors

Assessor A: Steve
Steve described his role as a Lecturer, a moderator and a kind of a team leader working towards the strategic focus at Premier. He further stated his role:

“My job is to make sure co-coordinating with the external stakeholders, external moderators and making sure that our moderation activities are implemented the right way and we take on feedback and pass it on to the teachers and then pass it back to him"

He stated that the moderation plan is being followed internally as well as externally. He said that can be ensured by looking at the assessment which are made in accordance to the learning outcomes, and the graduate profile which is aligned to the approved documents. He further stated:

“It is very important I have to stick with what is approved with external compliance"

He said that the assessors have to make sure that assessments are delivered in a timely manner, should be constructed in a way so as its fair for the learners and have to make sure of the design of the assessments should bulk into their teacher practice, and thus any feedback that comes from class observation or students’ feedback should be repackaged in to the next coming assessment. He further added that his role as an assessor is not only to design the assessment but to continuously improve
the assessments by taking and implementing all the feedback, to make sure that the assessments are fit for purpose. He further insisted on the importance of the role of assessor it plays is instrumental in terms of ensuring assessments to be of good quality and meets the purpose of the industry as well as the organisation and the students.

Assessor B: Sara
Sara clearly described her role as a Lecturer and was promoted as an assistant head recently in July 2015. She further explained her role and responsibilities in terms of moderation:

“I was in moderation initially during the time when I joined here, none of the assessments were developed, so every time we develop the assessments we are like doing each other's assessments, pre- moderation and post-moderation, so it's almost like four years I have been doing moderation, pre and post all together and definitely over the years that have been improved”

She explained how the assessing of scripts should be done in accordance to marking guide and she takes one question at a time, then mark all the scripts against the marking guide in order to have a fair and consistent outcome. She finished by saying any error found by the moderator is being send back and redone and then submit again.

**Challenges of moderation**

**The voices of academic leaders**

Academic leader A: Alan
Alan started off with describing the things that work well or the success things in terms of moderation within the institution. He said that the moderation process at their institution is very robust. He further added the things that are working very well is the layered approach to moderation whereby suppose to the internal and external component, the feedback loop, going into improving either the assessment tasks or the assessor's decisions and the process around delivery. He further added that the internal and external components are the industry-wide and they work very well and he assumed that most of the organisations have a similar moderation process being
practiced. Then he mentioned about the transparent and open culture that exists in their organisation, where the staff is not being punished if they don't feel something somehow found wanting if a part of the assessment is poor. The staff is provided an opportunity for genuine feedback, being supported which means they buy into this moderation process, an environment of participation and continual improvement in which everybody is happy to participate. He then talked in details about the challenges of moderation to which he said:

“I think that the challenges around moderation when the feedback is challenging and this can become contentious and disagreements can occur in terms of different expectations”

He further added that if the moderation is agreed by all the moderators then it's not very contentious, but as soon as there are some disagreements that's where they start getting challenges. He said that this is probably the interesting part of the teaching process and if done properly then everybody goes away with a very positive concept of it. Alan said that this process is a validation of everybody's practice from top bottom and a consequence people go away in confident as a result of it which feeds into the organisational motivation. He further stated that if the moderation is done in the right spirit, if the people are willing to participate, act on the feedback then they have a very sound understanding of what exactly they are doing with a feeling of what they have done is of great value. And this in return will go to the students who will achieve something substantial after being put through the rigorous process of moderation, will walk out of the door with valuable qualification and learning of standards.

Academic Leader B: Alister
Alister started off talking about the pre-moderation stage where he mentioned not to leave the moderation tool before the moderation is done, otherwise, it does generate heaps of issues afterward. Another thing he mentioned was that the assessment developer who develops the assessment should double check or read the tool twice once developed. He stated more critical was that the assessor should be able to print out and review it, as hard copy always help. In terms of post-moderation, he said that random and proper moderation would be appropriate as it adds value in the quality
assurance process. Then he mentioned the purpose and focus of moderation of assessment is about being appropriate before its handed over to the students and the assessors’ decisions should be fair. Alister further mentioned:

“All these aspects I have mentioned, the re-reading of the assessments by the assessment developer, printing of the hard copy before giving to the students and then the moderation, all these add value in all the aspects”

Then he added that it all depends on the organisational culture and the organisational resources that are available. He added that Polytechnics are better in resources and said that in regards to universities in paper level 8- Integrative research methods offering health sciences modules, there are three teachers teaching the same module whereas in PTE’s there is only one teacher that teaches three subjects or modules. And he added that because of this reason it is impossible to have the same level of practices as it not practical. He said that in case of universities there are infinitive resources available but very limited bandwidth of resources available for the private training establishments, whereas Polytechnics are in the middle. The second thing he finds quite challenging and stamped as an important issue is:

“The second thing is qualified trainers and assessors, when we talk about qualified moderators, qualified assessors or assessment developers there are two types, one is technically qualified the second is there has to be good understanding of maybe what we call it, bloom's taxonomy or NZQA framework. They should have understanding of both. In New Zealand, this is not a country with a very long history in terms of education, many programmes are offered very new. Sometime it happens for example a teacher who is not Kiwi, who is an immigrant has got technical skill, they don't have understanding of New Zealander qualification. On the other hand, Kiwis, they may be expert on NZ qualifications, they are good in hospitality business etc but if we talking about health sciences they may be good, but if we talk about electrical, mechanical or civil engineering they may not be that expert. So ye there is always a trade-off”
Then he stated the fact that the NZQA policies have changed a great deal, from 2015-2017. There has been a massive increase in the number of students from 9,000-10,000 within a year. He said that for privately owned businesses like theirs, that have a very few students, very few financial resources, very few human resources they had not been able to train staff because of the lack of financial resources. He further identified the current challenge their institution is facing is continuous monitoring and evaluations by NZQA within two to three years, in order to keep a check on changes they are incorporating as an institution in terms of assessment tools and assessment. Alister said that he would recommend the technical staff to keep on practising and learning from their mistakes, by taking up certified courses of adult education and training being offered by UNITEC Institute of Technology or the famous one from SIT (Southern Institute of Technology) which is called an NZ adult education training at level 6 and would give them a good insight of quality assurance.

Academic Leader C: Alice
Alice started off with success of moderation and said that the moderation panel has been a great development, as a training facility or resource and also a way to share knowledge and information to moderate as a pre and post moderation platform. She added that it’s the moderation panel where they can look at how to do the stuff and to make sure that they all are on the same page as a staff. The other thing she said that's working well is the pre and the post moderation because she can gauge the performances of the staff in terms of where they are at, the whole process. The third thing she mentioned that working well was getting the whole process streamlined, so working with all the departments, so that they all are working together thus bringing things into order. She further added that knowledge sharing and a common understanding within staff brings people together, as she said that there's been silos in the past, people have been working quite independently on their own and within the departments, and there's been no sharing of information and if the information was given out to them there has been a whole different interpretation. So she said people have come to her and mentioned that they enjoy the way of doing moderation together. Alice started explaining about the challenges of moderation being faced, by stating:
“I think the challenges are to do with the part time, the lack of time of staff, it’s really hard to organise all the people at the same time. Also the challenges to our international college is that getting everybody trained in the NZQA New Zealand way of doing things, people have come here with all different ideas of what is assessment, what is moderation and there’s been a challenge in the time factor, that people are stuck in their ways, they assume how to do stuff but actually they don’t, willingness to open up and to change but on the other hand there is this huge challenge.”

She further elaborated the challenge pertaining to the time factor is getting all of that process embedded as a system that should run smoothly so that everything is pre-moderated before it goes out. She further added that the changes have been made, been discussed and actually used. She said that in the past the changes have come back from the moderation reports, just been the tips in the box as moderation have occurred but the actual infermentation has not been taken aboard or even not been understood or utilised. She said that's been looked into in really how to use that information as a kind of golden nugget and that it informs how to develop or improve staff. She further stated that this is the huge challenge for them and they need to get everyone and everybody on board, so that the policies and procedures reflect what actually happen and the people should be on the same page so that they can actually pack the impact of the change with the assistance they actually have. She said that the online system is working really well but the challenge lies in bringing the actual events of all to connect really well with the online system. She finished by saying that it’s an area of development and they all are working on it.

**Key finding (Academic Leaders):**

5. Internal and external component and feedback loop in moderation of assessments. All the three participants mentioned about the aspects of moderation that work quite well in terms of social moderation, bringing everyone on board together. They all explained the challenges been spotted in terms of: when the feedback is challenging, lack of staff, resources, how the people come from all different parts of the world, with different expertise and how they needed to be trained into NZQA system of moderation.
**The voices of assessors**

Assessor A: Steve

Steve started with the process of pre-moderation. He said that the number of rounds of pre-moderation had a great impact in terms of quality which has gone up. He then praised the staff and developers in terms of being approachable, thus improving the quality of those assessments through recognizing and appreciating the feedback which has been reflected in the students’ feedback. The students found the newly developed assessments really difficult, much more creative and innovative and aligned to the real examples, all these he said has been the moderation outcome which involves the improvement of quality level. And he was happy to state the fact that they have been passing the external moderation as well, been working quite well. He then said between that the systems they are putting in, are being tested which are giving the positive results so far. He continued saying that the students who are not been able to cope up are withdrawn so as to ensure that the students who are speeding and performing well are being taken care of in this moderation process and that there are consequences beyond that. Steve then said that they are really serious about quality assurance, so they make sure that the assessments are really good. There had been instances where their assessments have failed three or four times and he said that instead of cutting corners or rushed into delivering of the assessments, they have gone back to the moderators, taken the feedback into their assessments and added that they have been very patient and communicative with other people, willing to learn and the learning attitude being coachable and all of this is being reinforced through all the meetings which involve senior management. Steve then mentioned the challenges of moderation:

“I think that the challenges around moderation when the feedback is challenging and this can become contentious and disagreements can occur in terms of different expectations. And so that's probably the biggest area and moderation agreement, if or moderation was agreed by all moderators then it's not very contentious, everybody is relatively happy as soon as you get disagreements that's probably where you get the challenges”
Then he talked about the importance of moderation, which is not just about looking at the assessments, it's also about looking at the teaching practices, the teaching resources, checking if the materials are updated or relevant that are been used, to ensure the teaching and assessing activities should be aligned with the course objectives, learning outcomes and the GPO's. Through moderation, he added that they can be exposed and can confirm a number of things that we are doing well, could be student satisfaction, could be the pass rate or could be the professional development. He finished by stating that moderation plays an important and a big role in the whole teaching and learning environment.

Assessor B: Sara
Sara started off by talking about the post moderation that the assessors are seriously doing their work not just for the sake of it. They should be properly reading the answers and doing the remarking. She then said that Alister asked them to sit with him and showed how the moderation is done. In terms of aspects of moderation that works well she stated is the fact that they always pass the external moderation. She added that time should be spend moderating, then its beneficial because the staff can get the moderation right for the first time. Then it's easier for them to sit down with the assessor and the assessment developer. Then she talked about the new staff when they come to the organization, they are paid quite well, they are being asked by Alister to sit down with him to learn the process of moderation. She mentioned that she never had any problems in regards to the process of moderation as three of them (her and including the two heads) been there at the beginning of the engineering department. Being a good team together, they rely on each other for the feedback, if someone finds a problem in something, the rest are ready to bring in changes. Sara mentioned about the challenges of moderation:

“But you know in the previous organisation where there are highly qualified people when I go and say something wrong they get offended, so I almost don't say anything to them. Sometimes I just kept their assessments just sign it and give it to them, even if I ask something they are like she is still young, she doesn't know anything, so I think that is the problem, challenges are there for everyone"
Another challenge she mentioned is about not understanding other courses, cannot expect to have one moderator for the same course, she then said that they have to moderate that kind of stuff which is not always deemed appropriate, so it's another biggest challenge:

“Sometimes we don't understand the other course, I have to do those kind of stuff. Not always you don't understand the big picture of the course, you can't always expect to have one moderator for everything, sometime we have to moderate those kind of stuff but it's not always appropriate. That is the one biggest challenge I would see”

Sara then talked about the feedback. She said that it's difficult because sometimes they don't know how much feedback is required to be given and all the feedback is given to the students as a moderator. Then she mentioned about the importance of getting the signature on the paper by the students. Then she mentioned another challenge of moderation:

“Pre-moderation is the problem. Sometime some learning outcomes will have a few ranges. As an assessment developer he knows what to do, but I will be like why he has asked only question on like this learning outcome more than this one. Isn't that important. But as moderator I wouldn't have knowledge as such, and sometime we the pre-moderation is when I started, all the assessments and then I realised the assessment grid is not matching, variance is not proper, may I change the marks for the question. That is the biggest challenge I have. That time I realised that I have to give big question that small marks. Because I didn't want to change the questions as such. I try to put the variance to zero, especially for the civil engineering”

Sara finished off the conversation by mentioning the dire importance of having a checklist to ensure that all of them are doing the moderation in a right manner. She further added that checklist should be measurement based.
Key Finding (Assessors):

6. Lack of consensus on feedback and social moderation. Steve mentioned a huge challenge which is when the feedback is challenging, not contentious and generates disagreements. Whereas Sara mentioned about challenges which are absolutely down the different lines in terms of feedback and checklist. She said that they don’t know how much of a feedback is required while pre-moderation and second challenge lies in terms of mismatch of the grid, variance and not been able to take the checklist in consideration.

Table 4.1: Consolidated key findings: Academic leaders and assessors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Academic Leader</th>
<th>Assessor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purpose and processes</td>
<td>1. There is heavy focus on quality</td>
<td>Importance of moderation for the sustainability of the organisation and as a part of quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Purpose of Moderation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role and responsibilities</td>
<td>Over-viewing or overseeing moderation, doing it from a distance. The name of their role is an academic leader and over-viewing is their responsibility.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges of moderation</td>
<td>Internal and external component and feedback loop in moderation of assessments.</td>
<td>Lack of consensus or social moderation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consolidated key findings

The key findings from this research have been consolidated in order to achieve data triangulation showing similarities and differences between the two stakeholder groups – the academic leaders and the assessors of moderation. In my study I investigated the perspectives of both academic leaders and assessors regarding moderation of
assessment using three broad categories. In the first category, which was related to purposes and processes of moderation the two stakeholders held similar views about the importance of moderation itself and that it served the purpose of quality assurance. For the second category, roles and responsibilities, the academic leaders held the similar views of overviewing or overseeing moderation which meant doing it from a distance. For the third category, the two stakeholders held different views about the challenges of moderation. The academic leaders mentioned challenges regarding the internal and external component and feedback loop in moderation of assessments. Whereas the assessors mentioned about the lack of consensus or social moderation as challenges of moderation.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction
This chapter focuses on the key findings from the research for discussion in the context of the literature reviewed earlier in Chapter Two. The chapter begins with the key findings related to purpose and processes of moderation with an immense focus on quality. This is followed by a discussion regarding the role of middle level leaders. This chapter continues with a discussion of the main challenges and issues faced by the middle level leaders and assessors in regards to the internal and external component and the feedback loop. Then conclusion and recommendations are presented.

DISCUSSION
Purpose and process of moderation
The first key finding in my study was related to purpose and process of moderation. All participants in this study, the academic leaders and the assessors, began by defining moderation which is about assuring the assessments being robust, fair and a part of the quality assurance and quality management process. Blom (2008) suggests the following definition “moderation ensures that people assessed are assessed in a consistent, accurate and well-designed manner” (p.302) which means he points out that moderation of assessment is the process of ensuring quality standards. Whereas Nusal (2007) sees moderation as a process for ensuring that grades awarded are fair and reliable and marking criteria applied consistently. One main similarity is the idea of consistency in moderation. Australian Learning and Teaching Council (2012a) defines moderation as the processes and activities that occur both before (ie: quality assurance) and after all assessments (ie: quality control). They further added that the moderation of assessment encompasses all stages of all assessments.

Another interesting key finding in my studies showed that, three of the six participants mentioned the same purpose of moderation which is about determining the assessments being valid, fair, consistent and quality assured. In her study, Afrin (2011), states the purpose of moderation as to uphold the value and quality of
education and thus significant gaining, sharing of knowledge and learning. Adie, Lloyd and Beutel (2013) recognized four different purposes of moderation that influenced the focal point and therefore the outcome of the moderation exercise for individuals, which have been identified as equity, justification, accountability and community building, and are beneficial in articulating an inclusive purpose for moderation that's firmly related to assuring standards. Davidson and Mackenzie (2009) states two distinct purposes of assessment: (1) assessment of learning which is a measurement of what and how students have learned and should incorporate and involve various dimensions of validity, reliability, utility and consistency; (2) assessment for learning is focused on using assessments to assist students improve and move forward in their learning through the help and intervention of academic staff. In regards to the process of moderation in my study all the participants explained the two stages of moderation -pre and post which ultimately helps in the continuous improvement and professional development of the assessors. Afrin (2011) describes the two processes of moderation which are pre-moderation and post moderation which are very much directly related to the learners’ assessments in relation to the qualifications being undertaken by them. She further describes the process of pre-moderation as designing, checking, validating and changing of assessments if required against the outcomes which are stated in the relevant NZQA prescription and in fact is a very crucial stage to ensure the assessments are aligned with the expected learning outcomes.

Boss, Endorf and Duckendahl (2001) prove in their research that any sort of misalignment between the assessments and the curriculum leads huge threat in terms of students’ achievements. They further describe the process of post moderation which follows after when the students complete and submit their assessments which are then marked by the assessors/lecturers who teach them in the class. Then there is a small sample which is further marked by the other lecturers/teachers in order to monitor the consistency of the marking. According to Grainger, Adie and Weir (2016) state the objectives of any moderation process as; (1) reaching consensus through affluent conversations and professional dialogues in regards to their judgements of the overall achievements of the students; (2) ensuring consistency in judgements about the students’ assessment results through shared understanding as moderation is a significant assurance activity; (3) to interpret and apply standards in a common way.
which is an evidence of the differing qualities of performance; (4) last but not least to
share and grade representative samples of student work across different standards.

**Quality**

Another key finding in my study was Quality. There has been heavy focus on quality.
All the three participants mentioned about moderation as a quality assurance process.
According to Sallis (2002), quality control is the oldest quality concept. It involves
detection of error focused on an after event process carried out by inspectors as quality
professionals. He said that quality assurance instead, places responsibility on the work
force and is concerned with preventing faults reoccurring. It is a before and during the
event process. All participants further mentioned about the two stages of moderation
which are called pre and post moderation and that there are strong linkages to quality
assurance, continuous improvement and professional development. Afrin (2011)
describes internal moderation as having two processes, pre-moderation and post-
moderation, that are done internally by staff within the organization. She said that pre-
assessment moderation (internal) is focused on the appropriateness of the
assessment tool, the selected assessment method and the alignment of the
assessment tasks with the learning outcomes. All the participants mentioned about
the quality management system and that the moderation forms are located in this
QMS. In Quality management is an essential part of management for an organisation
weaving together processes of accountability and development through the praxis of
evaluation (Sachs, 2003), essentially concerned with teaching, learning and research
(Ramsden, 1998).

**Role of middle level leaders**

The key finding in my study related to the role of middle level leaders which are the
academic leaders and how they collaborate staff/assessors/lecturers. My participants
confirmed their management role as academic leader. The name of their role is an
academic leader and overviewing is a part of their role. According to Cardno (2012)
the academic management in higher education involves managing of performance,
development and appointments of staff, managing serious student issues, budgeting,
teaching and learning environment, last but not least securing external research as
well as consultancy revenue. Whereas Ramsden (1998) suggests that academic leadership is focused on teaching which ultimately improves learning outcomes.

All three academic leaders mentioned about their major responsibility in terms of facilitating, ensuring that all the staff especially the assessors are well equipped with the resources and training they require in order for the successful delivery of the assessments, and last but not least monitoring of the results and making sure the whole work is quality assured. This view has been supported by Ramsden (1998) who defines academic leadership is about having sound knowledge of good teaching and must be able to dispense resources which can ultimately support the academic needs of the staff for their excellent performance. This idea of supporting staff is relevant to my study because the academic leaders in a PTE must support the assessors who carry out moderation.

Feedback loop
The key finding in my study is the challenges faced by the middle level leaders and assessors regarding the Internal and external component and the feedback loop in moderation of assessments. All the participants mentioned about the aspects of moderation that work quite well in terms of social moderation, bringing everyone on board together. In the literature review of social moderation, Gipps (1994) envisages social moderation as a technique that involves the instructors discussing and negotiating judgements made about student’ work with the intention to reach a consensus and common knowledge of the learner’s work standards. Whereas according to Sadler (2013), social moderation has often been interchangeably used with the term ‘consensus moderation’ which emphasises collaborative discussions around the allocation of marks.

They all explained the challenges been spotted in terms of: when the feedback is challenging, lack of staff, resources, how the people come from all different parts of the world, with different expertise and how they needed to be trained into NZQA system of moderation. In literature review of challenges of internal moderation process, Afrin (2011) asserts the biggest challenge for internal post-moderation is excessive workload and responsibilities which can hinder the progress of the
lecturers, assessors and the markers in terms of proper grading and objective feedback. This above view has been supported by Bloxham (2009) who asserts internal moderation process delivers fair and appropriate standards of marking and procedures are implemented to ensure appropriate standards of marking but then been criticized by her saying these processes and procedures are there to increase the workload and the responsibilities of the markers thus ignoring the real purpose of the moderation which is to provide accurate and reliable grades to the students and lacks feedback to the students on time which results in higher cost for the organisation.

CONCLUSIONS
A conclusion I can draw from my study is that the practice of moderation of assessments is valued and robust in the institutions sampled in this research. In all three institutions they are clear about the mistakes made in the past and now they have aligned practices with the official stated purposes and processes of moderation. They further mentioned about the aspects of moderation that are working and then provided the details of challenges of moderation. Last but not least, they have stated some actions being taken by the academic leaders and the assessors to overcome those challenges in order to establish much more effective and efficient moderation practices for the sustainability of the private training establishment.

From my study it has become clear that moderation is an important practice and that in order for it to be effective there needs to be clear communication about expectations. If practice is to be improved, then the institutions should be prepared to align the practices directly with the purposes of moderation.

RECOMMENDATIONS
To the Private Training Establishments: I recommend that the institution clarifies the purposes of moderation and communicates expectations about this to all existing and new staff so that alignment is achieved.
To the Academic leaders: I recommend that leadership activity should focus on making moderation of assessment a priority for teaching teams. I also recommend that leaders support assessors to meet quality management standards.

To the Assessors: I recommend that the social aspects of moderation are put in practice through regular dialogue about moderation. I also recommend that processes for creating a feedback loop through assessment, internal moderation, external moderation, assessor communication, to students is effectively enacted.
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APPENDIX 1:
Interview Schedule – Academic Leader and Assessor

Name of the Interviewee.................................................................
Position.................................................................
Date.................................................................
Venue: .................................................................

Reminder: Check informed consent
- Information sheet
- Consent form signing

1: Tell me about your role in the organisation and how it involves moderation of assessment?
2. Now I would like to focus on moderation and I want to find out your understanding about the purpose of moderation?
3. How is this purpose communicated in organisational documents (and could you share this documentation with me)?
4. Can you describe the way or process for actually doing the moderation?
5. What is the Assessors responsibility in the moderation?
6. What is the responsibility of an Academic Leader?
7. Can you tell me in some details about how moderation of assessments is seen as quality assurance in your organisation?
8. Can you please tell me about the aspects of moderation of assessments that work well?
9. Why do you think these aspects work well?
10. Are there any challenges around moderation that you would like to share with me?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about moderation?

Closing  Thank you for your time today and sharing your views of these questions.
APPENDIX 2:

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Title of Thesis: CHALLENGES OF MODERATION OF ASSESSMENT IN PRIVATE TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS IN NEW ZEALAND.

My name is Meenakshi Handa. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Educational Leadership and Management degree at Unitec Institute of Technology and seek your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree. The aim of my project is to explore the challenges of moderation of assessments in your private training establishment.

I request your participation in the following way. I will be collecting data using an interview schedule and would appreciate being able to interview you at a time that is mutually suitable. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event. The interview venue will be your organisation and the duration of the interview will be approximately for one hour. You will be provided with a copy of the interview transcript to check for accuracy and will be asked to verify this within a week of receipt of the transcript.

Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the thesis. I will be recording your contribution and will provide a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate) for you to check before data analysis is undertaken. I do hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology.

My supervisor is Professor Carol Cardno and may be contacted by email or phone. Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 8406, Email: ccardno@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely
Meenakshi Handa

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (insert number here)
This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
APPENDIX 3:
CONSENT FORM – PARTICIPANTS

RE: Master of Educational Leadership and Management
THESIS TITLE: CHALLENGES OF MODERATION OF ASSESSMENTS IN PRIVATE TRAINING ESTABLISHMENTS IN NEW ZEALAND.
RESEARCHER: Meenakshi Handa

Participant’s consent
I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports. I also understand that I agree to this interview being recorded. I understand that I will be provided with a transcript of the interview for verification and that I may withdraw myself or any information that has been provided for this project up to two weeks after the return/confirmation of my verified transcript.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: ____________________________

Name: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: (insert number here)
This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from (date) to (date). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 8551). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
DISSERTATIONS
RESEARCH BANK UPLOAD FORM (LIBRARY)

Full name of author: Meenakshi Handa


Practice Pathway: .TE MIRO POSTGRADUATE
Degree: Masters in Educational Leadership and Management
Year of presentation: 2018

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Principal Supervisor: Prof. Carol Cardno
Associate Supervisor: Mr. Martin Bassett

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Signature of author:
Date: 20-12-2018

______________________________
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Email this form and final PDF of dissertation to David Church dchurch@unitec.ac.nz