# Narrative 4
# Moderation and assessment practices

## John's story

John has been unit coordinator of a medium-sized third year unit at an Australian campus for six years, the last four of which has been delivered offshore. Although primarily a researcher, he agreed to develop the unit around his area of expertise. The first time the unit was delivered offshore, he made contact with the more senior of the two colleagues to make the necessary arrangements. Each week, he sent his lecture materials and assessments, including his marking guides, to his two offshore colleagues, Sami and Nic, and over the semester, collected all assessment marks.
He responded several times to questions from Sami about the content of assessments. That first year he noticed that after the first assignment, the offshore assessment and examination marks were much higher than his own students' results. He felt that this made the mean result for the unit too high. He adjusted the offshore marks downward and informed his offshore colleagues that they were marking too easy.

The following year he sent clearer marking instructions to his offshore colleagues, one of whom was a new lecturer, Kam, who had replaced Nic. He also withheld the examination marking key until after the students had sat the examination. He was again disturbed by apparent marking discrepancies; in particular, the examination marks appeared too high with an unusually high proportion being given 50-55%. He again made adjustments before submitting marks to the Board of Examiners.

The following year, he found that again, he had a new offshore colleague Ravi, who had replaced Kam. He now requested that the offshore lecturers send all examination scripts to the home campus for marking. He also required the offshore lecturers to send samples of marked assignments for checking. This time, there was more consistency between his own students' marks and those of the offshore campus students. He determined that from then on, this was the best way to ensure that assessment in the unit was less problematic, particularly at the end of the semester when he was under pressure to submit marks.

In the fourth year, with Sami and Ravi still the lecturers, he felt that the assessment process went very smoothly.

**Discuss John's story**

- What lessons are there?
- What are the key issues from John's point of view?
- What are the key issues from Sami's point of view?
- Would you have acted any differently to John either before or following the first year of offshore delivery?
- What are the likely or potential outcomes of this scenario?

## Sami's side of the story

Sami had recently completed his PhD in a particular field and while employed as a postdoctoral researcher at the offshore campus of an Australian university, was asked to teach a new unit related to his area of expertise, as well as a first year unit. Because of other commitments, he was asked to train another lecturer, who was not an expert in the field, to deliver the night-time lectures of the unit. He was contacted by the Australian unit coordinator, John, whom he did not know personally to discuss the unit. He was somewhat surprised to find that all materials were to be sent to him. The first lecture's materials did not arrive until two nights before the lecture which caused Sami some angst as he had too little time to provide the assistance that his colleague Nic needed. The two of them did their best. Each week after that, when the material arrived, Sami would sit down with Nic and work out how best present it to the students. After the first assignment, in which they felt their students did not do very well, they decided to run extra help sessions so that their students would not be disadvantaged by their inexperience. After that the students' marks were better, although the marking instructions were fairly vague and Sami, who did all the marking, found that he was using his own judgement to determine work standards. He also found that he had to ask for advice on several occasions as the lectures did not always appear to cover what was in the assessments. After the marks were all collated by John, he was informed that the offshore marks were too high and that they would be adjusted downward. While not pleased with this, he concluded that his perception of the standards was probably not quite right but that he would have a better idea the next year.

In the second year, it was unfortunate that Nic had secured a job elsewhere and Sami was joined by another inexperienced colleague, Kam. This time Sami did all the lecturing and Kam did the tutorials. Sami ran the extra help sessions in the early evening, which the students usually attended as some food was provided. The students' assessment marks were not much better but Sami felt that he was now a better judge of the standards and had a clearer understanding of the students' expected learning outcomes. A number of students had examination marks just below 50% but on reference to the expected learning outcomes, he decided that most of them really deserved to pass, so he awarded them 50%. John again advised him that the marks were too high and that some adjustment would be made. He was disappointed that three students whom he believed should have passed were given a fail.

With some dismay, Sami found that Kam had been allocated some different units to teach and he was to now train a third person, Ravi. Ravi turned out to be quite competent and Sami could share the load more evenly. However, new arrangements for assessment were made and Sami was asked to send all examination scripts to the Australian campus for marking as well as sending some already marked assignments for checking. This meant that although much of the marking experience he had gained was now not being used, he decided to make up for this by doing some team teaching with Ravi and together, over the next two years they were able to implement some new learning activities for the unit.

**Discuss Sami's story**

- What lessons are there?
- What are the key issues from Sami's point of view?
- What are the key issues from John's point of view?
- Would you have acted any differently to Sami either before or following the first year of offshore delivery?
- What are the likely or potential outcomes of this scenario?

**Alternative activities for a team**

1. After reading John's story, write a short fictional narrative from the point of view of Sami and share it with the others.

2. Read both stories. If you were the program manager, what would be your plan for the future regarding this situation? Discuss.