ASSESSMENT STRATEGY, PRINCIPLES & GUIDELINES

Section	Academic
Contact	Academic Strategy Manager
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Purpose

The University's Assessment Strategy, Principles and Guidelines provides a three-tiered approach to assessment policy and procedures comprising an assessment strategy applied at University Level, principles of assessment that relate to qualifications and/or specialisations, and question-based guidelines that can be used by lecturers and paper coordinators for self- and peer-review of their assessment design.

Definitions

A Glossary of Commonly Used Assessment Terms is provided in Appendix 1 of this document.

Introduction

Assessment is an integral component of a coherent educational experience and central to the overall quality of teaching and learning. It has two purposes:

- assessment of learning (primarily associated with summative assessment)
- assessment for learning (primarily associated with formative assessment)

and within these strands are a number of objectives including:

- provision of constructive feedback to support a student's progress toward achievement of the learning outcomes for the paper and for their selected programme of study;
- differentiating between students in a way that provides an indication of to what extent an individual has met or exceeded the learning outcomes and, where relevant, any other competencies or requirements associated with professional practice; and
- provision of constructive feedback to the teacher regarding the effectiveness of the assessment design and the teaching and learning methods.

These purposes and objectives of assessment are advanced in the University's Assessment Strategy which identifies a general approach to assessment, and provides a basis for the design, development and deployment of resources to support implementation of the associated Principles and Guidelines at programme and paper levels.

The Assessment Strategy, Principles & Guidelines

University Strategy	*The Principles of assessment design to be applied at qualification and/or specialisation level*	*Questions for lecturers and paper coordinators to Guide assessment design at paper level*
Encourage collective ownership, collaboration and teamwork to drive assessment design *Assessment design should evolve according to questions from the academic staff about how their contributions shape the achievement of the graduate profile. This emphasis may involve addressing differences between an individual staff member's personal goals for their paper and the collective goals of the programme as articulated in the graduate profile. Academic staff must agree on the assessment goals and may have to rise to a higher level of collaboration than may have been traditionally practiced within and across academic units.*	**Assessment should be moderated, that is, subject to peer review amongst programme or disciplinary groups** *Collaboration within and across academic units and with professional staff at the University will facilitate the best outcomes from assessment design. All constituents should recognise that assessment skills must be developed, and that colleagues can assist each other by sharing practices and strategies.*	**Have there been any discussions regarding how the paper contributes to the programme(s) it serves?** *A shared understanding about the purposes of the paper in relation to the programme(s) is likely to enhance the clarity of the expected outcomes both for students and for staff.* **Has the assessment design been peer-reviewed?** *'Peer-review' of assessment should be broadly interpreted to include discussions with colleagues about the assessment design informed by these principles and guidelines. External examiners, moderation processes, and team-teaching can also contribute positively to 'peer-review' of the assessment design.*
Clarify the purposes of assessment *Assessment serves dual purposes of promoting student learning (assessment **for** learning) and providing information to students and teachers about achievement of learning outcomes (assessment **of** learning). Wherever possible, students should experience a direct, positive benefit from their participation in assessment activities.* **Support the alignment of assessment design with the graduate profile and the strategic directions of the University** *Well-designed and properly implemented assessment provides a critical link between teaching activities, student learning, the graduate profile and the strategic directions of the University.*	**Assessment should support student achievement of the paper learning outcomes and progress toward the graduate profile including, where relevant, competencies and attributes required for professional practice**	**Is there a clear link between the paper learning outcomes and the overall graduate profile or learning goals of the programme(s) served by the paper?** **Has thought been given to the range of assessment tasks across other papers and how the paper contributes to the graduate profile?** *It should be evident that there is a link between the paper assessment strategy and that of the programme(s) it serves.* **Is the nature of the assessment task(s) such that it/they will enable differentiation between students' achievement of the learning outcomes?** *Assessment tasks and marking criteria should be designed to use a wide range of marks, and should enable individual students achievement of the learning outcomes to be determined.*

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Ensure that assessment design is valid, clear, measurable, and supportive of student learning *Explicit identification of graduate profiles, learning goals and/or learning outcomes facilitates coherence in the assessment design. Sharing those expectations explicitly with students provides clarity and purpose for student learning.*	**Assessments should be valid, fair, consistent, and beneficial to the learning process**	**Are the paper learning outcomes clearly articulated?** *Students must be able to demonstrate achievement of all the stated learning outcomes.* **Are the learning outcomes expressed at the appropriate level for the paper?** *The learning outcomes (and hence the assessment activities) must be appropriate for the level of the paper.* **Are there too many learning outcomes? How are they assessed?** *For example, a 15 credit paper should typically have about 5 learning outcomes (and no more than 8) which are assessed in as valid a way as practical. The idea that 'sufficient evidence' is required for the assessment of the learning outcomes should guide the assessment design so that the attainment of learning outcomes is assured without over-assessing the students.* **Are the linkages between the assessment and the stated paper learning outcomes clear?** *The purpose of the assessment(s) in allowing students to demonstrate mastery of the learning outcomes must be clear so that valid assessment is supported.* **How is equivalence between the assessment activities and marking criteria used in different offerings of the same paper assured?** *Equivalence requires a collaborative effort amongst the teaching staff to ensure that different student cohorts are assessed fairly and consistently. All staff teaching the paper need to agree on the assessment design and the variations in assessment that might be made to reflect the needs of particular student cohorts.*
Ensure that assessment tasks are diverse and varied as resources allow *Effective assessment occurs when supported with appropriate time, money, and recognition for good work. The use of different assessment approaches and types, including digital media, will depend on those resources. As resources permit, additional measures can be added to the assessment design.*	**There should be a range of assessment tasks consistent with the use of multiple measures and sources** *A range of evidence drawn from multiple sources will enable greater accuracy in the assessment of student learning.*	**Is there a variety of appropriate assessment methods?** *A variety of assessment enables students to demonstrate their individual capabilities and sustain their motivation, and can reduce opportunities for plagiarism. However, care should be taken to ensure that within an individual paper students are not subject to assessment overload with too many different assessment methods. If the answer to this question is not evident at the paper design stage, it should be addressed at the qualification/ specialisation level where a wider perspective of the papers serving a programme(s) can be observed.* **Are there any problems that particular students or groups of students may face when attempting the assessments?** *An example would be making 'reasonable adjustments' for students with disabilities or addressing issues of cultural diversity. There may be particular issues with the completion of practical and/or field work and these will need to be examined on a case-by-case basis.*

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Ensure that expectations for student and staff workloads are manageable *The numbers and proportions of assessment activities should encourage the attainment of deep rather than superficial learning and take account of the time required for marking. This requires a balanced assessment design whereby students are not pushed into shallow rote learning in order to complete assessment requirements, and staff have time to provide timely and useful feedback.*	**Expectations regarding the time students spend on assessment and the marking requirements should be realistic and enable effective student learning** *Students benefit from early formative assessment and feedback—especially at 100 level. Effective assessment includes spreading assessment activity within and across years rather than conducting a marathon short-term assessment effort in a single year.*	**Is there a reasonable correlation between the effort required for each assessment activity and the weighting that it contributes to the overall grade for the paper?** *There should be a realistic correlation between the time expected to be spent on each assessment activity (including all aspects of preparation and study) and the weighting of the activity in relation to the final grade.* **Is it evident that the time taken for an 'average' student to complete the assessment task(s) is realistic within the overall timescale of the paper?** *The overall 'student effort' for a 15 credit paper is 150 hours including all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment. Excessive assessment loads will de-motivate, discourage and dis-engage students – there must be time for study and reflection. To establish whether the workload is appropriate, staff are encouraged to use the Student Workload Calculator.* **Is it evident that the assessment design has realistically taken into account the available staff resources?** *There has to be a balance between the need for assessment and staff resources available for marking and other assessment related tasks. The turnaround time for assignments and feedback should be as quick as possible, normally no later than 15 working days from the due date. Has consideration been given to computer-aided assessment which might minimise marking effort, or the use of other innovative assessment methods?* **Are there opportunities for early formative assessment and feedback?** *Students will be more successful if they can benefit from feedback before completing the major part of the assessment task(s). There should be an indication of how formative assessment and feedback will be incorporated into the assessment design although such formative assessment does not have to be linked directly to the learning outcomes.*

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Help students succeed on assessment tasks *Students are more likely to perform at their best when sufficient information is provided about the purposes of the assessment and the expected outcomes (which may include a variety of samples or models of successful performance). Students will also benefit most when there are opportunities to practice prior to summative assessment of their learning and when they are given timely feedback about their performance.*	**Implement continuous assessment with clear, manageable timelines**	**Is the purpose of the assessment tasks clear to students?** **Is the assessment design 'hazardous' or 'high risk'?** *For example, a single assessment at the end of the paper is a 'high risk' approach. A number of smaller tasks spread over the paper and escalating in terms of difficulty are much more likely to result in students being successful and engaging with their studies. For a 15 credit paper multiple summative assessment tasks are recommended with the first having a strong developmental, formative component. Care should be taken, however, not to overload students with too many minor tasks that might create an impression of superficial assessment or assessment overload.* **Is the timing of the assessment tasks evident and appropriate for students to gain maximum benefit?** *Thought should be given to the scheduling of the assessment during the paper and all information on assessments must be available to students at the start of the paper.* **Are there opportunities for students to develop understandings through discussing ideas with others?** **Are there opportunities, where appropriate, for students to use the knowledge they are acquiring?**
Maintain integrity of the assessment process	**Assessment should be based on appropriate academic standards** *Assessment activities should align with effective practices in the discipline.*	**How are the assessment standards identified? Do the assessment practices reflect those established within the discipline?** *The assessment design should be guided by established practices in the discipline, with a view to extending those practices in innovative ways to enhance student learning.* **Are the assessment tasks appropriate to, and clearly measuring, the stated learning outcomes?** *Valid assessment requires that the nature and detail of the assessment task must be appropriate to the level of understanding and performance being assessed.* **Have the assessment tasks been designed taking into account the need to minimise the opportunities for plagiarism or other forms of cheating?** *Has thought been given to this problematic issue? For example, the writing of an essay with a title that is repeated year-on-year is an open invitation for plagiarism. Consideration should be given to making regular changes to the assessment activities such as using different examples or different contexts.*

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Evaluate assessment practices *Results from assessment activities should be evaluated to address their validity, reliability, and utility. Poor student performance can reflect limited learning or an ill-designed assessment process. Examining how effectively the assessment design meets the intended purposes of assessment, aligns with the learning outcomes for the paper, and contributes to the achievement of the graduate profile is critical. These principles and guidelines for assessment are provided to support the evaluation and improvement of assessment practices at Massey University.*	**The assessment should be valid, reliable and effective**	**How do the results of assessment provide feedback to the teacher regarding the effectiveness of the assessment design and the teaching and learning methods?** **Has the assessment design taken into account student feedback and views?** *The results of previous paper evaluations, student feedback received during the paper, historic performance data, and views sought in other ways such peer review, should inform the appropriateness of the assessment design. There could be value in engaging students in the design of assessment tasks.*

Responsibilities

The University will provide access to teaching and learning resources which support staff and student learning and the achievement of paper and programme outcomes.

Academic staff will ensure that:

- assessment designs are self-assessed against the Guidelines for every offering of a paper.
- assessment designs are peer-reviewed at least once per year
- their best professional judgement is used in the allocation of marks and/or grades to students' work, and any documentary evidence and/or critical personal circumstances are considered where these are relevant to the allocation of marks and/or grades (this could include statements from a health professional, employer, counsellor or independent member of the community as appropriate).
- all results have been correctly recorded and marking/grading has been duly and accurately performed.
- the Paper Guide includes statements describing the requirements to complete individual assessment items satisfactorily, the requirements for a student to be awarded a passing grade for the paper, and the method of combining marks or grades for individual assessment items into a final grade

Heads of Schools, Institutes or Departments [or in some cases Programme Directors (or equivalent)] are responsible for ensuring that the assessment of students is undertaken in a manner consistent with the Strategy and Principles.

Students are expected to accept responsibility for their learning in the papers in which they are enrolled. In relation to assessment this includes:

- accessing the learning resources provided by the University and for the paper, and engaging in learning activities;
- behaving honestly and ethically in completing pieces of assessment
- adhering to the assessment requirements presented in the Paper Guide (e.g., submission via electronic and/or hard copy, referencing techniques to be used, applying for an extension to the due date for an assignment when circumstances require it)
- avoiding any form of academic misconduct (refer to the Student Academic Integrity Policy & related Procedures).

Audience

All staff and students

Relevant Legislation

None

Legal Compliance

None

Related Procedures/Documents:

- Massey University Calendar
- Teaching and Learning Policy
- Equivalence Policy
- Withholding Grades for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Papers Procedure
- Student Academic Integrity Policy
- Procedure for Managing Breaches of Academic Integrity
- Guidelines for Graduate Profiles (to be developed in 2012)
- Peer Assistance and Review of Teaching Framework and related resources
- Curriculum Mapping Resources (to be developed in 2012)
- Student Workload Calculators (Rowatt, Kehrwald)

Document Management Control

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Appendix 1: Glossary of Some Commonly Used Assessment Terms

Assessment The process of judging how effectively learning is occurring through a process of generating and collecting evidence of a student's attainment of knowledge and skills and comparing that evidence against the assessment criteria.

Assessment criteria Statements that describe how student performance in relation to the stated learning outcomes will be recognised.

Assessment for learning The process of seeking and interpreting evidence of a student's performance for use by students and their teachers to identify where the students are in their learning, where their next learning goals are, and what they need to do to achieve them.

Criterion referenced assessment A form of assessment which measures what students can do against assessment criteria, rather than on their performance relative to other learners

E-portfolio An electronic portfolio, i.e., a file store and information management system that is modeled on the working method used for paper portfolios, but which takes advantage of the capabilities of information and communications technologies, notably allowing students to store digital artefacts, and streamlining the process of review and moderation for students, teachers, and others.

Evidence Materials provided by a student as proof of his or her competence against specified learning outcomes.

Feedback Qualitative information about their performance given to students during a paper and typically after an assessment. Unlike a mark, feedback is explicitly developmental, i.e., oriented towards further progress on the part of the student.

Formative assessment Assessment that provides developmental feedback to a student so that they can adjust their plan for future learning. Formative assessment is often called 'Assessment for learning'.

Grade   A code, often a letter, given to describe the level of achievement. Possible grades are reported in the Glossary of the University Calendar.

Graduate Profile A statement of the intended capabilities of graduates from a particular qualification and/or specialisation. The profile includes descriptions of the generic and specific attributes that graduates are expected to possess including the body of knowledge attained.

Learning outcomes Statements of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that students are expected to demonstrate as a result of successfully completing a course of learning. Learning outcomes are usually stated in terms of observable and/or measurable behaviour.

Moderation of assessment The process of establishing comparability of standards between assessors to ensure the validity, reliability and practicality of an assessment. Moderation can also occur in relation to the assessment design pre and post implementation.

Norm referenced assessment A form of assessment which compares students' performance with those of other students rather than with the assessment criteria.

Peer assessment Assessment of a student by a fellow student or students. Peer assessors apply criteria and standards of judgment as other assessors do.

Performance Standards Statements that describe the level to be achieved in relation to the assessment criteria.

Reliability In assessment, the extent to which a test's results are repeatable and fair from one student to the next, and from one occasion to the next (for example with a different group of students). Many factors affect the reliability of an assessment. Ambiguous instructions to students can make an assessment unreliable since they may be unclear about what they are required to do. Vague marking criteria may result in different markers awarding marks for different reasons or the same marker awarding marks inconsistently between students.

Self-assessment A judgment a student makes about his/her work or level of attainment in relation to the assessment criteria or learning outcomes for an activity. Self-assessment is generally used to develop the individual's ability to think critically about his/her learning.

Summative assessment Assessment, typically undertaken at the end of a learning activity or paper, which is used to make a judgment about the student's overall attainment. A key purpose of summative assessment is typically to record the student's performance in relation to the stated learning outcomes of a paper.

Validity The extent to which an assessment tests the actual abilities that it is supposed to test. The appropriateness of the interpretation and use of the results for any assessment instrument (e.g., a driving test where a candidate is observed driving is highly valid. A test where a candidate describes how they would drive is not valid). There are many different measures of validity.

Useful Links

A compendium of extracts on assessment (Phil Race) can be retrieved from http://phil-race.co.uk/most-popular-downloads/ This includes explanations of concepts such as reliability, transparency and authenticity in assessment and an extensive list of assessment techniques including their advantages and disadvantages.