

STUDENT ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING IN AND AFTER COURSES

Final Report for Senior Fellowship

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www.assessmentfutures.com

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Executive Summary

The senior fellowship focused on the issue of how assessment can enhance learning in and after courses. This purpose of assessment is particularly important as discussions of student assessment are often dominated by the, quite legitimate, needs of certification. However, if assessment does not act to promote students studying in desired ways, it can and does undermine the entire educational enterprise. An emphasis on the role of assessment in enhancing learning beyond the end of courses was included to ensure that assessment does not only focus on immediate achievement but on building the capacity of students to act well in the future. The senior fellow had already made a substantial contribution to the literature on assessment in higher education, but the need identified was to translate what is known by scholars of assessment into forms that were more widely accessible to all staff in Australian higher education institutions.

The program of the senior fellowship therefore linked international research on how assessment can have a beneficial influence on student learning with Australian policy and practice. It did this through a multi-stage process: (a) an international and national team of expert collaborators identified key ideas and practices with a sound empirical base; (b) Selected groups of university teachers and managers worked with these ideas and practices to identify fruitful initiatives for implementation in the overall Australian and local institutional contexts; and (c) they then collaboratively identified strategies to bring about change in assessment at national and institutional level. Representatives of all Australian universities were involved in various aspects of the program.

Resources were developed to support assessment design and development and disseminated through a wide range of events and activities and through a specially designed website. These resources had a strong conceptual base located in the notion that assessment (and indeed other aspects of teaching and learning) needs to enable students to make informed judgements about their own learning and that students need to understand assessment as a process they can use for themselves.

The program was successful in involving almost all the key Australian scholars in the area of assessment for learning in higher education and utilising their expertise. It was also successful in involving institutional leaders, heads of academic development units and academics interested in assessment practice. It not only generated resources for them to use, but also resulted in an accessible document that can be used to guide assessment reform in future years.

The substantive outputs from the program were threefold: (a) a website including sets of resources for those operating at a subject, program and institutional level – www.assessmentfutures.com; (b) events conducted in almost all states and territories involving both teaching staff and institutional leaders to raise awareness of current assessment issues; and (c) an agreed set of propositions to guide assessment reform in Australian higher education institutions for the next ten years.



Introduction

The senior fellowship addressed the question: 'how can assessment enhance learning in and after courses'? It linked international research on how assessment can have a beneficial influence on student learning with Australian policy and practice. It did this through a multi-stage process: (a) an international and national team of expert collaborators identified key ideas and practices with a sound empirical base; (b) selected groups of university teachers and managers worked with these ideas and practices to identify fruitful initiatives for implementation in the overall Australian and local institutional contexts; and (c) they then collaboratively identified strategies to bring about change in assessment at national and institutional level.

The substantive outputs from the fellowship were threefold: (a) a website including sets of resources for those operating at a subject, program and institutional level, which is not discussed in detail here, but can be found at www.assessmentfutures.com; (b) events conducted in most states and territories involving both teaching staff and institutional leaders to raise awareness of current assessment issues; and (c) an agreed set of propositions to guide assessment reform in Australian higher education institutions for the next ten years (included as an Appendix to this report).

Educational issue addressed: assessment for learning

Assessment is one of the most problematic issues in higher education. It has two main purposes that are often in tension: assessment for the certification of students and assessment to promote learning. It occupies considerable amounts of time for both teachers and students and it is often argued that not all of this time is well spent. It has a substantial impact on students' lives over and above its main purposes. It has an emotional impact that can be long lasting, and it is the focus of increasing disputes over fairness, timeliness and authenticity.

Assessment is pivotal in courses. It communicates to students what is important. It has a significant influence on what they do and how they go about studying. It shapes the curriculum by prioritising what is assessed over what is not assessed. Although it has a vital role in classification and certification, its impact on every aspect of teaching and student learning is pervasive. The seminal review by Black and Wiliam (1998) stimulated considerable research and development in higher education on the role of what is known as formative assessment; that is, assessment that influences what and how students learn. While many studies have been small scale, they have cumulatively had an impact on an understanding of what constitutes good practice in assessment for learning. In particular they have led to awareness of the inappropriateness of separating considerations of teaching and learning, on the one hand, and assessment, on the other, as if they were independent practices that did not influence each other.

The past ten years have also seen a greater flourishing of innovations and taking up of new approaches to assessment than ever before. These have included self and peer assessment; use of portfolios and other integrated assessment strategies; group and collaborative assessment; linking of generic attributes into assessment practices; and use of electronic media to enhance assessment. These new approaches have been prompted both by dissatisfaction with the limitations of conventional assessment methods and by the need to extend the range of learning outcomes included in assessment activities. Unfortunately, in parallel with the proliferation of examples of good practice, there has been a rationalisation of assessment influenced by adverse



staff-student ratios, which has driven assessment back to activities governed more by the need to generate grades, than to promote effective learning.

In recent years, there has begun to be a desire to consider not only the impact of assessment on learning now, but also its effects beyond the term of the course of study in which students are currently enrolled (Boud, 2000). This desire has taken up the concern of higher education to provide students with a foundation for a lifetime of professional practice in which they will be required continually to learn and to engage with new ideas that go well beyond the content of their university course.

As part of this, a critique has been building on the inadequacy of formative assessment practices that help students' learning during their courses (Sadler, 1998, Yorke, 2003). There has also been substantial criticism of the role of summative assessment and its negative effects on student learning (Ecclestone, 2002, Knight, 2002, Knight & Yorke, 2003). There is also concern that simply increasing feedback to students is not in itself a worthwhile practice unless it also builds students' capacity to critique and improve their own work (Hounsell, 2003). There is a flourishing literature exploring assessment practices that have positive effects on learning (e.g. Woodward's 1998 work on reflection in the context of journals and portfolios), and in recent years there has been considerable interest in the notion of constructive alignment of learning outcomes, teaching activities and assessment (Biggs, 2003). There have also been important initiatives that look at the long-term consequences of university courses, including assessment, on subsequent learning in professional practice (Mentkowski, 2000).

In an earlier paper (Boud, 2000), I identified the needs of assessment in a learning society and introduced requirements for a new way of thinking about assessment. I suggested that current assessment practices in higher education did not equip students well for a lifetime of learning and the assessment challenges they would face in the future. I argued that assessment practices should be judged from the point of view of whether they effectively equip students for a lifetime of assessing their own learning. The paper further proposed that the concept of sustainable assessment might be usefully adopted. It took the view that assessment could be sustainable if it "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs" (p. 151). That is, assessment activities should not only address the immediate needs of certification or feedback to students on their current learning, but also contribute to their prospective learning.

There is currently a wide array of assessment approaches potentially available, an increasing literature on the evaluation of the effectiveness of different approaches, and a population of university teachers ill-prepared and baffled by the options available to them. There have been important projects funded by the ALTC and its predecessor bodies about general advice on assessment ('Assessing Learning in Australian Universities'), assessment in particular disciplines (e.g. biological science), leadership in assessment at institutional level and about particular assessment innovations. There have also been useful developments overseas, for example, Carless, Joughin and Liu, (2006) in Hong Kong and Mentkowski and Associates (2000) in the USA.

A different focus from that adopted by these other assessment projects was needed. This involved a more strategic analysis of priorities for assessment development and an emphasis on promoting, rather than measuring, learning through assessment through carefully selected practices. Most importantly, it involved engagement by practitioners, managers and those who develop academics' skills in assessment with the best of current international knowledge about assessment and how it can be most effectively promoted.



The program built on a scholarly project completed in 2007, and collaborative work with Nancy Falchikov at The University of Edinburgh (Boud and Falchikov, 2006). It resulted in a book published by Routledge: *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education: Learning for the Longer Term* (Boud and Falchikov, 2007). In this book Falchikov and I brought together key scholars from different countries to explore issues on the theme of how assessment in higher education should be reconceptualised to equip students for continuing learning after graduation. During the program a further book – *Assessment, Learning and Judgement in Higher Education* – was published that included additional work by many of the authors who had influenced the formation of the program (Joughin 2009).

The first of these books provided a starting point for the activities of the fellowship, which focused on ensuring that this, often overseas research, had an impact on Australian higher education. The rationale for the emphasis of the program was provided in a chapter I wrote 'Reframing assessment as if learning were important'. This argues that a conception of assessment as about informing judgement (of staff about students, and students of their own work) is needed to replace a focus on measurement. An initial sketch of how some of the ideas might be introduced into university courses was provided in the final chapter 'Developing assessment for informing judgement'. This proposed strategies about how assessment might build over course units and over time throughout a program of study.

The book necessarily stopped short in working through the implications of these ideas and those of the other contributors for particular changes in higher education practice. It did not address institutional or disciplinary considerations although examples were drawn from many different institutions and disciplines. Importantly in the context of the program, it did not engage with how the good practices identified can translate into wider settings and have an impact on students generally.

Outcomes

The main outcome of the program was to mobilise key individuals and representatives of organisations to change practice in assessment for learning in Australian higher education institutions. The particular outcomes pursued were:

- the formation of networks around the theme of assessment and learning
- identification of key principles and examples of practice in selected areas
- development and documentation of strategies for assessment practice and implementation for use at institutional and course level
- identification of an agenda for future development in the area of assessment for learning beyond the course.

The intended outcomes aligned with the objectives of the ALTC as they:

- promoted a strategic change in Australian higher education institutions through a focus on how research-based ideas about assessment can be used to enhance learning
- raised the profile and encouraged the recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching through showing that assessment is a key element of teaching and that those who focus on it make an important contribution to the teaching enterprise
- raised the profile and acknowledged excellence in assessment for learning through the use of outstanding Australian work as examples in its outputs



- developed effective mechanisms for the identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice through the twofold strategy of combining international expertise on assessment with the needs of Australian higher education institutions through the consultation and engagement process
- acted to share and benchmark assessment for learning practices through the involvement of key national and international players
- identified a key learning and teaching issue that impacts on Australian higher education – assessment for longer term learning – and facilitated national approaches to address the issue through a multifaceted strategy of selection and prioritising of key assessment ideas for development and engagement with those who can influence the adoption of these ideas.

Approach and methodology

The fellowship aimed to improve current situations in which assessment does not have a sufficiently positive influence on learning through a strategy that:

- identified key issues for assessment for learning at course and institutional levels
- brought together those who have a good grasp of research and development relating to assessment and learning in order to undertake a strategic review of assessment developments and identify those areas fruitful for national and local initiatives for promoting learning
- created selective and focused resources for assessment implementation to provide the focus for strategic development
- engaged influential practitioners and policy makers from a diverse range of Australian higher education institutions with the ideas and resources to identify fruitful areas of application, and what implementation issues needed to be addressed to ensure impact on student learning.

These ends were achieved through the following activities:

Overseas study program

Key issues for assessment and learning practices were identified along with ideas for implementation. The program commenced with an overseas study program that involved visits to key sites engaged in research and development of assessment for learning. The emphasis was twofold. Firstly identifying and documenting strategies which have been found useful beyond the originators, and secondly, identifying ways in which assessment ideas have been taken up and utilised in higher education institutions. A particular focus was on practices that were established in one disciplinary area, but which showed potential for adoption in others.

Although I had good contacts in the area of assessment and learning and was in touch with the literature, much of the detailed resources required were located in what might be called the ephemeral literature, institutional practices and detailed contexts of particular programs. The main aim of the overseas study program was to allow me to drill down into assessment practices in different institutions to identify the examples and illustrations that would complement those that come from Australia. An international team of collaborators aided this process. Their bases were used as central locations from which to explore practices in the relevant countries: Edinburgh, Oxford and Leuven. Visits were made to institutions nearby to extend the range. An additional visit involved Professor David Carless, University of Hong Kong, who led the Learning-Oriented Assessment Project that has produced resources similar to those to be utilised in the program, and with whom I had previously collaborated.



The collaborative team and its roles

A national and international team of collaborators was assembled for the program. Collaboration took three forms in the different phases of the program:

(a) International team

This consisted of a specialist group of those who have demonstrated impact on assessment for learning in higher education through their research and scholarship. Involvement of these people provided a base of connections between work overseas and that in Australia. The team drew particularly on collaborators in Europe where there has been a considerable body of application of ideas to practice. The international team comprised:

- Professor Dai Hounsell (The University of Edinburgh) who is an authority on the use of feedback in undergraduate teaching and has undertaken major studies of teaching and learning in the disciplines.
- Professor Margaret Price (Oxford Brookes University) who is from the disciplinary area of business. She is Director of a UK Centre of Excellence for Teaching and Learning, specialising in assessment and learning with a focus on assessment standards.
- Professor Filip Dochy (Catholic University Leuven) who leads what is probably the largest research group in the world with a focus on assessment and learning.

I worked with the members of the international team during the overseas study program to prepare the inputs for the approaches that were used with the Australian team. It was intended that one member of the international team would visit Australia for each of the capital city events and act as a drawcard for those events. As it eventuated, scheduling problems meant that Filip Dochy was not able to come. In addition to these roles, the team also responded to resources developed by the national team and myself.

(b) National team

The national team was chosen as a senior group of those with strong reputations in assessment and in the application of assessment for student learning who could have policy influence. It is geographically dispersed and includes members from a variety of disciplines.

- Professor Royce Sadler, formerly Director of the Griffith Institute of Higher Education, who has an international reputation for his work on assessment, particularly with regard to a standards-based perspective.
- Associate Professor Mark Freeman from the disciplinary area of accountancy who was Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Economics and Business at The University of Sydney. He has undertaken major innovations in the use of peer assessment in classes with very large numbers of students. During the period of the fellowship he became one of the ALTC Discipline Scholars, for the area of business.
- Dr Gordon Joughin, Senior Lecturer in the Centre for Educational Development and Interactive Resources at the University of Wollongong and newly returned to Australia from Hong Kong where he was one of the leaders of the Learning-Oriented Assessment Project. Dr Joughin acted as the participant evaluator for the program.
- Professor Richard James, Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education and Professor in Higher Education at the University of Melbourne. He led the project team that designed the ALTC Awards for Australian University Teaching and the national project 'Assessing Learning in Australian Universities'.
- Professor Sally Kift, is Professor of Law and Director of the First Year Experience Project, Queensland University of Technology. She had particular interest and



expertise in first year undergraduate teaching and is well connected in disciplinary networks. She was also included because her experience as a 2006 ALTC senior fellow was invaluable. Professor Kift subsequently became an ALTC Discipline Scholar in the area of Law.

Development of strategies for assessment practice and implementation

This involved convening the national team of collaborators in Australia to work on the initial documentation and to critique the strategies identified. The team made judgements about which of the ideas and strategies could be most fruitfully promoted in the context of Australian higher education institutions. The national team sorted ideas and resources identified internationally along with those they identified for themselves. From this emerged a set of key assessment strategies that research and experience has shown to be effective in having a positive effect on learning in the short and long term. It was also involved in developing a set of institutional and disciplinary strategies likely to enhance the take up of these practices.

The key assessment elements identified were sets of assessment practices focused on particular tasks that students complete. Assessment practices are constructed from elements combined into an appropriate task. The features of an activity that contributes to learning can then be identified and new combinations made to suit a wide range of circumstances. Assessment elements developed include those that function as parts of teaching and learning within a course, along with those parts of assessment that commonly lead to marks and grades.

The elements were presented as a smorgasbord of ideas rather than an agenda to be followed. These ideas were:

- actively engaging students in learning tasks
- utilising 'authentic' and investigative activities
- incorporating student-designed assessments
- incorporating integrative tasks
- becoming aware of learning and judgement
- modelling and practice
- working with peers
- giving and receiving feedback.

A total of 40 different sets of assessment practices that can be used to promote learning were identified. Particular emphasis was given to strategies that are not intensive of staff time and which work with large groups of students.

Full details can be found on www.assessmentfutures.com

Development of an assessment web site

A major outcome of the fellowship was the development and promotion of a website. It was set up to provide a rationale for the ideas, extensive links to relevant projects and activities elsewhere, resources developed as part of the fellowship and facilities for response. The website is hosted at UTS and has been integrated into the normal teaching and learning provision of the institution. This means that it will be maintained after the end of the fellowship. The ALTC Exchange was not considered a suitable platform for the materials developed, as it was insufficiently flexible.

The website differs from other websites about assessment in that it takes a strong conceptual position about the nature of assessment. This view is that assessment must contribute first to learning. If it does not do this then features of assessment needed for certification are not important. It is also based on the notion that assessment (and



indeed other aspects of teaching and learning) needs to enable students to make informed judgements about their own learning, and that students need to understand assessment as a process they can use for themselves.

Most effort was placed on getting the overall positioning of assessment clear and well represented. This meant that less time could be devoted to populating it with large numbers of examples in different disciplines. However, many illustrations from a variety of disciplines are used to clarify the key ideas.

Additional features of the website are: extensive discussion of issues of design of assessment activities and advice on barriers encountered by those seeking to change assessment; the inclusion of a comprehensive list of books on assessment and learning in higher education; and links to all the main local and overseas websites that are devoted to assessment for learning in higher education.

Documenting approaches that impact on practice

This involved taking the outcomes of the teamwork of the earlier phase of the program, and turning them into a form that could be considered by a wider group that was not so closely involved in assessment research. It was anticipated that these would take the form of sets of principles with rationales, sources and extensive examples of applicability in different disciplines, at different levels of an institution (course, subject, etc.), at different levels of a course, and with different numbers of students. This aspect of the plan was modified and these ideas were either incorporated into the website or into the set of propositions described below.

Engagement activities

Utilising networks suggested by the national team, the ALTC and local contacts, full two-day events were conducted in three capital cities – Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney – and modified versions conducted in Adelaide and Perth. The purpose of these events was to engage participants in workshop activities to consider the strategies for assessment practice and implementation and how they would utilise them in their own context. The events were in two parts: the first day recruited teaching staff from a variety of disciplines with a particular interest in assessment and learning along with members of academic development units who advise staff, the second was for senior academics to take up issues of policy and implementation within their institutions.

Strategy event

A centrepiece of the dissemination of the outcomes of the fellowship was the convening of a national event on assessment for learning. This brought together an invited group of approximately 40 people. The aim was to identify national priorities in promoting assessment for learning through the work of the ALTC, discipline networks, higher education institutions and the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA). It drew on the strategies for assessment practice and implementation from the previous phases to develop an agenda for further development of assessment for learning. The event was in two parts. On the first day a group of approximately 12 'assessment experts' generated a set of propositions that represented their best judgement of forward-looking strategies informed by research. On the second day these were reviewed by senior representatives of nearly all Australian universities (only two universities were not represented). Participants consisted of the national team members, and those from the extended team of collaborators: various pro vice-chancellors (teaching and learning), chairs of academic boards, directors of academic development centres, those with key roles in teaching and learning in the disciplines, recent and current ALTC grant holders and senior fellows, particularly those whose projects have an assessment dimension, associate deans (teaching and learning),



members of university teaching and learning committees and prominent practitioners known to have influenced colleagues.

After much editing and a number of iterations following the meeting, a set of propositions was agreed. These constituted the final major output from the fellowship: *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*. This is a succinct document that can be used in all higher education institutions as part of discussions about how assessment can be changed to have a better impact on student learning. See Appendix 2.

The selection of participants and their role as owners of the propositions was a key feature of the dissemination strategy.

Strategy for profile building and dissemination

The entire program was designed as an extended exercise of profile building and dissemination. Dissemination was integral to all stages. The following were key features of the approach adopted.

- Involvement of an international team of academics to raise the profile of the program and Australian work on assessment and learning elsewhere.
- Participation with a diverse national team to identify networks of influence and to distribute selective ideas.
- Regional engagement events to involve an extended team with the work of the program and to enlist their networks to further disseminate ideas.
- A national strategy event that considered not only the substantive issues identified in assessment and learning, but strategies for influencing practice in Australian higher education institutions.
- Documentation of all aspects of the project including assessment principles, exemplars of good practice and implementation strategies on a website linked to other sites that provide resources for teaching, learning and assessment.

The program was designed to directly influence different groups of people: higher education teachers who will adopt new practices; academic managers with faculty and institutional roles who can facilitate the adoption of new practices; members of disciplinary education groups who are involved in the adoption of assessment practices in their fields; and academic development personnel who have a key role to play in ensuring the work of the program is represented in courses and workshops for university teachers. Further dissemination occurred both through them and through the availability of the resources produced on the project website. In addition, opportunities were taken to publicise the work of the project through newsletters and other publications and through offering sessions at conferences such as the HERDSA conference, the annual Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) conference on assessment and evaluation and various subject education conferences.

The following summary of presentations given illustrates the range of involvement throughout Australia and internationally.

Presentations given related to the senior fellowship

The following presentations were given during the extended period of the senior fellowship that related in some way to the theme of the fellowship. Support from multiple other sources was provided for travel, etc. Presentations were given in seven



countries other than Australia (UK, Ireland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, South Africa and Hong Kong) and in all states and territories other than Tasmania.

Keynote addresses

- Chemistry Education Division, International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry, Glasgow (August 2009)
- Opening Keynote, Research Centre for Lifelong Learning, Open University of the Netherlands, Heerlen (September 2008)
- Public lecture series, National Academy for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (NAIRTL), Research-led Assessment in Higher Education project, University College, Cork (January 2009)
- Assessment for High Quality Learning Conference, University of Edinburgh (June 2008)
- Conference on Problem-Based Learning, University College, Dublin (June 2008)
- All Ireland Built Environment Education Conference, University of Ulster, Belfast Campus (January 2010)
- National Psychology Learning and Teaching Conference, University of Bath (July 2008)
- Conference on Immersive Experience in Higher Education, Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education (SCEPTRE), University of Surrey (January 2008)
- Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal (September 2009)
- ATN Assessments and Evaluation Conference, Sydney (December 2006)
- International Conference on Experiential Learning, Sydney (December 2008)
- Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, University of Ballarat (December 2009)
- Annual Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Edith Cowan University (November 2009)
- Educate and Innovate Conference, Brisbane (March 2010)
- International Conference on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, Singapore (June 2010)

Other conference presentations

- Assessment for Lifelong Learning Symposium, European Association for Learning and Instruction Conference, Amsterdam (August 2009)
- Roundtable Discussion, European Association for Learning and Instruction Assessment Conference, Potsdam (August 2008)
- ATN Assessment and Evaluation Conference, Melbourne (November 2009)
- ATN Assessment and Evaluation Conference, Adelaide (November 2008)
- ALTC Assessment Forum, Adelaide (November 2008)
- Pre-Conference Workshop, Higher Education Research and Development Association of Australasia Annual Conference, Darwin (July 2009)

Special senior fellowship events

Conducted in Brisbane (March 2009, n=57, 39), Melbourne (July 2009, n=24, 27) and Sydney (July 2009, n=43, 51; September 2009, n=12, 37). These consisted of workshops for both senior leaders and assessment practitioners in each location. In Adelaide (April 2009), Perth (November 2009) equivalent less formal meetings were arranged.



Seminars and workshops overseas

- Centre for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, University of Edinburgh (September 2008)
- University-wide seminar, Leeds Metropolitan University (October 2008)
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Assessment for Learning, University of Northumbria (September 2008)
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Practice-Based Professional Learning, Open University (October 2008)
- Research Group on Lifelong Learning, Catholic University of Leuven (October 2008)
- University-wide seminar, Centre for the Advancement of University Teaching, University of Hong Kong (October 2008)
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Assessment Standards Exchange (ASkE), Oxford Brookes University (December 2008)
- Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Work-Based Learning, Middlesex University (January 2009)
- Institute seminar, Hong Kong Institute of Education (December 2007)
- University-wide seminar, University of Brighton (October 2008)
- Continuing Professional Learning Symposium, University of Leeds (January 2010)
- ReEngineering Assessment Project, University of Strathclyde (December 2007)
- Faculty of Education seminar, University of Strathclyde (December 2007)
- Centre for Higher Education Practice symposia, University of Ulster, both Jordanstown and Coleraine campuses (January 2009, July 2009)
- Workshop for the All-Ireland Society for Higher Education, Queens University, Belfast (June 2008)

Seminars, workshops and other events, Australia

- The University of Adelaide (April 2009)
- University of South Australia (April 2009)
- Flinders University (April 2009)
- The University of Sydney (March 2009)
- University of Technology, Sydney (June 2009, November 2009)
- University of Wollongong (March 2009)
- University of New England (November 2009)
- Queensland University of Technology (August 2007, March 2009)
- Griffith University (March 2009)
- The University of Melbourne (June 2009)
- RMIT University (July 2009)
- Macquarie University (September 2009)
- Monash University (September 2007)
- Murdoch University (November 2009)
- Charles Sturt University (February 2010)
- Edith Cowan University (May 2010)

International networking outcomes

As an active scholar in the area for many years, I already had extensive international contacts and have received invitations from overseas institutions to contribute to assessment discussions for some time. The fellowship has enabled some of the key links to be cemented and new ones established. Continuing links were forged with five of the UK Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, including the two key assessment centres at Oxford Brookes University and the University of Northumbria,



and the two major centres in Scotland: the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Centre at the University of Edinburgh and the ReEngineering Assessment Project at the University of Strathclyde. In addition, an important link was made with the research group at the Catholic University Leuven that has produced more research on assessment in higher education than anywhere else in Europe.

Invitations beyond the end of the fellowship have been made and visits to three of these centres are scheduled for later in 2010.

A joint project with Monash University (Dr Liz Molloy) has been planned on the theme of feedback for learning. This incorporates international collaborations in the assessment community in the health professions.

Evaluation

In keeping with the overall approach of the program to foster engagement and networking, the evaluation strategy was twofold. In stage one of the strategy, one member of the national team, Gordon Joughin, was engaged as a participant evaluator. His role was to participate at all stages of the program. As well as contributing his expertise as a full member of the team, he had a special function to (a) conduct evaluations of all events, (b) act as critical friend designated to offer a counter-reading of the work and plans of the team, and (c) collect data to be used in the overall evaluation of the program.

Stage two of the evaluation strategy occurred in the final months of the program. The participant evaluator undertook a critical appraisal of the work of the program drawing on the documentation assembled in stage one of the evaluation strategy. He prepared a report (see Appendix 2) that is included as part of this final report.

Other academic duties undertaken during the fellowship

It was necessary to delay the start of the fellowship to ensure that responsibilities associated being Dean of the University Graduate School at UTS were completed. It would not have been possible to combine a fellowship of this kind with a management role.

Other academic duties were minimised during the period of the fellowship. It was necessary to continue supervision of doctoral students, and to maintain my disciplinary research, especially as I held an ARC Discovery Project during the period of the fellowship. Publication and presentations at conferences of this other work were necessarily continued.

Some academic writing related to the theme of the fellowship was undertaken, but this was based on work already underway prior to commencement.

See Appendix 4 for details of publications.

Factors critical to the success of the program and factors that impeded its success

The most important factor critical to the success of the program was the time made available through the senior fellowship away from other academic activities. While the program built on my previous work in the area and the extensive overseas contacts I



had made, there would have been no time in my normal schedule to undertake the development work needed to translate the ideas available into different forms that could be widely used.

The second most important factor was the willingness of the ALTC to be flexible with regard to both the starting date and the end date. If I had been held to the original timings other work would have intruded to such an extent that not all of the outcomes of the program could have been realised. Although the amount of funding did not change, the opportunity to spread the component of it not related to my salary was of vital importance. It gave far more opportunities for presentations in Australia and overseas, in enabled full negotiation of the final crucial document – the Assessment 2020 Propositions – and it enabled resources to be devoted to the work of the program from other sources: the time of collaborators, invitations and funding from overseas institutions for travel and accommodation, etc.

The third key factor was an early decision undertaken in consultation with the national team to move away from foregrounding a disciplinary focus on business and law and on large classes alone. While conventional wisdom suggests that nothing gets taken up in teaching and learning without a disciplinary orientation, I think this is an overly simplistic analysis. It is an analysis that is disrespectful of academic staff and which regards them as captives of their disciplines. The sheer energy of multidisciplinary groups engaging with assessment ideas and being able to translate them into their own contexts betrays this as a limiting notion that the ALTC needs to be cautious about. Of course, many things work well through a disciplinary focus, but increasingly, academics are seeing themselves as being in the business of sophisticated high-level teachers and managers of learning who have a lot to learn from others engaged in similar enterprises, irrespective of where they might be found. They like disciplinary examples, but they are not so restricted in their training that they can't generate ideas and practices of their own.

The only factors impeding the success of the program are minor in comparison.

There have been tensions to be managed between work on the senior fellowship and other institutional and professional demands. It is not realistic to expect that other academic work can be put on hold for a year. To do so would leave the fellowship holder too vulnerable after the program had been completed. One cannot ignore one's obligations as a corporate citizen, nor can research be stopped. Although I have done considerable research on assessment in the past, which has been particularly convenient, it is not my current main research area. Time supervising students, writing papers, giving seminars and attending conferences in this other area is needed if fellowships are not to be a one-way transformation to other roles entirely. They cannot be this, or more precisely, they cannot be planned to be this. Therefore a return to 'normal' work has to be assumed.

Finally, while I have found the staff of ALTC extraordinarily supportive, there are features of its operation that could be developed further to enhance this kind of program. These range from the basic: a lack of knowledge and expertise about teaching, learning and assessment on the part of its own staff that means that the ALTC is necessarily excluded from any substantive discussions of the program, to the practical: given that so many ALTC projects and programs are organising events in capital cities, it should be possible for advice on venues, costings and resources to be available to the large numbers of people undertaking very similar tasks. More resources could be spent on the substance of programs if project staff members in each institution were not occupied with repeating common organising tasks such as identifying venues.



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Appendices

1. Timeline
2. Evaluation report
3. *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*
4. Publications



Appendix 1

Timeline

Time line	Activity
January-June 2008	<i>Initial planning and organisation</i>
July 2008	<i>Commenced full-time on Senior Fellowship Identify key issues for assessment for learning practices</i>
Aug-Oct 2008	<i>Overseas study program Working with International Team members</i>
Nov-Dec 2008	<i>Establish Program website Development of strategies for assessment practice and implementation Working with National Team members ALTC and ATN Assessment Events</i>
Jan 2009	<i>Overseas conferences</i>
Feb 2009	<i>Planning for National events Developing resources, Building website</i>
March 2009	<i>Brisbane events</i>
April 2009	<i>Adelaide events</i>
May 2009	<i>Developing resources, Building website</i>
June 2009	<i>Melbourne and Sydney events End of full-time on Senior Fellowship</i>
July 2009	<i>HERDSA workshop</i>
September 2009	<i>National Strategy Event Documentation of outcomes</i>
Oct-Nov 2009	<i>Revisions of propositions</i>
2010	<i>Completion of reports</i>



Appendix 2

Evaluation Report

Evaluation of the ALTC Senior Fellowship program of Professor David Boud: 'Student assessment for learning in and after courses'

Dr Gordon Joughin, University of Wollongong

December 2009

Introduction

The senior fellowship proposal on 'Student assessment for learning in and after courses' provided a straightforward set of strategies well aligned with the senior fellowship's intended outcomes. This evaluation report focuses on the extent to which the strategies were implemented and the outcomes attained, noting adjustments made to the planned strategies and hence to the actual outcomes. The proposed strategies and outcomes are expressed in several different forms in the senior fellowship proposal. This report uses the set of strategies listed under Section 6 of the proposal, 'Strategy for profile-building and dissemination' since this neatly encapsulates the key steps in this senior fellowship program, while the intended outcomes are simply those nominated in Section 5 of the proposal.

6. Strategy for profile-building and dissemination

1. Involvement of an international team of overseas academics to raise the profile of the program and Australian work on assessment and learning internationally
2. Participation with a diverse national team to identify networks of influence and to distribute selective ideas
3. Regional engagement events to involve an extended team with the work of the program and to enlist their networks to further distribute selective ideas
4. A national strategy event that will consider not only the substantive issues identified in assessment and learning, but strategies for influencing practice in Australian universities
5. Documentation of all aspects of the project including assessment principles, exemplars of good practice and implementation strategies made available on a website linked to other sites that provide resources for teaching, learning and assessment.



5. *Intended outcomes*

The main outcome of the program is to mobilise key individuals and representatives of organisations to change practice in assessment for learning in Australian universities. The particular outcomes will be

1. The formation of networks around the theme of assessment and learning
2. Identification of key principles and examples of practice in selected areas
3. Development and documentation of strategies for assessment practice and implementation for use at institutional and course level.
4. Identification of an agenda for future development in the area of assessment for learning beyond the course

This evaluation combines the two-stage evaluation originally proposed since it was recognised that the final evaluation, being dependent on the first-stage participant evaluation, could appropriately be completed by the participant evaluator. The evaluator attended all meetings of the national team, the state events in Melbourne and Sydney, and the final national event. Traditional participant satisfaction data were collected at the Brisbane event, while data on significant learning and resultant intentions were collected at all three state events. The key data from the national event was in the form of the event's outcomes. This evaluation report is based on the data collected, the evaluator's observations of the events attended, and his perceptions of the website.

The extent to which the proposed strategies were implemented

1. Involvement of an international team

The international team proposed was successfully engaged in the project, with Professor Margaret Price and Professor Dai Hounsell visiting Australia to contribute to the three state events. The team members also met with Professor Boud at the early stage of the program and provided comments on the final outcome of the program, the 'Assessment 2020' statement.

2. Participation with a diverse national team

The nominated national team was convened and functioned as proposed, and contributed actively to the design and implementation of the state and national events, with each member presenting at one of the state events and all members playing a major role in the national event. The national team also helped to identify experts for the national event. Given their profiles and positions, members of the national team are well positioned to continue to disseminate ideas beyond the formal life of the program.

3. State events

The three state events noted in Professor Boud's Progress Report were conducted in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney using the two-part structure nominated in that report:

- (i) *Assessment Futures: Student assessment for learning in and after courses* (open to all academic staff)
 - Attendance at all venues was high and widely dispersed, with a total of 143 participants from 24 universities.



- Most attendees were at the lecturer or senior lecturer level. Common roles included subject coordinator, sub-dean, academic developer, and member of school teaching and learning committees. All were engaged in activities designed to improve assessment in their universities.
 - The presentations were all of an exceptionally high standard, with participant evaluations noting a wide range of benefits. All respondent participants at the Brisbane event rated its helpfulness at 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale, while participants at all events named numerous benefits gained from attendance.
- (ii) *Changing assessment to focus on learning: Implications for universities* (an invited forum for opinion leaders)
- Attendance at all venues was high, with 91 attending from 23 universities.
 - The nature of the attendees is important, since the program was seeking attendees who would be influential in their own contexts. Attendees included:
 - a small number with university-wide roles (President of Academic Board and Chair of University Assessment Committee; Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching and Chair of University Learning and Teaching Committee; senior policy advisor)
 - a large number with faculty-wide responsibilities (Deputy- or Associate-Dean Teaching and Learning; Chair of Faculty Assessment Board; chair of faculty education committee) - sometimes these participants were members of university committees
 - a high number of academic developers involved in professional development for assessment, assessment-related projects, or heading academic development units.
 - The day long program included high quality presentations and inter- and intra-university discussions on how to progress assessment for learning across whole institutions. The latter were characterised by a high level of engagement and the generation of strategies and issues for further consideration and/or action within participants' institutions.

In summary, the three state events were effective in exposing a large number of academics at different levels, in different roles, and from across these states' universities, to the themes of the fellowship and in promoting conversations at multiple levels regarding assessment strategies and their implementation in participants' own contexts. While there were limited numbers of attendees from the most senior level of universities, the large number of attendees with important teaching, learning and assessment roles at the faculty level, along with a significant participation by academic developers who often play a pivotal facilitative role in change is noteworthy. The strategy's intention to engage colleagues in the work of the senior fellowship program, with the expectation that they would utilise their networks to further disseminate ideas, was clearly met. What may happen in regarding such dissemination is beyond the scope of the program and this evaluation.

4. The national event

The final event of the fellowship had the challenging objectives "to identify national priorities in promoting assessment for learning" and "to develop an agenda for further development of assessment for learning" (Proposal, Part C, Section 4). The two-stage process used to address this, involving (i) a day long meeting of assessment experts to generate a set of assessment for learning propositions using the well established 'nominal group technique' followed by (ii) the critical review and refinement of these by a



representative group of university leaders in concert with the experts, seemed an eminently appropriate means of identifying priorities and developing consensus for an agenda for further action.

- Twelve assessment experts were identified by the senior fellow in consultation with the national team and through a library search of Australian authors of internationally published assessment articles. This exhaustive process ensured that the group of experts was comprised of the most appropriate colleagues.
- The resulting group of 16 experts (including the six members of the national team) subsequently met. The nominal group process was closely followed and all participants contributed effectively in generating a provisional agreed set of clearly formulated assessment for learning propositions.
- The experts met the following day with 37 leaders from 36 universities. Most universities were represented by deputy- or pro-vice-chancellors teaching and learning or by directors of teaching and learning centres, confirming the importance of assessment reform in their institutions and the success of the program in attracting the intended audience of university leaders. The participants were effectively engaged in a series of small- and whole-group discussions to clarify the meaning of the propositions, to challenge their appropriateness, to modify them, and to add other propositions. This process appeared to lead to consensus on the propositions as well as numerous suggestions for how and where they should be promoted.

In summary, the national event process was effectively implemented, and the event clearly succeeded in meeting the fourth and perhaps most important intended outcome of the program, namely “identification of an agenda for future development in the area of assessment for learning beyond the course”, this agenda being in the form of the ‘Assessment 2020’ propositions.

5. Documentation of the program

The program website is clearly presented, has a structure which is easy to follow, and provides: an overview of the program, short presentations of the key ideas behind the program, links to useful external sites, access to downloadable up-to-date resources, a series of ideas and checklists to support changing assessment practices at different levels of a university, and a small number of practical examples from six subject areas. A more extensive list of examples, drawn from a broader range of subject areas, would have been useful, but may have been impossible to develop within the constraints of the program – examples of any educational practices that highlight specific approaches are commonly difficult to locate. The hosting of the site by the University of Technology Sydney’s Institute for Interactive Media and Learning (IML) is particularly helpful since the IML’s site is well known, widely used, and well maintained.

In summary, the strategy to document all aspects of the project was effectively implemented.

The extent to which the intended outcomes were achieved

The successful implementation of the program strategies noted above suggests that the intended outcomes of the senior fellowship would have been met and this does indeed seem to be the case:

- Outcomes 2 and 3 noted at the beginning of this report should have been achieved without difficulty given the senior fellow’s expertise, the quality of input from the International and National Teams, and the process that was followed. Outcome 2,



“the identification of key principles and examples of practice in selected areas” and Outcome 3 regarding strategies for assessment practice are both clearly documented on the website.

- Outcome 1, the formation of networks, is more difficult to evidence. Neither the intended strategies nor the strategies as implemented should have been expected to develop enduring networks of colleagues. The state and national events did bring colleagues from across and within universities together in formal and informal conversation and it is possible that these discussions will lead to ongoing contacts over assessment for learning. Since these discussions are typical of the ‘changing conversations’ described by Shaw in her work on complexity and change in organisations, there should be a reasonable expectation that the program will have boosted the prospects of further conversation and action in and across universities on assessment for learning.
- Outcome 4, the “identification of an agenda for future development ... of assessment for learning” is perhaps the most significant of the intended outcomes. It has been clearly met by the generation of a set of substantive propositions, developed by the best expertise in Australia, critiqued and improved by the international team, and modified and endorsed by a representative group of university leaders.

Conclusion

The strategies proposed for this program, as modified according to the senior fellow’s progress report, were successfully implemented and the intended outcomes achieved to a high degree. While benefits will arise from the activities of the program, its eventual value may well lie in the impact of the ‘Assessment 2020’ on the sector.

Gordon Joughin
University of Wollongong
December 2009



Appendix 3

Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education

A higher resolution version of this document is available from www.assessmentfutures.com





Assessment 2020

Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education

Preamble

Universities face substantial change in a rapidly evolving global context. The challenges of meeting new expectations about academic standards in the next decade and beyond mean that assessment will need to be rethought and renewed.

This document provides a stimulus for those involved in the redevelopment of assessment practices. It draws on the expertise of a group of highly experienced assessment researchers, academic development practitioners and senior academic managers to identify current best thinking about the ways assessment will need to address immediate and future demands.

Underpinning principles

- > Assessment is a central feature of teaching and the curriculum. It powerfully frames how students learn and what students achieve. It is one of the most significant influences on students' experience of higher education and all that they gain from it. The reason for an explicit focus on improving assessment practice is the huge impact it has on the quality of learning.
- > Assessment is the making of judgements about how students' work meets appropriate standards. Teachers, markers and examiners have traditionally been charged with that responsibility. However, students themselves need to develop the capacity to make judgements about both their own work and that of others in order to become effective continuing learners and practitioners.
- > Assessment plays a key role in both fostering learning and the certification of students. However, unless it first satisfies the educational purpose of ensuring students can identify high quality work and can relate this knowledge to their own work, the likelihood that they will reach high standards themselves is much reduced.

The purposes of the propositions

The propositions have been developed to guide assessment thinking in the light of the increasing focus on standards, and to address criticisms of current practice. They set directions for change designed to enhance learning achievements for all students and improve the quality of their experience.

The propositions, however, do not stand alone. They must be considered within overall curriculum thinking alongside teaching and learning strategies and changing disciplinary content. They need to be supported by a range of development opportunities to foster the shifts in thinking and practice on the part of teaching staff and students that they imply.

The propositions are posed in a form that needs to be embraced and be taken up at different levels - specifically, by educational institutions, by programs and courses of study, and by those responsible for teaching and learning. They have implications for resources and the nature of workload; when addressed thoughtfully they may contribute to reduced costs through a better focusing of effort on those features of the curriculum and teaching that have most direct impact on learning.



ASSESSMENT HAS MOST EFFECT WHEN ...

1. ... assessment is used to engage students in learning that is productive.

i. ... assessment is designed to focus students on learning

To improve student engagement in learning, and to support better quality learning outcomes, it is necessary that assessment tasks are designed to direct student attention to what needs to be learned and to the activities that best lead to this. Effective learning can be hampered by assessment tasks that focus student attention on grades and marks or reproductive thinking.

ii. ... assessment is recognised as a learning activity that requires engagement on appropriate tasks.

Assessment tasks should be significant learning activities in themselves, and not only enable judgements to be made about what has been learned. The potency of student engagement in learning is enhanced when assessment tasks require substantial involvement over time, and when they are designed in an interlinked, constructive, organised and coherent sequence.

2. ... feedback is used to actively improve student learning.

i. ... feedback is informative and supportive and facilitates a positive attitude to future learning.

Students benefit from clear and helpful feedback on their learning. Everyday learning activities as well as special tasks and tests provide opportunities for the provision of feedback. This places responsibility on staff to plan assessment in order to (a) develop their own skills in providing quality feedback, and (b) develop in students the skills they need to provide sound feedback to each other.

ii. ... students seek and use timely feedback to improve the quality of their learning and work.

Students' own skills of judgement are developed by their utilisation of feedback, guidance provided by those already inducted into the culture and standards of the discipline, and opportunities to grow their own skills of critical appraisal. They need to be able to seek and employ feedback from a variety of sources to develop a full range of outcomes from their studies.

iii. ... students regularly receive specific information, not just marks and grades, about how to improve the quality of their work.

Marks and grades provide little information to students about specific qualities of their work and do not indicate how it might be improved. While marks and grades may provide a crude tracking measure of how well students are doing, they do not help students move beyond their present standard of performance. Specific and detailed information is needed to show students what has been done well, what has not, and how their work could be better.

3. ... students and teachers become responsible partners in learning and assessment.

i. ... students progressively take responsibility for assessment and feedback processes.

The overall aims of higher education include developing students' critical thinking abilities, which include self-critique, independent judgement, and other skills for continuing learning. Personal responsibility for assessing performance and providing and responding to feedback is a desired graduate outcome. It is necessary and appropriate for university programs to foster this development throughout the curriculum.

ii. ... students develop and demonstrate the ability to judge the quality of their own work and the work of others against agreed standards.

Students need confidence and competence in making informed judgements about what they produce. They need to develop the ability to evaluate the quality, completeness and/or accuracy of work with respect to appropriate standards, and have the confidence to express their judgements with conviction. This requires deliberately managed assessment processes and practice that relates to judgements required in professional practice and mature community engagement.

iii. ... dialogue and interaction about assessment processes and standards are commonplace between and among staff and students.

Assessment activities and standards require disciplinary and contextual interpretation if they are to be understood, yet discussion of processes and reference points for determining standards is relatively rare. Assessment judgements are more consistent when those making them are able to reach consensus as to ways of establishing levels of performance. Student understanding of processes they can use to judge their own performance are similarly enhanced when they participate in dialogue about them with peers and teachers.

4. ... students are inducted into the assessment practices and cultures of higher education.

i. ... assessment practices are carefully structured in early stages of courses to ensure students make a successful transition to university study in their chosen field.

For students to become independent and self-managing learners, they need to be supported in the development and acquisition of the skills they need for learning, including those of assessment. Critical to this attainment is early engagement in manageable assessed tasks to build confidence, and the expectation that learning requires not only an investment of effort but also the taking of initiative. This contributes to alleviating anxiety around assessment information, instructions, guidance, and performance. Early assessment provides information to both students and teachers on progress and achievement, and allows for identification of students in need of additional support.

ii. ... assessment practices respond to the diverse expectations and experiences of entering students.

Students come to higher education with great diversity in preparedness and understanding of what it involves. To ensure that all can engage equitably with assessment tasks, the implicit rules and expectations around what is required for success in any discipline need to be made accessible to students and opportunities provided for them to develop the academic skills they require to perform those tasks.



5. ... assessment for learning is placed at the centre of subject and program design.

i. ... assessment design is recognised as an integral part of curriculum planning from the earliest stages of course development.

Assessment is not an 'add-on' to the curriculum structure of a program. It needs to be considered from the outset of course design and intimately embedded and linked to considerations of student learning as part of the curriculum. Assessment tasks, types and means of deployment need to be fully aligned with all other aspects of the curriculum.

ii. ... assessment is organized holistically across subjects and programs with complementary integrated tasks.

The development of a full range of graduate attributes requires a systematic approach to assessment that builds and enhances those attributes through tasks that are diverse, complementary to each other and embedded strategically throughout a program of study. Integrated whole-of-program curriculum design needs to incorporate assessment and feedback as well as learning outcomes and teaching and learning activities, if carried out in this way, an emphasis on feedback for learning can be the focus of teaching and learning engagement in the early curriculum, leading to capstone and integrated assessment in later years.

6. ... assessment for learning is a focus for staff and institutional development.

i. ... professional and scholarly approaches to assessment by academic staff are developed, deployed, recognised and rewarded by institutions.

Academics need particular support in developing expertise required for subject and program assessment responsibilities. Such support could include mentoring, dialogue with peers in informal and formal moderation activities or formal courses. However, while enhanced assessment skills are essential, their acquisition is not sufficient to ensure good assessment practice. Institutions should have explicit requirements that professional and scholarly proficiency in assessment is necessary for satisfactory teaching performance. Further, leadership and exemplary performance in assessment matters should be recognised for promotion, awards and grants.

ii. ... assessment practices and the curriculum should be reviewed in the light of graduate and employer perceptions of the preparedness of graduates.

The impact of courses on student learning, and the role of assessment in them, can only be fully evaluated following graduation. Common post-graduation measures (eg. the Course Experience Questionnaire, the Graduate Destinations Survey) presently provide insufficiently detailed information for the improvement of programs. In particular, they do not enable assessment and feedback processes to be sufficiently monitored. Systematic study of the impact of such experiences on graduates (at, say, one and five years from graduation) and employers' perceptions of such preparation and standards are needed to ensure that courses are effective in the longer term.

iii. ... assessment of student achievements is judged against consistent national and international standards that are subject to continuing dialogue, review and justification within disciplinary and professional communities.

The quality of awards in higher education will be increasingly scrutinised nationally and internationally. Assessment practice needs to provide convincing evidence of students' accomplishments that can be judged against external reference points. Disciplinary and professional communities (both within and beyond the academy) are the focus for ongoing collaboration and dialogue to determine, review and moderate academic achievement standards. Such collaboration and dialogue requires clarity of expectations and persuasive evidence of learning outcomes.

7. ... assessment provides inclusive and trustworthy representation of student achievement.

i. ... interim assessment results used for feedback on learning and progress do not play a significant role in determining students' final grades.

For purposes of certification, care must be taken to avoid the formal use of early grades that do not represent the outcomes reached by course or program completion. Entry-level knowledge, learning rates and final achievement levels differ. Although learning itself is cumulative, progressively adding marks throughout the learning period towards the final grade can distort representation of end-of-study achievement. What is important is using interim outcomes to improve learning.

ii. ... evidence of overall achievement to determine final grades is based on assessment of integrated learning

Many separate low-value pieces of assessment can fragment learning without providing evidence of how students' knowledge and skills from a unit of study are interrelated. This is often compounded across subjects, leading students to experience knowledge as disconnected elements. Strong evidence of achievement of the totality of outcomes can be provided by larger-scale tasks that require students to demonstrate coherent integrated learning, not isolated or atomistic performance.

iii. ... certification accurately and richly portrays graduates' and students' achievements to inform future careers and learning.

An academic transcript that lists subject titles and grades provides limited information to students, employers or educational institutions. Increased scope and sophistication of the reporting of achievement is needed to communicate outcomes well. Two areas for improvement are: veracity, in grades that are fully and robustly aligned with learning outcomes and standards; and, richness, in the documentation of student accomplishments to convey information about what students can and cannot do.



Suggestions for use

These propositions can be used to focus debate and action on those features of assessment that have the greatest impact on learning and the quality of courses.

They might be most productively used by:

- > planning teams and program directors in new course design and course review and renewal
- > teaching and learning committees and academic boards, institutionally and locally
- > groups of Associate Deans and Directors of Teaching and Learning within and across Faculties
- > those running courses and workshops for academic staff on assessment, and particularly within Graduate Certificates in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education
- > those running leadership programs to ensure that leaders at all levels have a strong appreciation of assessment issues and directions
- > those with academic development roles who consult with staff and course teams
- > those guiding staff-student discussions about the improvement of courses.

The challenge is to consider how these might be best pursued within existing cost constraints. This must necessarily involve deciding which assessment tasks should be discontinued in order to provide space for more worthwhile initiatives.

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Appendix 4

Publications

There were no publications as part of the contracted deliverables. However, the website www.assessmentfutures.com can be regarded as a substantial text and continuing publication. This website includes the only other text, *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*, which is included here as Appendix 3.

Linked with the theme of fellowship, but not part of deliverables

- Falchikov, N. and Boud, D. (2008). 'The role of assessment in preparing for lifelong learning: problems and challenges'. In Havnes, A. & McDowell, L. (Eds.). *Balancing Dilemmas in Assessment and Learning in Contemporary Education*. New York: Routledge, 87-99.
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