Protocols: Assessment

Protocols to accompany the policy for Assessment

(Manual of Policy and Procedures C/5.1)

August 2011

Content

The University prescribes protocols for assessment consistent with the principles outlined in the assessment policy (MOPP C/5.1). The purpose of these protocols is to clarify policy requirements, expand on and explain the assessment practices required to meet the policy principles, and identify associated responsibilities and accountabilities. References to complementary policy and links to resources and support services are also provided. Assessment protocols are approved by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) and specified on the Learning and Teaching Unit web page.

Links to documents referred to within the protocols

- Assessment tasks
  http://www.ltu.qut.edu.au/curriculum/protocols.jsp

- QUT Teamwork Protocol – QUT Blackboard
  **http://blackboard.qut.edu.au/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp
  ?course_id=_18661_1&content_id=_375339_1**

- Guidelines for costs to students
  http://www.ltu.qut.edu.au/curriculum/courses/units.jsp

- *Administrative information for higher education providers: student support*
  **http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/C2263179-E5A1-416B-A659-
  0236D1974F5D/25529/AdministrativeInformationforProviders.pdf**

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Versions	Date	Updates
Version 1	• April 2009	• Original version
Version 2	• June 2010	• Minor edits
Version 3	• October 2010	• Shortened and updated in conjunction with work on Assessment guidelines.
Version 4	• August 2011	• Replaced references to OTQ with LTU

1. Definitions

The following definitions are used within QUT's assessment policy and protocols

assessment item	An assessment item is the description of the body of work that will be assessed. QUT uses common definitions for assessment items in courses and units to ensure consistent communication and shared understanding for students, staff and external stakeholders.
assessment pattern	The assessment pattern is the schedule of assessment used within a unit including the number, type and weighting of assessment items.
assessment profile	The assessment profile is the schedule of assessment items used across a course.
assessment load	The assessment load is the number and weighting of assessment items across a semester or across the course.
capstone unit	A capstone unit/experience is a culminating learning experience occurring in the final year of a course that brings reflection and focus to the whole course experience whilst, at the same time, leading students to transition into new professional pathways and/or post-graduate study.
formative assessment	Formative assessment provides feedback to students to enable them to monitor their learning progress and determine where improvements can be made in their work to enhance learning. Formative assessment focuses on why an outcome was obtained, and how it can be improved.
summative assessment	Summative assessment is about gathering authentic evidence to determine the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved. The distinctive characteristic of summative assessment is that in addition to supporting learning, the task allows student work to be compared to pre-determined standards so that student work can be classified/rated in terms of particular levels of achievement. Its purpose is, therefore, classification and prediction. It focuses on outcome, standard and comparison with criteria based on a number of sources and forms of information.
grade	A grade is a numeric value on a 7-point scale awarded on the completion of the unit and used to calculate the grade point average (see MOPP C/5.2 QUT Grading System).
mark	A mark is the value assigned by the unit coordinator to a student's work on a summative assessment item. The value is determined according to predetermined criteria and performance standards.

2. Designing assessment for learning

Policy principles

(i) Assessment is valued as a strategy to support student learning.

(ii) Assessment cohesively links the learning outcomes, content, and learning and teaching approaches at the unit and course levels.

(iii) Assessment is an integral part of the whole of course design and gives particular attention to the needs of first year students.

Assessment is an integral part of the curriculum design for any course or unit (see MOPP C/4.2). Both unit and course coordinators have a responsibility for ensuring that the choice of learning activities and associated assessment tasks are clearly informed by the desired learning outcomes and are consistent with the developmental patterning of whole of course design to ensure students meet discipline and professional standards and experience a range of assessment types.

2.1 Roles and responsibilities in the design of assessment

Unit coordinators are responsible at the unit level for devising and offering assessment items appropriate which are consistent with the principles of assessment (MOPP C/5.1.3) and the Curriculum Design policy (C/4.2) which includes ensuring that assessment is

- consistent with the course assessment map

- appropriate to the unit's learning outcomes

- relevant to life and professional contexts consistent with QUT's real-world approach to learning and teaching

- efficient in terms of both student and staff workload in relation to the value of the task

- inclusive to promote equal opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to excel

Course coordinators/ Study Area coordinators are responsible for ensuring that

- assessment across the course/study area is aligned to the learning outcomes of the course and consistent with whole of course design,

- assessment across the course is comprehensive in that it addresses the learning outcome, challenges students to deeper learning, and provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their full capabilities

- assessment is sequenced to allow students to progressively and realistically build their capabilities; and

- assessment design and practice is consistent with the principles of assessment outlined in the University's assessment policy.

Faculty academic boards are responsible for

- ensuring a whole of course approach to assessment as part of the curriculum design and development process.

2.2   Purposes of assessment

Learning environments are expected to be designed to enable students to achieve clear learning outcomes that are transparent for students to track their learning progress through a course.

Assessment is integral to the learning environment and designed for students to:

- achieve the desired learning outcomes as evidence-based discipline/ professional standards and QUT's graduate capabilities
- recognise developmental process components of learning
- create sustainable learning patterns than engender habits and skills for self-assessing professional, lifetime learning
- take responsibility for their own learning;
- critique the work of peers; and
- receive advice on how to better plan for future learning and improve academic scholarship

Assessment is to be designed within whole of course and provides for academic/ administrators to

- document student development over time;
- certify the learning achievement of students; and
- to provide data that can be aggregated to monitor the performance of academic programs.

3.   Assessment patterns

Policy principles

(iv) Assessment provides valid evidence of learning outcomes at the unit level and may contribute to assessment of student learning at the course level including graduate capabilities.

(v) Assessment approaches are consistent with QUT's approach to real world learning and teaching and include a variety of assessment tasks.

Assessment patterns are the schedule of assessment within a unit including the number, types and weights of assessment items. Assessment patterns are planned and organised to ensure assessment meets the assessment principles and design criteria as outlined above. QUT has therefore established typical requirements for assessment patterns.

A complete list of QUT assessment items together with definitions is provided on the Learning and Teaching Unit website[1.]

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[1] http://www.ltu.qut.edu.au/policy/guide/assessment.jsp

3.1 Roles and responsibilities for assessment patterns

Unit coordinators are responsible for ensuring that

- the number, type, weighting and timing of assessment items provide evidence of learning against all learning outcomes, and meet the criteria outlined in QUT's assessment policy
- the assessment items are capable of providing clear, relevant, valid and reliable evidence of learning against the learning outcomes
- assessment design and practice provides a reasonable spread of assessment tasks throughout the teaching period so that timely feedback can be provided to assist students to achieve the unit learning outcomes

Course coordinators/ Study Area coordinators are responsible for ensuring

- comparability of assessment patterns across the course/study area
- there is an appropriate and varied range of assessment types mapped across the course/study area, and
- assessment loads are monitored each semester.

Faculty academic boards are responsible for

- monitoring assessment strategies proactively in the unit approval process and in cases where there is doubt that assessment strategies for particular units have achieved reasonable outcomes
- approving variations to assessment patterns as part of the unit approval process

3.2 Assessment patterns

QUT has established typical assessment patterns (number, type and weighting of assessment items) to support the assessment policy good practice principles and meet the design specifications for assessment. These assessment patterns apply to all courses and units unless an exception has been approved through the curriculum development and approval process (see MOPP **C/4.1**). Exceptions may be approved to satisfy prescribed professional accreditation requirements or support substantive discipline requirements.

All exceptions to the typical assessment patterns described below must be:

- accompanied by a clear academic rationale consistent with the assessment policy principles and curriculum design policy principles (see MOPP **C/4.2**) (i.e. the assessment approach reflects a whole of course design, is aligned to real world learning pedagogies and supports student learning)
- approved through the curriculum development and approvals process (usually at faculty level unless the assessment approach is being considered as part of a curriculum development that requires University Academic Board approval)
- clearly communicated to students (e.g. a note in the unit outline stating that the assessment pattern has been approved, and details of the rationale for the assessment pattern on the unit Blackboard site – see Section 5).

3.3 Typical assessment patterns

A 12 credit point unit includes either two or three summative assessment items. Weightings for each assessment item must be whole percent increments of 5% (e.g. 45%) and cannot be expressed as a range (e.g. between 30% and 40%).

Weightings for assessment items meet the following patterns:

- the maximum weighting of an assessment item is 60% of the total summative assessment for the unit
- the minimum weighting of an assessment item is 10% of the total summative assessment for the unit
- the maximum weighting for examinations (written) is 60% of the total summative assessment for the unit
- the maximum weighting for the collective component of team work is 50% of the grade for the unit.

Note: Theses (see MOPP **C/3.1.3** (d)) are outside the scope of this policy.

3.4   Requirements for assessment

attendance	Attendance cannot contribute to summative assessment but may be a requirement for some courses in specific circumstances
participation	Participation can only contribute to an assessment item provided the item and criteria include participation in a way that is consistent with the principles for assessment (see MOPP C/5.1.2)
examinations (written)	- formally invigilated summative assessments - examinations may be conducted in one or more formats including written, multiple choice, or online (see *Definitions of Assessment Items*) - quizzes are classified as an examination if they are invigilated and used for summative assessment (see *Definitions of Assessment Items)*[2]. - assessment of professional, practice or performance related skills under the supervision from a recognised expert are classified as examinations (practical) and are **not** regarded as examinations for the purposes of the rules for assessment patterns. - centrally organised examinations are to be held within the formal examination period - school-based examinations are held in the semester period only - the examination preparation period does not permit - school-based exams, or - other assessment items requiring attendance on campus (e.g. viva voce, performance or exhibition) (see MOPP E/6.1) - feedback must be available to students for all summative assessment items, including examinations
team work	- assessment for teamwork must be consistent with the University's principles for assessment (as defined in the Assessment Policy) and consider advice provided in the *QUT Teamwork Protocol*[3] - the maximum weighting for the collective component of team work is 50% of the grade for the unit.

[2] http://www.otq.qut.edu.au/policy/guide/assessment.jsp
3 Just in Time website on Blackboard at
http://blackboard.qut.edu.au/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_id=_121_1

third party materials	• assessment using third party materials is not recommended due to copyright and licensing restrictions
	• if third party materials are used, unit coordinators must ensure compliance with relevant legislative frameworks and agreements (refer to Guidelines for costs to students[4] and *Administrative information for higher education providers: student support)*[5]*.
virtual environments	• assessment using third party virtual environments is not recommended as they are outside QUT's control and the University cannot guarantee availability, robustness and functions of the system
	• if recording of the assessment activity is undertaken, unit coordinators must gain student permission before recording activities and events in virtual environments
	• alternative assessment strategies must be in place for students who cannot access virtual environments due to equity or accessibility reasons.
work integrated learning	• assessment of Work Integrated Learning (WIL) must take into account the context and situation that students face in terms of this unique work experience
	• the University academic must take ultimate responsibility for assessment and moderation
	• where industry supervisors are involved in assessment, the University academic supervisor must make certain that the industry partner understands assessment requirements
portfolio assessment	• the scope and value of the portfolio must be consistent with the normal requirements for the credit points of the unit
	• appropriate opportunities for formative assessment must be incorporated throughout the unit to assist students to monitor their progress and determine where improvements can be made.

4. Criteria and standards

Policy principles

(vi) Assessment reflects rigorous academic standards associated with the discipline and is based on pre-determined and clearly articulated criteria, associated standards and weightings.

4.1 Roles and responsibilities for criteria and standards

QUT has adopted a criterion-referenced approach to assessment. This means that assessment is based on

- pre-determined and clearly articulated criteria which contribute to the reliability and validity of the assessment; and

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4 http://www.otq.qut.edu.au/curriculum/unit/index.jsp
5 http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/C2263179-E5A1-416B-A659-0236D1974F5D/25529/AdministrativeInformationforProviders.pdf

- associated standards of knowledge, skills, competencies and/or capabilities that are high but attainable to motivate students and focus their energy on learning rather than on competition with peers.

Unit coordinators are responsible for

- ensuring that criteria are consistent with the assessment task and transparently aligned to the unit's learning outcomes, and standards and responsive to the developmental design of the course establishing criteria and standards that are high but attainable and designed to motivate students and impact positively on their learning
- planning and documenting the assessment strategy within a unit
- ensuring standards are communicated to and understood by all teaching staff including sessional academics
- ensuring that workplace supervisors are appropriately briefed and understand their roles and responsibilities and QUT's requirements for assessment; and
- encouraging discussions among across-semester unit coordinators to establish common views on early (including First Year Experience), mid and later (including Capstone experience) phases of development regarding equitable and consistent grading allocations across semester units.

Every assessment item needs to have criteria and standards consistent with the QUT Grading system (MOPP C/5.2).

Teaching staff are expected to participate in any development activities arranged by the unit coordinator to

- plan assessment and marking strategies,
- develop shared views of standards; and
- participate in internal moderation of assessment items.

Course/ Study Area coordinators are responsible for

- ensuring that criteria and standards are aligned to unit and course learning outcomes.
- monitoring assessment grades across the course/ study area and
- ensuring that standards applied by all unit coordinators in a course/study area are comparable and appropriate to the developmental level of the units.

Heads of school are responsible for

- authorising results submitted to the assessment management system (see MOPP **E/6.5.2**)
- ensuring that standards applied by all unit coordinators in a course/study area are comparable and appropriate to the developmental level of the units.

Executive deans are responsible for

- approving the final grades for each student but may
  - delegate the authority to approve results to another person or body the authority to approve results, provided the executive dean has determined policy on assessment of results and the decisions of the person or body are consistent with this policy and reported to the executive dean (see MOPP **E/6.5.3**).

Faculty Academic Boards are responsible for

- assuring good learning and teaching and assessment practices within the faculty, in accordance with University policy.

4.2   Determination and presentation of standards

Criterion-referenced assessment requires that:

- The criteria and associated performance standards are communicated to students at the same time as they are provided with the details associated with the assessment item.

- The criteria used for an assessment item are weighted equally unless specified in advance through a clear academic rationale provided in writing to students at the commencement of the semester.

Moderation is important to assure the consistent use and rigor of standards (see Section 6.2).

4.3   Allocation of grades and approval of results

Final grades provided by the unit coordinator are authorised by the head of school, and approved by the executive dean as the chair of faculty academic board. The executive dean may determine a unit result which is different from the result recommended by the unit coordinator. This occurs in consultation with the examiner of the unit or the head of school (see MOPP **E/6.5.3**).

An indication of how the assessment items contribute to the final grade should be provided to students with the caveat that all grades are subject to moderation and Faculty approval.

5.   Communication and feedback to students

Policy principles

(vii)   Assessment is fair, equitable and inclusive and clearly communicated to students

(viii)   Assessment patterns provide progressive and timely feedback to students and staff through both formative and summative elements.

5.1   Roles and responsibilities for communication and feedback to students

Unit coordinators are responsible for

- providing timely information to students on assessment requirements through the approved unit outline and additional unit information

- ensuring that assessment requirements are consistent with the unit outline details

- communicating criteria and standards to students in a timely manner, well before they commence the assessment task

- providing feedback to students during the teaching period as an integral part of the learning process

- ensuring that all staff involved with marking assessment items provide timely and appropriate feedback to students.

Teaching staff (including sessional staff) are responsible for

- explaining assessment items to students, including the relationship of assessment tasks to the unit and course learning outcomes and performance standards
- providing timely and appropriate feedback to students.

Course/Study Area coordinators are responsible for

- recommending approval of all changes to assessment arrangements once semester has commenced.
- externally moderating assessment to assure academic standards of the course are appropriate.

Heads of school are responsible for

- recommending approval of all changes to assessment arrangements once semester has commenced.

Faculty academic boards (or its delegate) are responsible for

- approving changes to assessment arrangements once semester has commenced as part of the unit approval process consistent with MOPP C/4.1.

Students are responsible for

- familiarising themselves with the assessment requirements for a course and units (including any approved exceptions to assessment patterns) and
- considering feedback to support their learning.

5.2   Faculty policies

Faculties may choose to develop faculty-level policy on assessment to further define expectations relevant to professional accreditation or disciplinary practices or clarify normal operational parameters. Faculty polices are consistent with the principles for assessment and are subordinate to University policy which state minimum quality standards for assessment practices. Faculty policies must be clearly communicated to students.

5.3   Notification of assessment requirements

Unit outline

The unit outline provides students with broad details of assessment items including

- number of assessment items
- type
- weighting
- indicative due date
- unit learning outcomes to be achieved.

Changes made to assessment requirements once the teaching period has commenced require

- agreement of all students taking the unit,
- approval from the course coordinator and head of school, and
- approval of the change to the unit outline through the usual faculty approval process (see MOPP **C/4.5** and **C/4.1**).

Once the change has been approved, the unit coordinator must provide details of the change to students in writing, together with the academic rationale.

QUT Blackboard

In the first week of the teaching period, unit coordinators provide students with additional assessment details through Blackboard. These additional details must include

- additional assessment details which include specific due dates for all assessment items, guidance on the type and nature of the assessment items, further explication of the learning outcomes to be achieved in each assessment item, and the criteria that will be used to judge the assessment;

- a reference to the University's policy on academic dishonesty (see MOPP **C/5.3**);

- details or a link to any faculty policies on academic dishonesty; and

- details or a link to the faculty's policy for late submission of assessment.

5.4   Providing feedback to students

Unit coordinators are required to provide feedback to students during the teaching period as an integral component of the learning process. Unit assessment tasks should be designed to facilitate the provision of feedback to students from an early stage in the unit to allow students to monitor their progress and determine where improvements can be made to enhance their learning. Strategies to provide formative and summative feedback to students must be clearly indicated.

Formative feedback aims to

- promote reflective practices that lead to greater clarify on the successful completion of its related summative assessment item; and.

- provide point-in-time information about progress in the unit.

Summative feedback must

- provide information to students on progress regarding achieving learning outcomes in a unit and course; and

- provide advice on how to improve.

In order to meet the policy principles for feedback, QUT requires the following:

availability	Feedback must be available to students on all summative assessment items including examinations, as well as for all formative assessment.
timing	Feedback should occur at several points during the teaching period as an essential component of the learning environment. In particular • all first year undergraduate students must be provided with feedback on at least one individual item of assessment (formative or summative) prior to the withdrawal without *financial* penalty date. • for units other than first year, feedback must be provided on at least one summative assessment item before the date for

	withdrawal without *academic* penalty (See key dates[6]) Feedback should be available in a timely manner, which is normally • ten working days after the submission date of the item. and • five working days before the next summative item is due.
feedback strategies	Unit coordinators must clearly indicate to students their strategies for feedback at the beginning of the teaching period (either through the unit outline or the additional unit information). All feedback is expected to be • provided in writing • meaningful, clear, and constructive • respectful of the student • enable students to make judgements about their own performance related to the criteria for the item and the standards expected Feedback to students

6. Review of assessment

Policy principles

(ix)   Assessment approaches ensure that reliable and consistent judgments are made about a student's performance and that academic integrity is promoted.

(x)   Assessment is reviewed as part of course quality assurance processes to facilitate effectiveness and efficiency for students and staff.

6.1   Roles and responsibilities in the review of assessment

Unit coordinators are responsible for

• ensuring the continuous improvement of the quality of the teaching and learning in their units (see MOPP **C/4.7**).

• internally moderating their units to ensure that marks awarded between tutorial groups and by different teaching staff are internally consistent and meet academic standards appropriate to the level of the unit.

Course coordinators are responsible

• at the whole of course level for monitoring assessment results across the course/ study area to identify inconsistencies and areas for improvement and review of assessment and implementing those improvements.

Assistant Deans Teaching and Learning are responsible for

• encouraging, monitoring and reporting on faculty compliance with QUT policy and procedures relating to assessment.

Executive deans are responsible for

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[6] http://www.studentservices.qut.edu.au/info/dates/key/

- the continuous improvement of the quality of teaching, courses and units in their faculty (see MOPP **C/4.7**).

6.2 Moderation of assessment

Moderation aims to regulate the marking of individual assessors to achieve consistency. However, it is also important that unit coordinators across a semester engage in cross-unit discussions about grade quality. Thus, gaining consensus on what receives a particular grade across a year of study is equally important as unit moderation.

While the development of well-designed criteria and performance standards will invest the assessment process with greater objectivity, of necessity the process must also rely on the professional judgement of the assessors. For this reason, internal and external moderation are critical to assure validity and reliability of assessment practices including the awarding of grades.

(a) Unit coordinators – internal moderation

Unit coordinators are required to internally moderate all assessment items in a unit, including e-learning assessment items (MOPP **B/3.5.6**). The goal is to ensure that marks and grades awarded between tutorial groups and by different teaching staff are internally consistent and consistent with the QUT Grading Scale (see MOPP **C/5.2**) and meet appropriate academic standards.

Marks for assessment items and the grades for a unit are not provided to students until internal moderation has been completed to ensure consistency of academic standards.

(b) Course coordinator – external moderation

Course coordinators are responsible for external moderation of assessment to assure academic standards of the course are consistent with the discipline and sector. Rigorous external moderation involves an independent and knowledgeable individual or recognised authoritative group confirming academic standards and that assessment practices are valid, consistent and fair.

External moderation begins prior to marking by involving independent knowledgeable experts to confirm that assessment tasks, criteria and standards are appropriate to the level, discipline or profession or after marking by including review of student work. Post-marking moderation generally involves checking assessment items at random to review low, medium and high grading points against the criteria and standards.

Strategies for external moderation include:

- periodic review of course criteria and assessment of learning outcomes by professional accreditation agencies; and
- periodic review of academic standards against national/international disciplinary benchmarks by relevant academics from other universities.

6.3 Review of assessment

Moderation of student results can be used as feedback for staff in the curriculum design process. Unit coordinators should use assessment:

- as a means of checking whether the learning activities in the unit have allowed students to achieve the required learning outcomes; and

- to identify any common misunderstandings by students, and ensure future planning for the unit can include activities to change those misconceptions.

In addition to using moderation to review assessment, unit coordinators should use the following curriculum quality assurance and review processes to review all aspects of their unit including assessment:

- student feedback received through the Learning Experience Survey and other feedback mechanisms (see MOPP **C/4.7**); and
- professional accreditation of courses and the course quality assurance (see MOPP **C/4.6**) and curriculum approval processes (see MOPP **C/4.1**).