

Teaching Development Unit

## **Summary of analysis of early stage implementation of the new Assessment & Learning Guides policies**

### **Introduction**

The Teaching Development Unit (TDU) conducted a small research study to investigate how assessment criteria and standards had been communicated in Learning Guides produced in 2009, the first year of staged implementation of the new policies. The study reviewed all level one Learning Guides placed in the online Learning Guides repository. The study enabled TDU to gain a detailed picture of how staff had implemented criteria and standards-based assessment and Learning Guides in 2009. TDU acknowledges that processes are in place in Schools to review and improve Learning Guides. This report identifies areas for consideration in that review process.

The study focused on 159 level one Learning Guides produced in Autumn and Spring Sessions 2009. They represented all the Schools teaching at undergraduate level.

### **Analysis**

In order to analyse the extent and type of assessment information provided to students, TDU developed a framework which proposed that written assessment expectations *for each task* are clearest when:

1. There is alignment between unit learning outcomes and the type of assessment task;
2. Task description is provided;
3. Criteria and standards of performance are provided;
4. Task description and criteria and standards are clearly consistent with each other;
5. Rationale for doing the task is explained;
6. Exemplar(s) of related student work are provided. (Thomson & Curtis 2009)

The study analysed Learning Guides against all six components of the framework and a summary of these results is presented in Table 1 (see p.3).

An initial step was to identify the range of assessment tasks used in level one units. This included exams and tests, critical/analytical tasks, reports, reflective learning tasks, in-class assessments, and 'other' assessments. Table 2 shows the range of assessment tasks used and notes the extent to which assessment task descriptions were provided. Assessment tasks are typically complex, requiring students to demonstrate a range of capabilities within the one task. For the purposes of this study, assessment tasks were coded according to the major focus of the task. This was determined through reading the task name, description, criteria and standards, rationale, and the learning outcome(s) with which the task was aligned.

### **Selected results**

The 159 Learning Guides contained details of 536 assessment tasks.

#### *Observable and measurable learning outcomes*

Observable and measurable learning outcomes are important because they:

- enable the selection of a valid assessment method

- facilitate the design of assessment tasks that engage students in activities which lead them to achieving the unit's learning outcomes (Morgan et al, 2004).
- are used to derive assessment criteria (Armstrong et al, 2008).

69% of Learning Guides contained observable and measurable learning outcomes.

28% of Learning Guides contained learning outcomes that were vague or incomplete.

#### *Alignment apparent between learning outcomes and type of assessment (validity)*

When learning outcomes align with the type of assessment task, there is a consistent message to students about what is important to learn in the unit and where they should target their learning efforts. Alignment between assessment task and unit learning outcomes was apparent in 72.8% of tasks (n=390/536). Alignment was most frequent in report-writing tasks (93.9% of category), reflective learning tasks (83.7% of category), and critical/analytical tasks (82.7% of category). Alignment was least frequent in exams and tests (61% of category).

#### *Consistency of task descriptions with criteria and standards*

Task descriptions and criteria and standards should give a consistent message about what students have to do in the task. Inconsistency between these elements can lead to confusion on the part of students, and a greater number of enquiries for staff to handle. Where both components were present in the Learning Guide, 54% of tasks had consistent descriptions and criteria and standards. Consistency was highest in report writing tasks (78.8% of category), reflective learning tasks (69.8% of category) and in-class assessments (67.6% of category). Consistency was lowest in exams and tests (40.9% of category) and other assessments (42.1% of category).

#### *Exemplars provided or referred to*

Exemplars of related work enable students to recognise quality performance in assessment, rather than just having quality performance described to them. 'Exemplars convey messages that nothing else can' (Sadler, 2002:136). O'Donovan et al (2004) explain that exemplars are useful in class-based learning activities such as practice marking workshops which develop students' understanding of assessment expectations. Exemplars can also be used independently by students. Exemplars were provided or referred to (usually as being provided in the unit's vUWS site) in just 14% of assessment tasks. They were most commonly provided for exams and tests (22.3% of category) and report writing tasks (18.2% of category), and least commonly provided for reflective learning tasks (4.7% of category).

#### *Rationale for assessment tasks*

A rationale tells students how the assessment task will benefit their learning within the unit, in subsequent units and/or their professional futures. Overall, a rationale was provided for 48.9% of assessment tasks, most commonly for reflective learning tasks (67.4%) and least commonly for exams and tests (44.2%) and critical/analytical tasks (46.6%).

### **Areas for improvement**

Key areas for evaluation for improvement include:

- ensuring alignment between learning outcomes and type of assessment task for all assessment tasks (validity);
- ensuring that the assessment task description and the criteria and standards clearly relate to the same task;
- increasing the extent to which exemplar(s) of related work are provided to students;
- increasing the extent to which a rationale for the assessment task is provided to students, particularly for exams and tests and critical/analytical tasks.

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Table 1: Summary of extent to which Learning Guides communicated clear expectations

Assessment expectations are clearest when:	Achieved
1. There is alignment between unit learning outcome(s) and the type of assessment task	72.8%
2. Task descriptions are provided	84.7%
3. Criteria and standards of performance are provided	67.0%
4. Task descriptions and criteria and standards are clearly consistent with each other	54% (where both elements were present)
5. Rationale for the task is provided	48.9%
6. Exemplar(s) of related student work are provided or referred to	14.0%

Table 2: Provision of task descriptions for different types of assessment tasks

Type of assessment task	Number of tasks which provided descriptions	Total number of tasks in 'type'	Percentage of type which provided descriptions	Category of type of task
Essay	41	45	91.1%	Critical / analytical tasks
Critical review/analytical task	18	22	81.8%	
Annotated bibliography	5	6	83.3%	
Research task	20	22	90.9%	
Audio/music task	16	16	100%	
Design task	12	12	100%	
Translation or written OTE language task	4	10	40%	
Report	17	20	85%	Report writing tasks
Professional document	13	13	100%	Reflective learning tasks
Journal	21	23	91.3%	
Portfolio	20	20	100%	
Presentation	35	36	97.2%	In-class assessments
Practical	18	21	85.7%	
Class participation	13	17	76.5%	
Final exam	89	111	80.2%	Exams and tests
Online test	32	36	88.9%	
Other tests	55	68	80.9%	
Other assessments	25	38	65.8%	Other

Further study results are available at the TDU website

[http://www.uws.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/144877/Study\\_CSBA\\_LGs\\_implementation.pdf](http://www.uws.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/144877/Study_CSBA_LGs_implementation.pdf)

#### References

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