Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation: A User Guide and Handbook

This User Guide and Handbook is an outcome of a project funded by the Office for Learning and Teaching entitled *A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation*

Kerri-Lee Krause, Geoff Scott, Kate Aubin, Heather Alexander, Tom Angelo, Stuart Campbell, Martin Carroll, Elizabeth Deane, Duncan Nulty, Pip Pattison, Belinda Probert, Judyth Sachs, Ian Solomonides, Suzi Vaughan

www.uws.edu.au/latstandards

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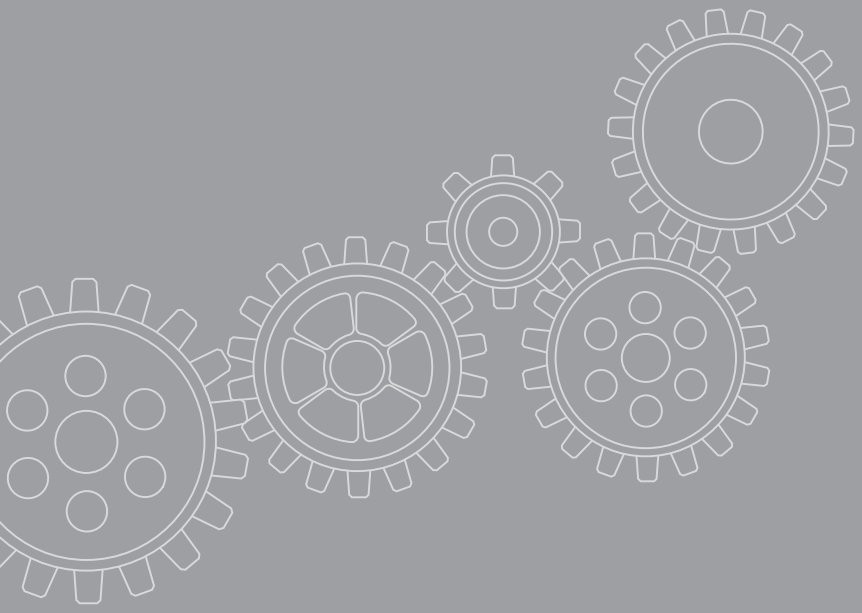

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Partner institutions:
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Queensland University of Technology
Griffith University
The Australian National University
La Trobe University
The University of Melbourne
Macquarie University

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1. Note: Griffith University was the lead institution in Year 1. The Project Leader moved to UWS in October 2011 when the institutional leadership was transferred to UWS, as negotiated with the institutions and OLT.

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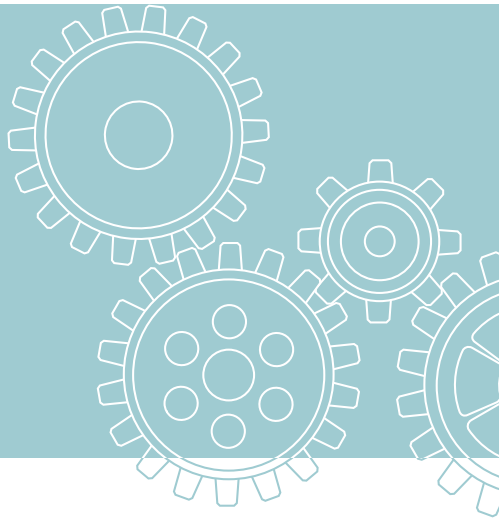
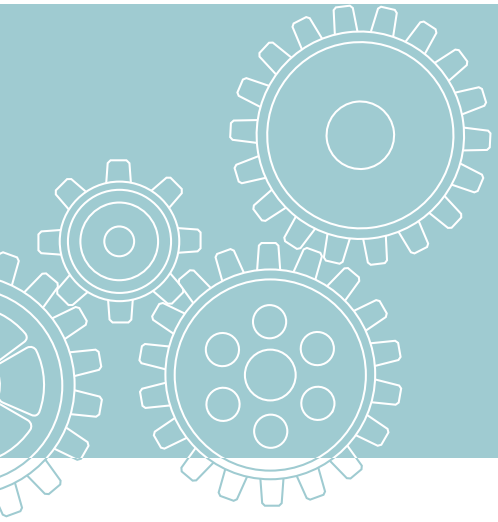


Section 1
About the project

The objective of this project was to test an approach for inter-university blind peer review of teaching and learning standards among final year undergraduate subjects, accounting for program-level outcomes, external reference points and discipline standards. Eleven universities identified common final year subjects across twelve disciplines. Peer judgements about teaching standards were enabled through review of de-identified subject inputs, including subject outlines, assessment tasks, marking criteria and information about program level learning outcomes. Peer review of learning standards was based on blind grading of four de-identified assessment artefacts across four grade bands (Fail, Pass, Credit and Distinction). On balance, findings show that there is broad agreement among peer reviewers from a range of university types on disciplinary teaching and learning standards, particularly in judgements about threshold Pass/Fail grades. Outcomes of the project include: a user guide; a peer review template; a sample policy for inter-institutional peer review; guidelines for local responses to peer reviewer discrepancies; strategies for publishing selected inter-institutional peer review outcomes; and recommendations for national and institutional policy and practice. The project addresses the imperative to demonstrate sector-level, self-regulated, arm's length approaches for monitoring standards by assessing consistency of subject-level standards across disciplines.



Section 2
Project website

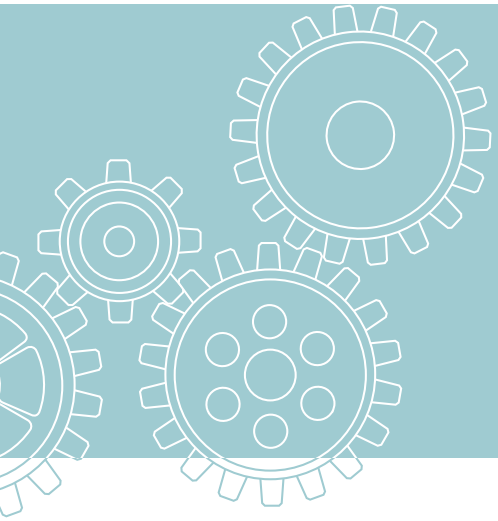
A project website comprising all project information is available:
www.uws.edu.au/latstandards

Section 3
Making the most of this user guide and handbook

This *User Guide and Handbook* includes resource material developed and tested during the course of the project *Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation: A User Guide and Handbook*. It reflects feedback from academic colleagues who have made numerous suggestions about ways to improve the peer review process and associated user materials.

Templates are provided to guide implementation of inter-institutional peer review of teaching and learning standards. These templates may be adapted according to the purpose and context of the peer review activity.

All materials may be downloaded from the project website.



Section 4
Glossary of key terms

Academic standards: refers to both learning and teaching standards. Teaching standards are understood to encompass "process" or "delivery" standards, while learning standards refer to "outcome standards" which describe the "nature and levels of student attainment" (TEQSA, 2011, p. 3).

Assessment: a process to determine a student's achievement of expected learning outcomes and may include a range of written and oral methods and practice or demonstration. It is expected to fairly, validly and reliably measure student performance of intended learning outcomes.

Valid assessment refers to the explicit and clear alignment between intended learning outcomes and the assessment methods used to measure student achievement of those outcomes.

Assessment Task: illustrative task or performance opportunity that closely targets defined learning outcomes, allowing students to demonstrate their learning and capabilities. Assessment tasks include, but are not limited to essays, tests, examinations, laboratory, clinical or field practicums, projects, compilations, productions, presentations, performances, web-based discussions and participation in forums.

Assurance: the process of ensuring that activities and outcomes meet an agreed standard.

Blind grading: double marking where the second marker does not see the original marker's comments or marks.

Capstone subject: a final year culminating subject taken at the end of the program in which students showcase capabilities and competencies developed during the program.

Competence: the ability to perform/use set skills and knowledge in relatively predictable, current circumstances to a set standard. Competence is necessary but not sufficient to be identified as being professionally capable.

Coursework: the curriculum covered at unit/subject and course/program level.

Double marking: requires two different staff to mark the same piece of work submitted for assessment, where the original marks and comments are seen by the second marker.

Evaluation: making judgements of worth about the quality of higher education inputs and outcomes.

Learning outcomes: the expression of the set of knowledge, skills and the application of the knowledge and skills a person has acquired and is able to demonstrate as a result of learning.

Management: the organisation and coordination of the activities of an enterprise in order to achieve agreed objectives and outcomes successfully and consistently.

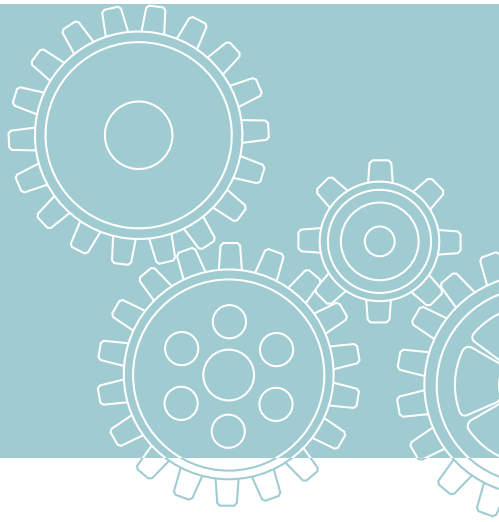
Marking: the act of assessing individual assessment components, generating a score and/or grade, and feedback, as appropriate.

Moderation: a peer review process by which a University assures itself and stakeholders that its assessment processes are consistent with its policies for the area; focus on the capabilities and competencies required of graduates; that the assessment processes used to measure these are valid and that marking is reliable.

Consensus moderation uses processes of peer review to undertake this process in an objective and criterion-referenced fashion – often using a set of validation reference points. Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), for example, notes that moderation in this area brings assessment judgements and standards into alignment.

Program/course: whole-of-degree program.

Quality: is fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard.



Reliability: trustworthiness of assessment, the extent to which the grade awarded by one marker aligns with that awarded by another marker.

Standards: statements describing the level or quality of student performance of criteria, in an assessment task.

Standards framework: this describes, in graphical or narrative form, the main dimensions of the area and the presumed relationships amongst them. The University of Western Sydney (UWS) Learning and Teaching (L&T) Academic Standards and Quality Framework is one such example.

Strategy: linking relevant, desirable and clear ends to the most feasible means necessary to achieve them.

Subject/unit: an individual unit taken as part of a whole-of-degree program.

Teaching standards: refers to the inputs necessary to achieve the required learning outcome standards. They can cover the quality of course design, support, delivery and staff.

Unit: a single component of a qualification, or a stand-alone unit, that has been approved/accredited. A unit may also be called a 'module', 'subject', 'unit of competency' or 'accredited unit'.

Validity: in establishing outcomes which are the focus of assessment, validity refers to the process of confirming, on evidence and against a range of agreed reference points, that what is being given focus on in a course or subject is both relevant and desirable. In terms of the process of assessment, validity refers to the use of assessment methods that are 'fit for purpose' – that is, they are shown to be the best way to measure the development of the capabilities and competencies set down for achievement in a particular course or subject.

Section 5
User Guide for implementing inter-institutional peer review of standards

Teaching and Learning Standards Project
Inter-University Peer Review and Moderation of Coursework
OLT (ALTC) Project

User Guide

VERSION FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Project Leaders

- *Professor Kerri-Lee Krause*
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  University of Western Sydney
- *Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott*
  Executive Director (Sustainability)
  University of Western Sydney

Project Team

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- *Professor Stuart Campbell*
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- *Professor Liz Deane*
- *Associate Professor Duncan Nulty (Griffith University)*
- *Professor Pip Pattison (The University of Melbourne)*
- *Professor Belinda Probert*
- *Professor Judyth Sachs (Macquarie University)*
- *Associate Professor Ian Solomonides (Macquarie University)*
- *Professor Suzi Vaugh*

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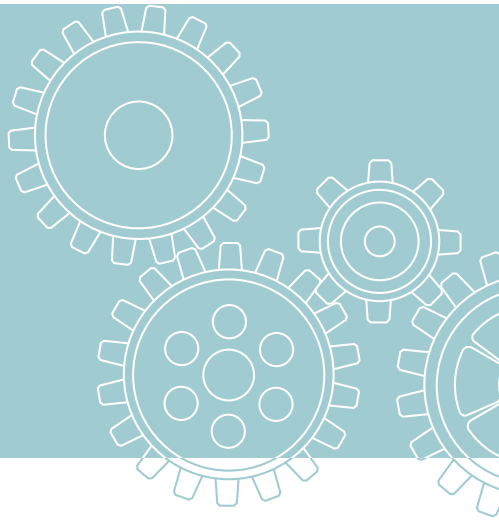

User Guide Overview

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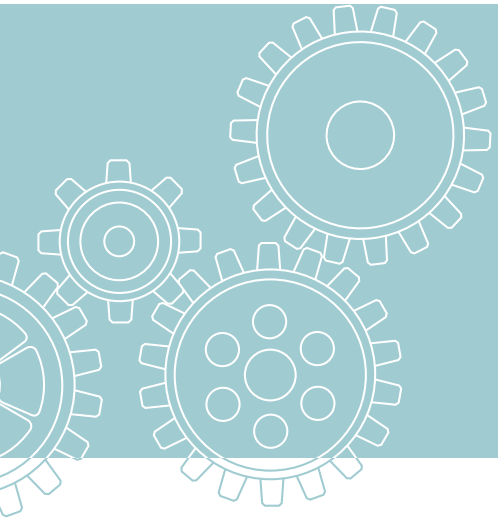


Project Overview

The Teaching and Learning Standards (TaLS) Project addresses the Government's search for a valid and efficient way to assure sector standards in relation to academic achievement, whilst assuring appropriate diversity and responsiveness. It seeks to identify a collegial approach for reviewing unit/subject 'inputs' such as unit outlines, learning objectives and assessment items, along with actual samples of student assessment outcomes. This approach is based on 'blind' peer review among disciplinary experts in partner universities. It uses a sampling approach and is not unduly onerous.

Our goal is to provide opportunities for academic staff with disciplinary expertise to 'calibrate' their ability to judge student work and to support one another to ensure that their approaches to assessment are valid and reliable.

This use of peer review will be underpinned by a common evaluation framework. In the project, discipline specialists from partner universities will compare:

- the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and assessment tasks used in common units of study; and
- the reliability of marking in these units.

This means that the project gives focus not only to comparing assessment outcomes – in particular the reliability of marking – but also to comparing the nature and validity of a range of assessment inputs – including the specified learning outcomes, assessment tasks, and grading criteria in common units of study across partner universities. This process will be used to identify, critique and consolidate the indicators being used to identify the standards for learning outcomes, assessment processes, assessment tasks and marking in common areas of provision and specific disciplines across the partner institutions.

The project deliverables will include:

- A range of discipline-specific moderation strategies developed through peer review for adaptation and use within or between universities to assure the quality of academic achievement standards in specific fields of education.
- A validated, reliable and cost-effective method that could be used to assure the quality, relevance and assessment of student outcomes in Australian universities, whilst at the same time promoting sector diversity and responsiveness.

The results from the participating universities will be consolidated and circulated to all participants for feedback. The enhanced report will then be discussed at a meeting of relevant project team members from the partner institutions with a view to determining if the approach is efficient, productive, relevant and scalable. Peer reviewers will also be asked to provide their feedback on the process, suggesting enhancements where appropriate.

National roundtable discussions will be conducted to review the veracity and implications of what emerges. We will also link up with parallel projects, including those supported by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) and international developments in the area of standards and assessment.

Key Terms Used in this Guide

Unit of study– may also be referred to as a *subject* or *course*. This is normally a one semester (or equivalent) unit of study and forms part of a degree program.

Unit guide – in most universities this is the main guide for students. It often includes assessment information and learning objectives, as well as information about assessment.

Learning guide – this term may be used in some universities. It involves a self-teaching package on how to undertake the assessment tasks and associated learning activities that inform them.

De-identified – a sample from which any identifying institutional information, student details, and marks have been removed.

Home University – the university in which assessment materials/unit guides are selected and de-identified for peer review.

Partner University –agrees to take part in the 'blind' peer review exercise and provides feedback on de-identified assessment materials/unit guides from the Home University. In this project at least three universities share the de-identified assessment inputs and the agreed sample of assessment products for blind review by peers with appropriate disciplinary expertise in another university.

Unit Coordinators – individuals with primary responsibility for convening a unit of study. We expect that Unit Coordinators will do some or all of the peer review of unit outlines and 'blind marking'/moderation of sample assessment items from Partner Universities, but they may nominate colleagues (see Peer Reviewers).

Peer Reviewers – a Unit Coordinator may wish to nominate one or more colleagues to assist with reviewing unit outlines and moderating sample assessment items. This is optional. Unit Coordinators may choose to do all review activities themselves.

Timeline to be negotiated among partner universities.

ATTACHMENT A CHECKLIST

Please paste the relevant information in the sections below or refer to the appropriate document.

- All materials should be *de-identified,* i.e., free from identifying institutional information, unit codes, student details, marks, or written comments.

A – Brief rationale for unit design and approach (optional)

B – Degree

- ☐ Information about degree program structure in which unit is located
- ☐ List of degree-level learning outcomes
- ☐ Specification of the unit selected, including where it fits into the degree program (including core or elective status) and a brief outline of how it is linked to degree level outcomes

C – Unit/Subject

- ☐ Unit title
- ☐ Unit outline
- ☐ Unit learning guide (if applicable)
- ☐ Unit learning objectives/outcomes

D - Assessment tasks

- ☐ Description of specific assessment tasks being used in unit (including copies of essay and exam questions)
- ☐ Weighting for assessment tasks

E – Grading

- ☐ Brief details of the grading system and nomenclature used for the unit concerned
- ☐ Copies of grading guides/criteria sheets that accompany the samples of student work to be submitted (see F, below).
  If no grading guides/criteria sheets are used, please provide an explanation of how student work is graded.

F – Sample of student work

De-identified samples of student work from *one* of the assessment tasks in the unit (preferably worth 25% or more of final grade) which represent the:

- ☐ bottom of the range (fail or equivalent)
- ☐ minimum requirements for a pass (low pass or equivalent)
- ☐ middle of the range (credit or high credit)
- ☐ top of the range (distinction/high distinction or equivalent)

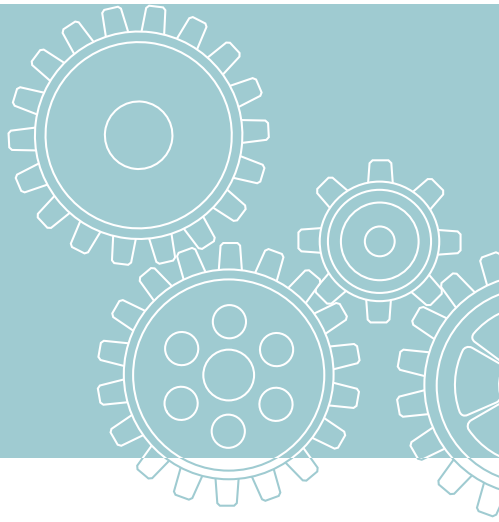
This will equate to a *total* of 4 samples of student work – i.e., one from each grade band.

Suggestion for sending student work
Hard copies of student work can be scanned and emailed to [insert your email contact here].

G – Assessment coversheet

- ☐ A completed coversheet (*Attachment B*) for each sample of student work. Please save the completed editable *Home Uni Coversheets – Attach B* document and email as an attachment to the Project Officer.

Please EMAIL this completed document to [insert your email contact here].



ATTACHMENT B COVERSHEET

Home University Materials
(Completed by: Unit Coordinators and/or Support Person at Home University)

University: _____

Your contact details: _____

_____

Student work sample number: 1 2 3 4 Other: _____

Discipline: _____

Degree: _____

Unit code: _____

Type of assessment (e.g., Final exam): _____

Assessment weighting: _____% of final grade

Actual marks (if relevant): _____ / _____

Grade awarded (please select)*: Fail Pass Credit Distinction High distinction

**Please indicate and select equivalent if a different grading system is used*

_____
_____
_____
_____

Comments and suggestions for improving this process:

_____
_____
_____
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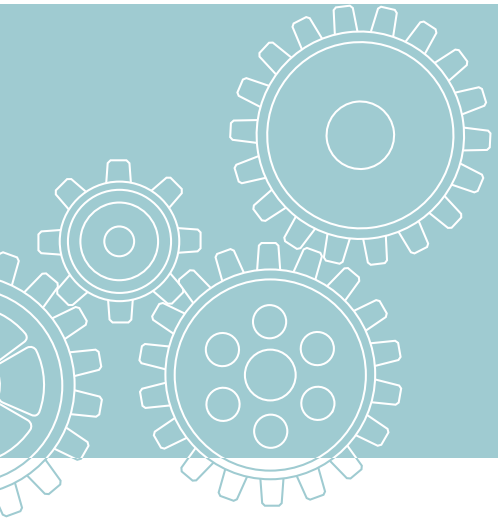


ATTACHMENT C PEER FEEDBACK FORM

(Completed by: Unit Coordinator and/or Peer Reviewer/s in each Partner University)

SECTION A: YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE UNIT OUTLINE

In reviewing the unit outline/learning guide:

1. To what extent does the curriculum content for this unit cover all that a final year undergraduate unit on this topic should cover? *(Please select the description that best represents your view)*

Not at all 1	*Somewhat* 2	*Adequately* 3	*Very Well* 4	*Completely* 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please list up to three *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate.

2. a. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the unit learning outcomes? *(Please select)*

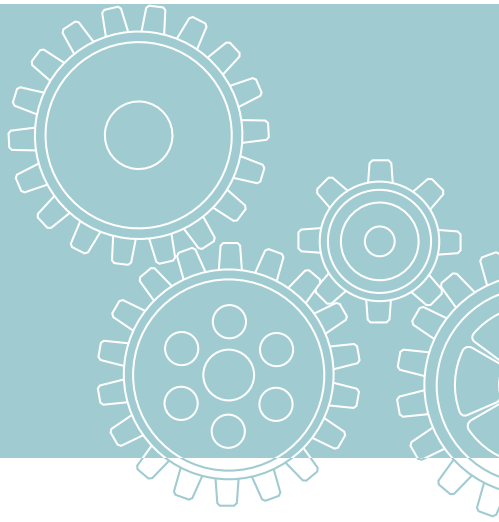
Not at all 1	*Somewhat* 2	*Adequately* 3	*Very Well* 4	*Completely* 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please list up to three *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate.

b. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the overall graduate outcomes of the degree program? (Please select)

Not at all 1	*Somewhat* 2	*Adequately* 3	*Very Well* 4	*Completely* 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please list up to three *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate



3. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain clearly (preferably with examples) the requirements for achieving at various grade levels (e.g., what is required to achieve a credit, distinction etc.)? *(Please select).*

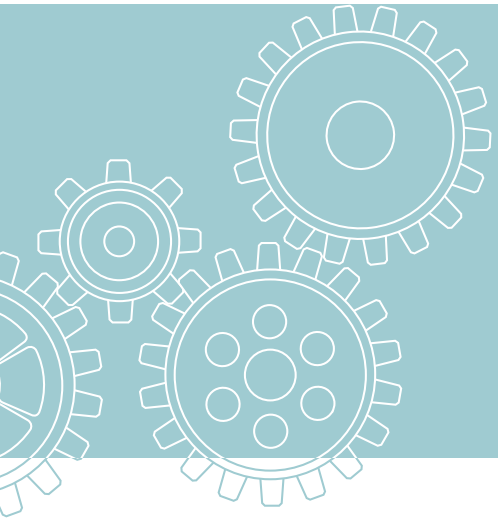
Not applicable	*Not at all 1*	*Somewhat 2*	*Adequately 3*	*Very Well 4*	*Completely 5*

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate.

4. What, briefly, are the **best aspects** of the unit outline/learning guide?

5. Do you have any suggestions for **further enhancing** the unit outline/learning guide?

Comments



SECTION B: YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE GRADING GUIDELINES

In reflecting on the assessment grading guidelines provided for the samples of student work that you are reviewing:

1. To what extent is it clear how student work will be awarded grades at different levels for that assessment task? (Please select)

Not applicable	*Not at all 1*	*Somewhat 2*	*Adequately 3*	*Very Well 4*	*Completely 5*

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate

2. To what extent are the grading criteria at an appropriate level for a final year undergraduate unit of study in this field of education? *(Please select)*

Not applicable	*Not at all 1*	*Somewhat 2*	*Adequately 3*	*Very Well 4*	*Completely 5*

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate

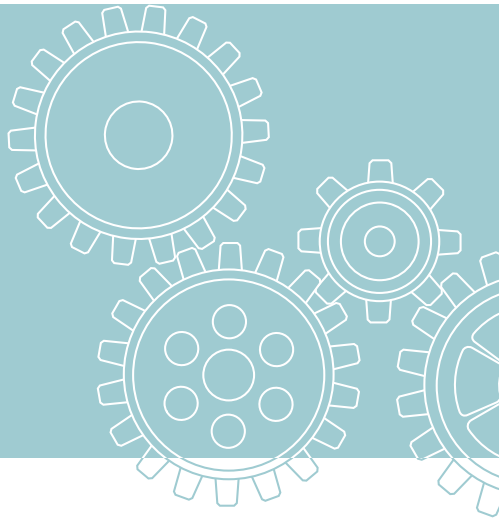
SECTION C: YOUR FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT TASK/S

In reviewing the list of assessment tasks which students have to complete in the unit of study:

1. To what extent is the range of assessment tasks suited to assessing the key learning objectives listed in the unit outline? (Please select)

Not at all 1	*Somewhat 2*	*Adequately 3*	*Very Well 4*	*Completely 5*

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate



SECTION D: YOUR OVERALL FEEDBACK ON THIS PROCESS

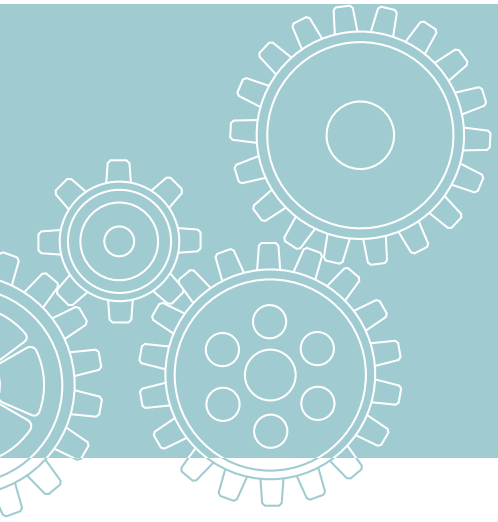
Please provide brief feedback on this peer review process as a collegial way to monitor and assure standards in common units of study between different universities.

1. What, briefly, are the **best aspects** of this peer review process?

2. Which aspects of this peer review process **do you think we could improve** and how might this be achieved?

Please save the completed editable *Peer Feedback Form – Attach C* document and email as an attachment to [insert your email contact here].

Many thanks for your valuable input.



ATTACHMENT D CHECKLIST

Partner University Materials
(Completed by: Unit Coordinators and/or Support Person in each Partner University)

A – Feedback on peer reviewed samples of student work

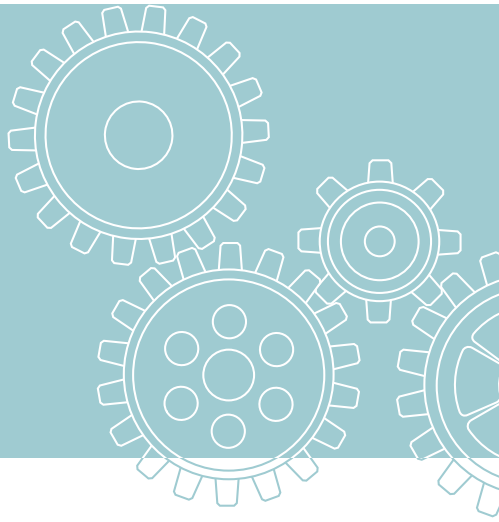
☐ Completed grading guides/criteria sheets (if supplied). Please email to [insert your email contact here].

B – Partner university feedback coversheet

☐ A completed coversheet (*Attachment E*) for each peer reviewed sample of student work. Please save the completed editable *Partner Uni Checklist + Coversheets – Attach D&E* document and email as an attachment to the Project Officer.

Explanatory Comments *(optional):*

Thank you for your significant contribution to this project



ATTACHMENT E COVERSHEET

Partner University Materials
(Completed by: Unit Coordinators and/or Peer Reviewer/s in each Partner University)

Partner university number: _____
(as labelled in the files you have received)

Student work sample number: _____
(as labelled in the files you have received)

Discipline: _____

Assessment item reviewed: _____
(e.g., Final exam)

Peer reviewer/s: _____

Contact details: _____

Your home university: _____

Mark *(if relevant):*
The mark I would allocate this piece of work
(using the marking guide that came with it) _____ / _____

Grade *(if relevant):*
The grade I would allocate to this piece of work *(using the grading guide that came with it)*

(please select):* **Fail** **Pass** **Credit** **Distinction** **High distinction**

**Please indicate and select equivalent if a different grading system is used*

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Comments:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Please also email the completed grading guides/criteria sheets (if supplied) to [insert your email contact here].

Section 6
Implementation guide for inter-institutional peer review of standards

Step-by-Step Implementation Guide

The following steps are a suggested guide for implementing a peer review process for monitoring and assuring learning and teaching standards among a group of institutions. These steps may be adapted according to context. Attachments comprising sample emails and templates for implementation are also included.

1) Project team to identify discipline area/s for involvement.
2) Project team (Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC)/Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) or nominee) to email/phone relevant Head of School (HoS)/ representative in his/her institution to seek approval for discipline involvement.
   - Copy in project leader and project officer.

   See email template for recruiting academic peer reviewers in disciplines: Section 7.
3) Project officer to phone HoS/representative to explain project further. HoS/representative asked to nominate disciplinary colleague/s to assist in the process of identifying three or more final year units in the discipline which could be suitable for involvement in project.

   Site visits at each university may be held at this stage to assist in recruitment if appropriate. These visits involve a meeting of the project leader, project officer (depending on location and project budget), HoS and/or representative and appropriate disciplinary colleagues at the university involved in the project.

   See sample site visit agenda: Section 9.

   See background reading to site visits: Section 10.
4) Project officer to contact nominated disciplinary colleagues to brief on project. Mention recommendation from HoS. Advise colleagues of their role – identify three units that would suit the purposes of project. Advise that they will be sent an email with information about identifying the three units. Post discussion, email project outline and/or User Guide if colleagues would like further information.
5) Project leader/officer to email nominated colleagues in each discipline to ask for nomination of three units for potential involvement in project.

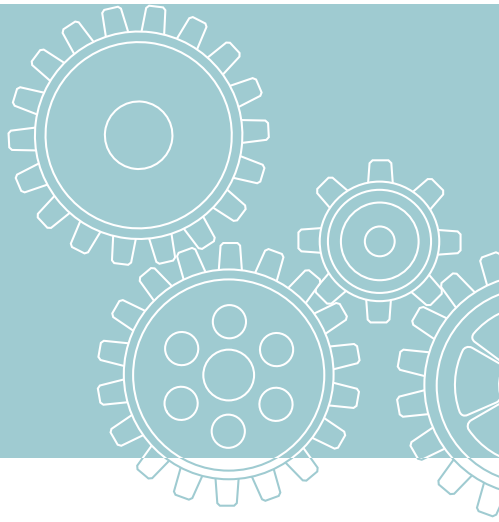
   Ask for a one paragraph synopsis on each suggested unit, the unit coordinator details and semester information.

   See email template for requesting unit nominations: Section 8.

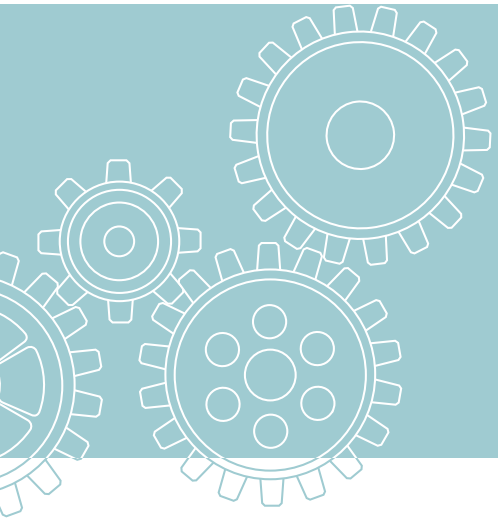
   Teleconferences or email discussions between nominated disciplinary colleagues across universities may be organised at this stage to help in identifying units.
6) Nominated colleagues in each discipline/institution as a contact to confirm with project officer the unit to be involved in each discipline, as well as details of peer reviewer/s (often unit coordinator).

Site visits may be organised at this stage.

7) Project officer to telephone each peer reviewer.
   - Mention disciplinary contact recommendation
   - Explain process
   - Give summary of steps involved in process
   - Advise a follow up email with key documents will be sent
   - Advise of site visit organisation if relevant
   - Negotiate deadline for submission of inputs (unit and degree information (inputs) and samples of student work (outputs)).
     - Unit and degree information may be sent ahead of samples of student work depending on whether retrospective (from previous semester) or current assessment item is being used.



8) Project officer to send email proceeding the telephone conversation confirming the agreed deadline for submission of inputs (and outputs if retrospective work being used) or request colleague to nominate deadline if not already identified. Input deadline is generally two to three weeks after the telephone conversation.
   - Email attachments:
     - User Guide (**see Section 5**)
     - Home University Coversheets – Attachment B (editable document) (**see templates in Section 5**)
     - Ethics Form and Participant Agreement (**see Sections 11 & 12**).
9) Collate ethics forms as necessary.
10) Project officer to send reminder email one week before input/input and output (retrospective) submission deadline (if applicable).
11) Project officer to send reminder three days before input/input and output submission deadline (if applicable).
12) Project officer to send reminder one day after input/input + output submission deadline (if applicable).
13) Upon receipt the project officer is to check all input materials have been provided, using the User Guide checklist (**see template in Section 5**). In particular, check that all materials are de-identified.
14) Project officer to confirm receipt of the materials by email. Copy in institutional nominee/ university contact monitoring process at the participating university if relevant.
15) If inputs and outputs have been provided together, the project officer will distribute materials via email to peer reviewers in partner universities.
    - Give instructions for reviewing materials.
    - Attach Partner University Coversheets and Peer Review Form editable documents. (**see templates in Section 5**)
    - Advise of deadline for completing review. Deadline for reviewing one set of inputs and outputs is generally two to three weeks from the date distributed.
    - Copy in institutional nominee if applicable.
    - Project officer to follow up peer reviewer via phone roughly three to four days after sending email (if necessary).
    - If inputs have been provided (outputs to come later), project officer to email peer reviewer/s to determine whether he/she would prefer to receive inputs for review shortly and at a later date outputs (samples of work), or receive the inputs and outputs together when both are ready for review.
16) Reminder email two weeks before deadline (if applicable).
17) Reminder email one week before deadline (if applicable).
18) Reminder one day after deadline (if applicable).
19) Email to confirm receipt of review. Copy in institutional nominee if applicable.
20) Check reviewed documents to ensure they have been completed appropriately.
21) Transfer feedback data to Excel spreadsheet.
    See spreadsheet template for collating data – Section 13.
22) Analyse data and prepare discipline findings reports.
    See discipline findings report template – Section 14.

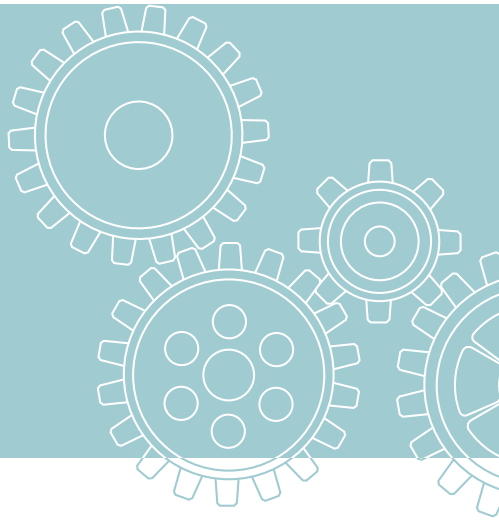


23) Distribute discipline findings reports via email to colleagues in each discipline.

24) Send unit feedback to unit coordinator from the two peer reviewers.
See Peer Feedback Form – see templates in Section 5.

25) Organise disciplinary feedback teleconferences.
See sample questions for feedback with peer reviewers – Section 15.

Section 7
Email template for recruiting academic peer reviewers in disciplines



Recruitment email template

========== Start of email template ==========

Dear [name],

This year the University is participating in a project that utilises a peer-based approach to assuring academic standards – such projects have developed from the sector in response to discussion of potential Teaching and Learning standards for the new tertiary regulator, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). We are enthusiastic about participating in the project because it is good to be involved in efforts to ensure that sensible approaches emerge and also because we learn what we can about the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches. The project is an Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT formerly ALTC) project that runs across two years, involves eight universities and up to 10 disciplines per year (led by Profs Geoff Scott and Kerri Lee Krause).

The project will focus on final year undergraduate units, ideally units completed by all or a number of students completing a major, and will take contextual account of the learning objectives of subjects and degree structures.

I am writing to you now as a meeting of universities involved in the project has selected [discipline/s] as disciplines to include in [semester, year]. I am hoping you will be happy to include a final year [discipline] unit in the process. Involvement in the project means:

- attendance at a briefing with the project team.
- participation by the subject coordinator (or delegated teaching team member) in the peer review exercise (this means review of materials – objectives, outline, assessment exercises and a small number of items of assessed work – from another university).
- supply of materials – objectives, outline, assessment exercises and a small number of items of assessed work – for review by a subject coordinator from another university.

Colleagues involved in earlier work on the project found it a useful and interesting process and not onerous.

Would you be willing to participate and also help identify a suitable unit – preferably one that is likely to have something in common with units taught in other universities?

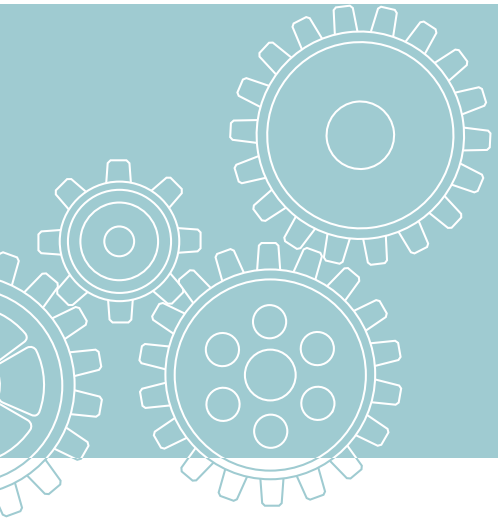
The other participating universities are: [names] – selected to “cover” the sector.

I am very much looking forward to hearing from you, and very happy to supply more details about the proposed moderation if required.

Many thanks in advance,

[name]

========== End of email template ==========



Section 8
Email template for requesting unit nominations from participating institutions

========== Start of email template ==========

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of our national Office of Learning and Teaching (OLT) project on peer review and moderation of final year coursework in [*discipline name*].

We are now moving into Phase [*phase number*] which will involve units in Semester [*semester number*] [*year*] and Semester [*semester number*] [*insert year*]. [*discipline name*] is one of [*disciplines number]* disciplines involved in Phase [*phase number*].

What is our aim?

- To identify a comparable final year unit/s in [discipline name] which we can be used for the process of peer review and moderation of sample assessment items.
- The peer review process is designed to share discipline-based expertise across universities, including collegial peer review feedback on unit inputs and outcomes.

What do we ask you and/or your colleagues to do?

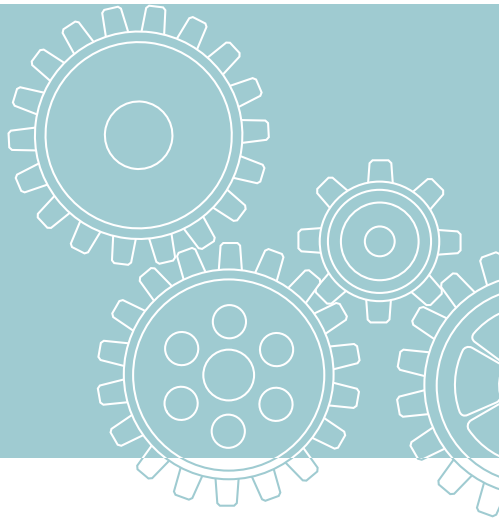
- Once the unit/s for peer review have been finalised, we ask that you share a copy of the unit outline, assessment items and assessment criteria (inputs) and four samples of student assessment (outputs) in response to one assessment question in the unit. These samples of student work should represent four grade bands, from Fail to High Distinction (or equivalent). Some contextual information about how the unit fits within the degree program is also requested (see the feedback template and checklists for further details).
- Your partner universities use a feedback template to provide peer review comments on the unit content and assessment items (i.e., the unit inputs). They also moderate the samples of student work (i.e., outcomes) using the criteria applied in the home university.
- [Project officer] will provide you with the feedback template when the units have been identified. If you would like a copy of this in advance, don't hesitate to contact him/her: [project officer email].

Who is involved?

- The universities involved in this peer review exercise for [*discipline name*] will be [*university names*]. (If applicable – [*university name/s*] may also be involved).
- We have ethics approval for this project and we ask all participants to sign an ethics and participant agreement form to ensure that the process is collaborative, supportive and collegial.

How can you help?

- I would really appreciate suggestions on two to three final year undergraduate units in [*discipline name*] which you think could be used for the purposes of this peer review among the involved universities. (If applicable) [*DVC/PVC*] will seek the views of his colleagues at [*university*].
- [*HoS/discipline contact name*], at [*university*] has suggested [*unit name*] and [*unit name*] as options; and [*HoS/discipline contact name*] ([*university*]) – *unit name*] might work from your perspective. We'll leave the rest to you for your suggestions and discussion.



- We are looking for broadly comparable units in terms of content and level of coursework. However we know that each university is distinctive in its approach, particularly in the final years of study. For this reason, we are not looking for identical units. Rather, we would like to ensure that we share unit materials and assessments among peers who are teaching in a similar field so that they are comfortable providing feedback on the unit content and assessment items.
- Please reply with the names of two to three final year units that are likely to have comparators in the partner universities listed above. From this list we will settle on one or two units for the final peer review process. We need at least two partners for each unit. The units may be offered in either Semester 1 [*year*] or Semester 2 [*year*] – we are happy to extend the process over two semesters.
- Ideally, we are looking for capstone units (if applicable).

We can talk further about the details of the peer review process once we know that we have at least one unit that we can use for this exercise.

I would appreciate receiving your suggestions by [*day, date*] if at all possible. If there is merit in organising a teleconference, please let me know. I will be happy to do so. Alternatively, feel free to use this email distribution list as a way to finalise your choice of unit for peer review, or contact one another directly.

I look forward to working with you on this project and please do not hesitate to contact me or [Project Officer] if you have any questions. Many thanks!

[name]

========== End of email template ==========

Section 9
Sample site visit agenda

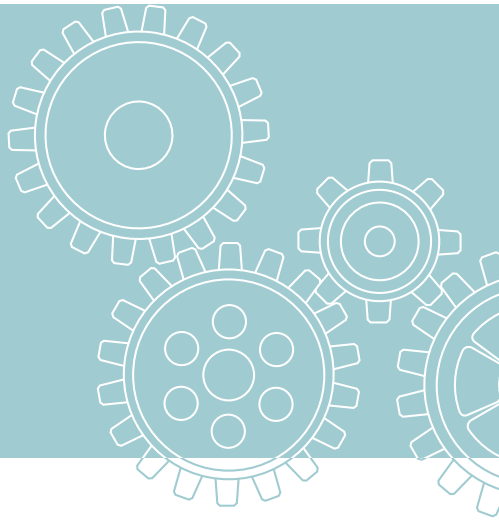
Following is a sample site visit program for discussion of peer review of standards among academic staff.

A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject/unit and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation

[name of university] Meeting Outline
[date]

1. **Project significance**
   a. Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) update and where this project fits – TEQSA covers standards in five areas: Provider standards – Qualification standards – Research standards – Information standards – L&T standards (focus of this project).
   b. Proportionate management of risk.
   c. Need to balance growth with quality and capacity to deliver.
   d. Importance of collegial peer review and disciplinary expertise.
2. **Project focus**
   a. Peer review of assessment inputs – learning outcomes, subject outlines/learning guides, grading system and the validity and range of assessment tasks.
   b. Blind grading of a small selection of assessment products – i.e. actual samples of student work in four grade bands.
   c. Strengthening Academic Standards and Assessment Frameworks. An example from UWS is over the page, especially Area 4.
   d. Graduate capabilities – using collegial peer review to monitor how graduate outcomes and learning standards are being assessed and validated across disciplines and universities.
3. **Connections to [name of University] strategic priorities**
   a. University colleagues to comment
4. **Project Implementation and User Guide**
   Clarify and review
   a. Key roles
      i. DVC/PVC
      ii. Head of School
      iii. Unit/Subject coordinator and unit team
      iv. Project officer
      v. Project directors
      vi. National Steering Committee

   b. Key steps
      i. Identify common final year undergraduate units of study (websearch and local advice)
      ii. For the agreed unit(s) – send a package of input materials, full list of assessment tasks and a sample of a de-identified assessment product – one each at a fail, pass, credit, distinction level to the Project Officer
      iii. Review assessment inputs (using feedback sheet)
      iv. 'Blind mark' a small sample of assessment products
      v. Report outcomes from b (i) and (ii)



5. **Other issues**
   a. Make sure the full list of assessment tasks for the common units is received but select only one (and not always the exam) for blind grading and moderation.
   b. Feedback on the Implementation and User Guide – suggestions for Phase 2
   c. Any assessment items that measure degree program level outcomes – e.g. capstones, work-based learning projects, practicum placements.
   d. Your role as partners in the project – testing, validating a possible model for the sector.

1. Meeting Papers
   1. Agenda
   2. Implementation and User Guide (Section 5 of this Handbook)
   3. Project Summary (Brief)
   4. Executive Summary: 2010 Project Pilot
   5. Information Sheet & Consent Form
   6. Information Sheet & Participant Agreement
   7. See over page for UWS Learning and Teaching Standards Framework illustrating the connection between teaching (process) and learning (outcome) standards
   8. Background information *Researching graduate capability* (Scott, March 2011) See Section 10.

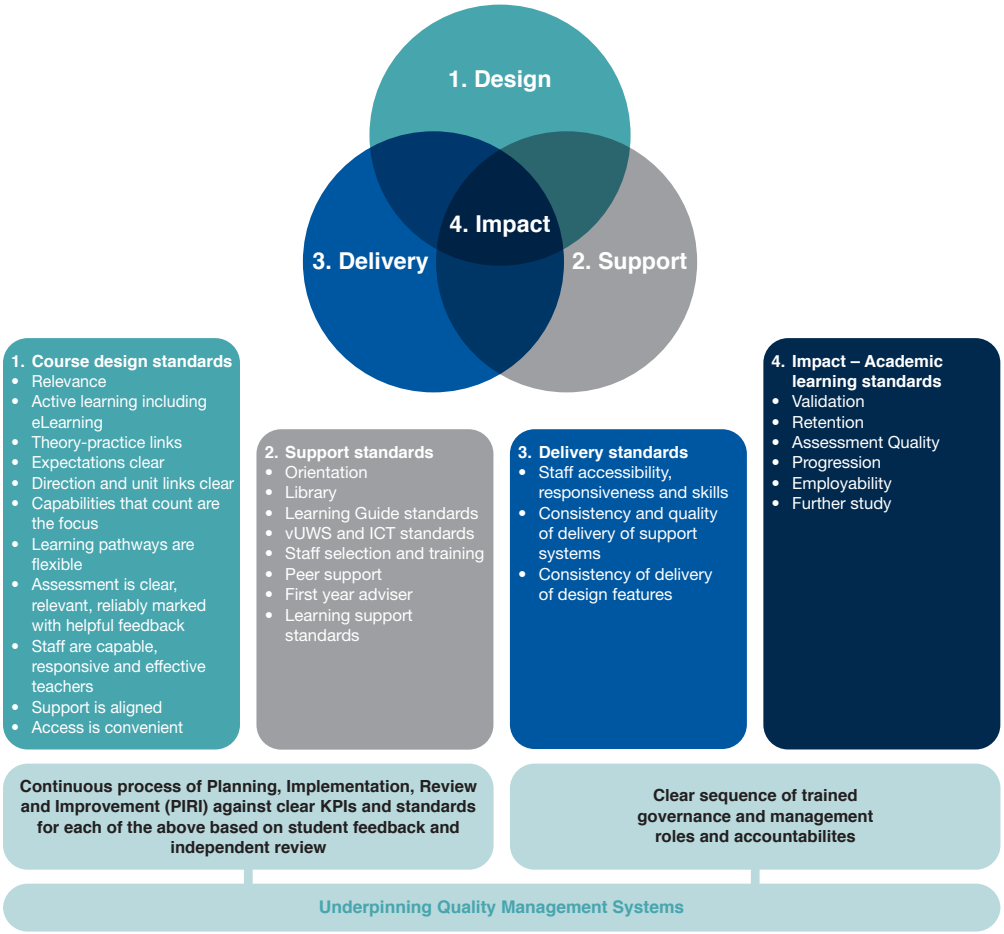
Key Contact People

Project Officer: [insert name and email here]

Project Leaders: [insert name/s and email/s here]

Your institutional nominee and 'go to' person: [insert name and email here]

UWS L&T standards framework and QA system
(Source Bradley Review)



Section 10
Background reading for institutional site visits – *Researching graduate capability* (Scott, 2011)

CHEC Cape Universities Quality Forum March 2011

Researching graduate capability

Geoff Scott
Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Western Sydney

Aim

In this address I aim to set up a framework for your discussions at the forum. I will do this by outlining what is happening in Australia and many other parts of the world to address the issue of researching graduate capability, and to improve the quality of what we design and deliver in our higher education programs as we seek to produce graduates who contribute positively not only to their professions but to their country and communities.

Specifically I aim to:

- Locate the issue of 'graduateness' within a broader framework for assuring academic standards and assessment;
- Summarise the key factors that are currently making academic standards and the quality of course level outcomes a focus;
- Outline and review approaches to validating graduate outcomes and ensuring they are effectively assessed;
- Highlight the role of tracking studies of successful graduates in this process.

Key Terms

Before I start I would like to note something repeatedly found in our studies of successful change management in higher and further education over the past 30 years: that, if we first don't all make clear to each other at the outset what we mean by key terms, we may find ourselves talking at cross-purposes.

It would, for example, be useful to develop an agreed definition of the following terms as your institutions seek to work collaboratively on the areas that are the focus of this forum.

I have listed out what we mean by such terms at my institution – each is not necessarily the one 'right' definition but might trigger some ideas for you.

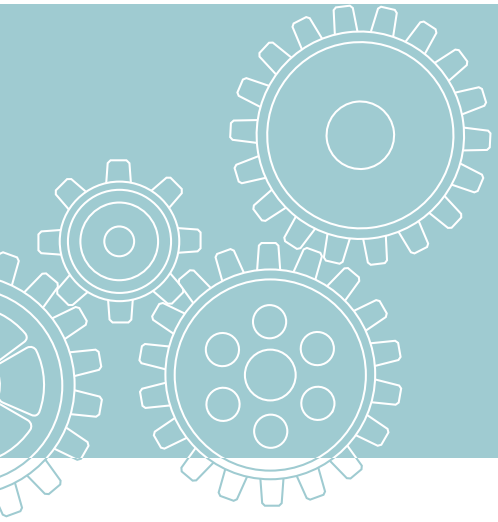
Capability versus competence

There is much confusion between these two terms.

For us *competence* concerns both relevant generic skills and knowledge (e.g. how to use computers) and profession or discipline specific skills and knowledge (e.g. in law a clear understanding of relevant legislation or in surgery how the correct procedure for an appendectomy).

On the other hand, for us, *capability* refers to higher order abilities like the ability to manage oneself when things go wrong, the ability to work productively with a diverse range of people, the ability to diagnose what is really happening in an ambiguous, complex technical and human situation and, from this, to identify how best to proceed.

There tends to be too much focus on competence (skills and knowledge) in many university programs and assessment regimes and too little focus on how to manage the complex technical and human problems of real world practice.



Furthermore, when people talk about 'capabilities' it tends to be about cognitive capabilities, often things like the ability to think critically, analyse or solve given problems. There is much less talk about producing graduates who can work in messy situations, who have the capability to diagnose, to determine if a problematic situation is worth pursuing or who can 'make sense' of what is going on when things take an unexpected turn. Yet in our work on this area over the past thirty years we have found that the best tradespeople, early career graduates, teachers, leaders and professionals all share similar profiles – they are all characterised by high levels of emotional intelligence and a particular, 'contingent' way of thinking. They do have high levels of relevant skill and knowledge (competence) but these are seen as being necessary but not sufficient for successful professional performance in the uncertain world of daily practice.

Assessment

At University of Western Sydney (UWS) assessment is defined as the measurement of learning. In 2011-12 UWS is leading a national assessment benchmarking project with Griffith University funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) involving the Australian National University, the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology and Charles Darwin University. This project is using peer review to test the standards and quality of what is being given focus in assessment in similar units of study and courses, along with the grading systems, the validity of the assessment tasks and how course-level outcomes are being measured. This work is a complement to the ALTC discipline standards project and the subject benchmark standards in the U.K.

Academic standard

- "UWS defines an *Academic standard* as: an agreed specification … used as a rule, guideline or definition of a level of performance or achievement. (This definition is very similar to that used in the Australian Universities Quality Assurance Agency's Quality Manual v 7 p: 93).
- In the area of *student assessment* at UWS standards are statements of the level of performance on specified criteria in assessment tasks.
- In evaluating *course design, support and delivery* 'standard' refers to an agreed level of performance. For example, the UWS performance standard for student feedback is 3.8/5. This is because, on a five point Likert scale, this means that more students are marking 4 – agree and 5 – strongly agree than neutral (3); disagree (2) or strongly disagree (1)."

UWS AUQA Cycle 2 Portfolio, 2011, p. 14-15

UWS has given focus to *Academic Standards and Assessment* as one of its two chosen AUQA cycle 2 audit improvement themes, the other being *Commencing Student Transition and Retention*. Whereas the first theme concerns our aim to assure 'excellence' the latter is focused on opportunity. For us it is the combination of opportunity and excellence that counts. The UWS audit takes place in early May, 2011.

Criterion

Criteria are specific performance attributes or characteristics that the assessor takes into account when making a judgment about the student response to the different elements of the assessment task (UWS Assessment Guide, p. 4).

Ensuring that what is given focus is valid (i.e. what is needed for effective graduate performance in each profession or field of study) is a key issue. And this is where research on the capabilities that distinguish successful early career graduates can be helpful.

The UWS Academic Standards and Assessment Framework for Learning and Teaching

Diagram A (below) gives an overview of the UWS academic standards framework.

A key starting point (and the central focus of the framework) is to determine the sort of impact (4) we want to have on the capabilities and competencies of our graduates. This, in turn, involves seeking to identify the capabilities and competencies that are most important for early career professional or disciplinary performance, along with the sorts of attributes that are needed to develop a harmonious, productive and sustainable society. That is, we seek to validate – ensure the relevance – of the capabilities and competencies we want our students to develop by using both internal and external reference points.

Area 4 of Diagram A also includes making sure that, once course level outcomes – the capabilities and competencies to be developed – are determined, the way they are assessed is valid. That is we seek to ensure that the assessment tasks being used are really the best way to determine that our students are developing the required capabilities and competencies to the required standard. So in area 4 of Diagram A we are most concerned with developing both valid outcomes and valid assessment.

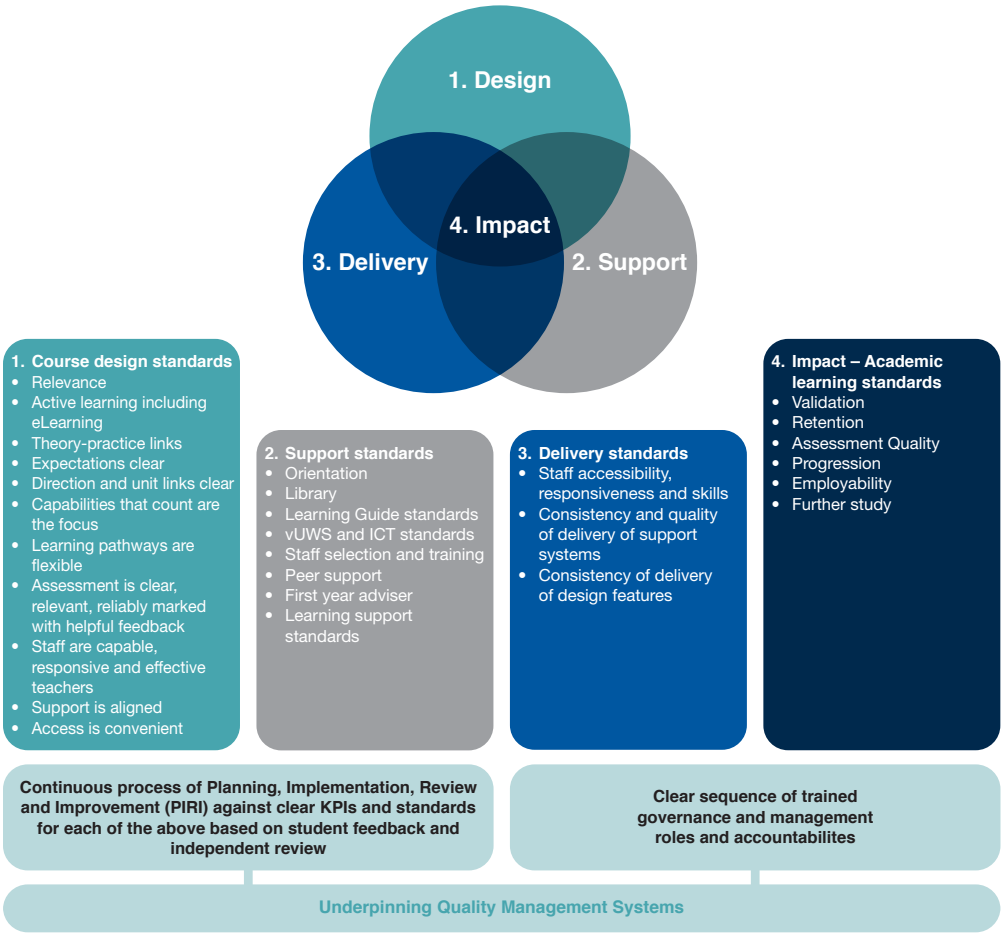
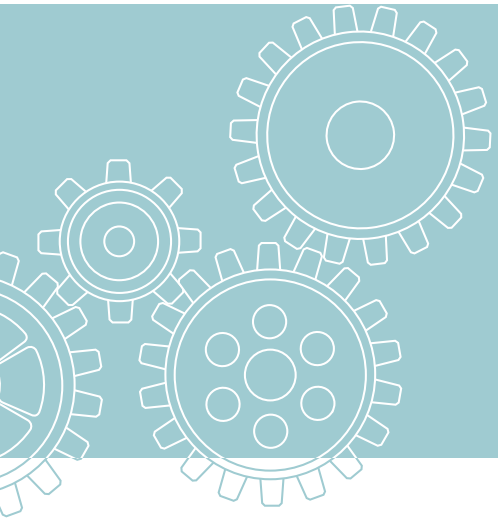


Diagram A: UWS Academic Standards and Assessment Framework for Learning and Teaching



Only then do we turn to designing the most engaging learning program (Area 1 in Diagram A) with which to develop the desired outcomes and to making sure that the underpinning support systems and infrastructure are aligned with this design (Area 2). The list in the left hand column in Diagram A outlines the empirically validated design tests which are used to ensure that the learning programs we design not only engage students in productive learning but retain them. The acronym made up of the first letter of each quality checkpoint spells out RATED CLASS A.

Importantly, it is possible to have valid learning outcomes and assessment (4), a well matched and engaging learning design (1), a support system directly aligned to assist its implementation (2) and still fail our students. This is because we need consistently capable and responsive staff in place to deliver what is planned (Area 3 in Diagram A).

Using this approach has meant that, since 2004, UWS has improved overall explicit satisfaction on the Australian Course experience Questionnaire by just on 25% and, retention by just on 4%. This is important to us as just over 50% of our students are first in their family to go to university, people for whom getting a degree profoundly opens up their life opportunities and contributes to the region. At present UWS has domestic students from more than 150 countries, including a large numbers of refugees.

What is driving the academic standards & graduate outcomes agenda?

A common set of change forces are operating together to encourage universities to give far more focus to course-level outcomes; to validating the capabilities and competencies they are seeking to develop in their graduates; to ensuring that their course designs engage and retain students; and to making sure that their assessment is both valid and reliable.

These change forces include:

- government policy developments concerning participation, rewards for retention and student success, with targeted funding;
- the introduction of new regulatory agencies like the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) in Australia;
- having to balance growth with quality and capacity to deliver;
- ensuring 'value for money' from what is expended on higher education;
- making sure that practitioners are competent;
- international developments – see, for example, the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), European Tuning, and Bologna initiatives;
- growing international competition for students;
- assertions of grade inflation;
- a growing student consumer movement and push for more informed choice as students have to pay increasing amounts for their university studies.

Whereas the top half of Diagram A concerns *what* we need to focus on to achieve great graduates, the bottom section concerns *how* we are seeking to ensure that such a framework is consistently and effectively implemented, monitored and improved. For us it is the combination of the *what* and *how* that counts most.

Validating course level outcomes

Reference Points being used to validate UWS course-level learning outcomes

Having outlined the broader framework I now wish to return to Area 4 of Diagram A – specifically to how we might validate the course level outcomes for each program.

At UWS, in addition to reference to the Australian Qualifications Framework, we are seeking to ensure that the graduate capabilities and competencies we are developing and assessing are validated against a set of external and university-specific reference-points.

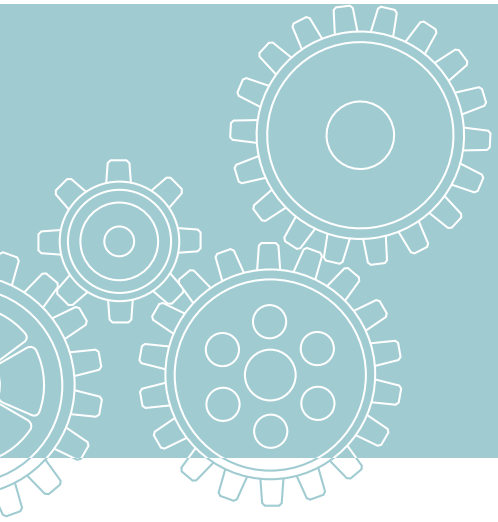
These reference points include:

- the Australian Learning and Teaching Council's discipline standards;
- the UK subject benchmarks and the outcomes of the European Tuning Project and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s AHELO project;
- external professional accreditation standards (when applicable);
- data on the highest rating learning outcomes on importance and performance in the UWS Annual Course Reports;
- the results of UWS School Reviews, especially recommendations concerning future positioning in the discipline or profession concerned;
- the stated learning outcomes for courses of the same name in other universities that are attracting high ratings on the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ);
- the UWS graduate attributes – focusing on these as well as those established by the professions helps ensure that our university is more than a vocational training agency. An example at UWS is our Indigenous Graduate Attribute;
- the results of studies of successful early graduates in the area concerned (discussed below);
- the results of the UWS Employer Survey; and
- input from the University's External Course Advisory Committees.

Some hot issues and dilemmas when validating course-level outcomes

These include:

- Whose voice has most weight? For example we need to figure out how best to balance what the government wants, what business and the professions want, the input from the university's council and staff, what successful graduates say works best, what enrolled students say they want and what the broader community expects.
- How best to set the balance between a focus on the university's graduate attributes and external requirements. This involves figuring out which of the above groups' views are going to be given most weight and making sure we take a representative and evidence-based approach. For example, our studies of change capable universities since the 1980s, indicate that many external advisory committee members are very senior people who may be out of touch with the world of the early career graduate and, when giving advice, often represent only their own point of view, not their constituency.
- What is the role of employer needs in this process? Employability is not the same as graduate capability. However, it is very important for our graduates that they are 'work ready'. Here there is potential to use surveys of the employers of the graduates from each institution. The UWS Employer Survey provides one model of how this can be done.



- Making greater use of studies of successful graduates. This is a source of data that is under-utilised. There is great potential to build on our studies of successful early career graduates in nine professions as an additional source of input.

Professional Capability Framework

I would like now to talk specifically about our research on successful graduates. The professional capability framework which underpins this research has been built and tested over three decades, starting with the research of Donald Schon on the Reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action in the 1980s and then our own studies of successful Skill Olympians in the early 1990s. These were followed by our studies of successful leaders in schools, Vocational Educational Training (VET) and higher education and successful early career graduates in accounting, architecture, engineering, IT, journalism, law, nursing, teaching and sports management. It is the successful graduate studies which we thought would be of most interest in the context of your current work.

What these studies have uncovered is that much more than a high level of generic or job-specific skill and knowledge (competency) is required to be identified as a successful early career performer in each of the professions studied.

Far more important is one's ability to manage oneself when things go wrong, when the unexpected happens, when complex workplace dynamics unfold.

Furthermore, we have found that the best performers not only have a high level of personal and interpersonal capability they also have a particular sort of cognitive capability. They are not simply able to analyse or think critically. What makes them stand out is their ability to 'read' what is going on in each distinct and challenging situation – in terms of both its technical and human dimensions – decide if it is really worth giving priority attention and, if it is, to 'match' a uniquely suited way of handling it. This way of thinking involves using diagnostic maps built up in similar but never exactly the same situation to make sense of what is going on; the ability to listen to others, to use collective input, an ability to tolerate ambiguity and, like a chess player, to trace out the medium and longer term consequences of a range of apparently sensible ways of dealing with the situation. Theirs is as much an ability to problem form as to problem solve.

They report developing this ability to 'listen, read and match' as coming from experiencing challenging situations, and specifically reflecting on what did and did not work using a framework like that in Diagram B to make sense of experience. It is in this way that they report that their most significant learning is learning from experience.

This has profoundly important implications for what we assess in higher education and how we help our graduates develop the capabilities that count. I am reminded here of the Canadian David Hunt's observations back in the 1980s – "there is nothing as practical as a good theory (Lewin) or as theoretical as good practice" and, more recently, Spohn's (2003:13) observation (cited Fullan and Scott, 2009, pg. 52) that "we are more likely to act ourselves into new ways of thinking than think ourselves into new ways of acting".

In short, our professional capability is most tested when things go wrong and it is then that something far more than knowing a lot or being able to do a lot counts.

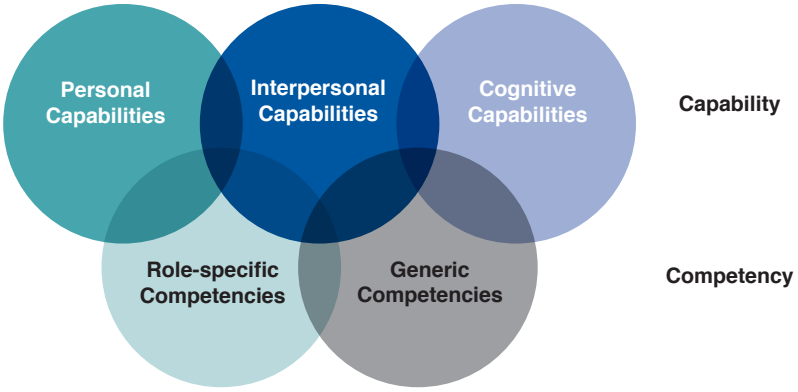


Diagram B: Professional capability framework

Our research has identified some 38 aspects of capability and competence that continue to be given high ratings on importance when our successful graduates are asked what they think it is about their approach that accounts for others identifying them as being such an effective performer. Each of these fits into one of the above domains.

An interesting side-product of these successful graduate studies has been the identification for each profession studied of what those who have nominated an early career graduate as performing successfully are using to select them. The most common indicators cited are delivering projects/jobs on time and to specification; and high levels of colleague and client satisfaction. We find that sharing these indicators with first year undergraduates in each of the professions concerned not only shows what people look for in the profession but shows why the professional capabilities that make up the framework outlined in Diagram B are so important.

The successful graduate studies

Many of these are listed in the Further Reading section if you are interested in finding out more about how they work. It would be great if colleagues in other countries were interested in replicating them and/or extending them to other areas so we can build up a more robust, focused and cross-cultural picture of the capabilities that count in our graduates.

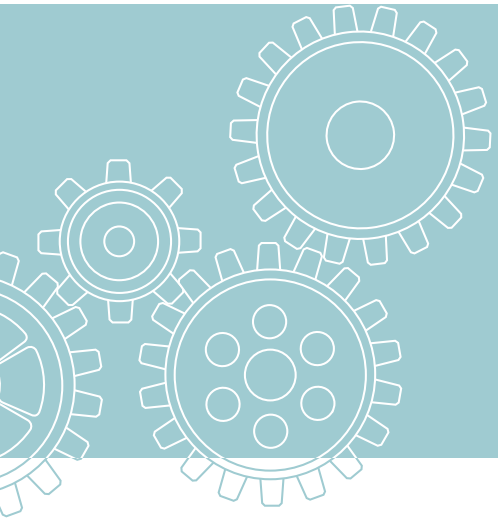
Methodology

The idea of using 'successful travellers further down the same learning path'

- The studies use the key finding from Alan Tough's studies of the Adult's Learning Projects in the late 1960s (since replicated around the world) that the preferred choice of learning resource is a person who is doing well and who is further down the same change (i.e. learning) path that the individual is setting out on. This is why we have intentionally selected early career graduates identified as performing successfully. What new students want is to hear what the most successful performers say counts.

The concept of 'backward mapping'

This involves finding out what capabilities in the domains identified in Diagram B are given the highest importance rating by successful graduates in each profession and working backwards to make sure that what is assessed and learnt aligns with them.



In the successful graduate studies we not only ask respondents to identify the capabilities that are, in their experience, most important, we also ask each of them to tell us when they were most challenged in the last year, what happened, what they did, what capabilities helped them most to make their way through the situation, how they evaluated what happened and what they learnt for next time. It is in this way that we are able not only to identify the capabilities that count but the real world material for integrated, case-based learning and assessment of them.

Capability framework

The overlapping of the circles in Diagram B is intended to indicate that, for an effective outcome, all these areas need to operate in conjunction. For example, one needs to be able to remain calm and tolerate the uncertainty of the situation when something goes wrong (aspects of personal capability); and be able to work collaboratively with the diverse range of people involved (an interpersonal capability) in order to start to figure out what is really going on, how important addressing the situation is and to diagnose what might work (aspects of cognitive capability). As this takes place certain generic skills and knowledge may help (e.g. networking electronically with colleagues to identify if they have encountered a similar situation and what they did) and, when action is taken, it is important that the professional is able to deftly draw upon job-specific knowledge and deliver successfully the necessary skills.

We have found that exactly the same combination works for effective higher education teachers and leaders (see Fullan and Scott, 2009). This is no accident because change capable organisations are made up of change capable leaders and change capable staff.

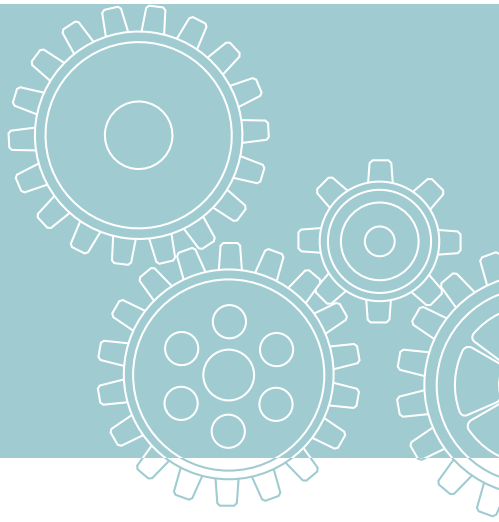
The top ranking capabilities

Table A lists, in rank order on importance (highest first), the top 12 capabilities and competencies out of the 38 surveyed for a combined sort of the results for successful early career graduates from the nine professions. All of the items listed in Table C attracted an importance rating of more than 4.4/5.

There are some variations in the weighting for each profession but the pattern in Table A is generally representative. Looking at Table A raises some very interesting issues about what is being given focus in learning and assessment in our universities.

Table A: Successful graduate studies – highest rating items on importance (all professions) in rank order, highest first

Being able to organise my work and manage time effectively	(GSK)
Wanting to produce as good a job as possible	(P)
Being able to set and justify priorities	(C)
Being able to remain calm under pressure or when things go wrong	(P)
Being willing to face and learn from my errors and listen openly to feedback	(P)
Being able to identify from a mass of detail the core issue in any situation	(C)
Being able to work with senior staff without being intimidated	(IP)
Being willing to take responsibility for projects, including how they turn out	(P)
Being able to develop and contribute positively to team-based projects	(IP)
A willingness to persevere when things are not working out as anticipated	(P)
The ability to empathise with and work productively with people from a wide range of backgrounds	(IP)
Being able to develop and use networks of colleagues to help me solve key workplace problems	(IP)



Discussion of these findings

A number of observations can be made about these findings. They include the fact that, for these successful graduates:

- Capability is more important than competence. In other words having high levels of generic and profession-specific skill and knowledge is necessary but it is not sufficient for successful early career performance.
- 5 of the top 12 items concern personal capabilities (PC).
- 4 of the top 12 concern interpersonal capabilities (IP).
- 2 of the top 12 concern cognitive capabilities (C).
- One item concerns a generic competency (GSK). It is worth noting that the more we undertake such studies the more this area (work and time management) emerges as masking a wide range of personal, interpersonal and cognitive capabilities.

As noted already, these findings align closely with extensive research on successful School, Vocation Educational Training (VET) and higher education leaders (see for example *Learning leaders in times of change*). They also align with the findings from the Carnegie Foundation-funded study undertaken in the U.S. by Sullivan and Rosin (2008) on the new agenda for higher education. One key recommendation from this study was for U.S. universities to focus more on the development of 'practical reasoning' and 'shaping a life of the mind for practice'.

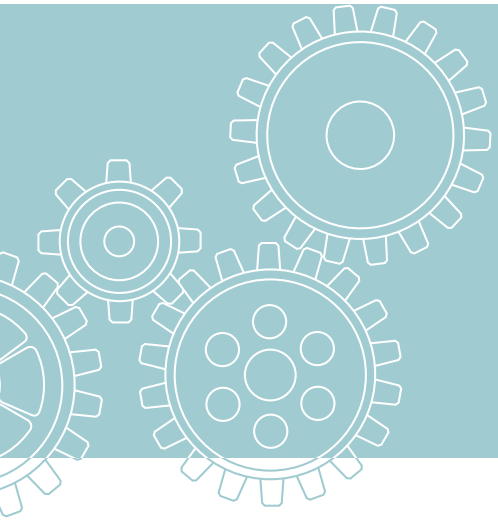
Finally our findings align with our conclusions at the 2010 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) – Microsoft leaders conference where the ministers and officials from the 40 countries present focused on the capabilities required of 21st century graduates and the successful graduate studies findings were discussed.

It was concluded that two key literacies should underpin our findings – sustainability literacy and change 'savviness.' It was also noted that our universities still operate predominantly using a model which encourages disciplines to operate in isolation from each other despite the fact that, as our successful graduate studies show, our graduates have to work in a multi-disciplinary world.

A new focus for university graduates?

Sullivan and Rosin (2008) put our position well on the new role of universities and the critical importance of ensuring that we are giving focus to helping students develop (i.e. learn) capabilities more suited to a 21st century world (Fullan and Scott, 2009, pg. 44-6). Sullivan and Rosin argue that the 21st century university should aim:

> To prepare students for lives of significance and responsibility (by developing) a life of the mind for practice. This life of the mind for practice means developing students' capacity to blend knowledge, skill and appropriate attitude in response to unique situations that require expert judgement... The common thread to this new integration is teaching practical reason.... there is much more to university education than critical thinking. By itself, critical thinking is bad theory because it fails to grasp the meaning and required action in specific situations... Practical reasoning and valid higher education experience is about participation and engagement with real-world problems and perplexities, not the abstract dissection associated with critical thinking and traditional university analysis (Sullivan and Rosin 2008, p.10).



> The academy is not only called upon to break apart the world into its constitutive relations and causes through critical thinking... we mistake analysis and critical thinking, which are distintegrating ends, for judgement and responsibility, which are integrating and consummating ends.... Our students will be called to take up concrete places and stances in the lives of others. They must learn to discern the practical salience of academic insight through integrative acts of responsible judgement in the world. What critical thinking pulls apart responsible judgement must reconnect (Sullivan and Rosin 2008, p. 143).

As we argue in Fullan & Scott (2009) there is no better example than the case of Bhopal of why the capabilities identified as being most important in our successful graduate studies need to be given much sharper focus.

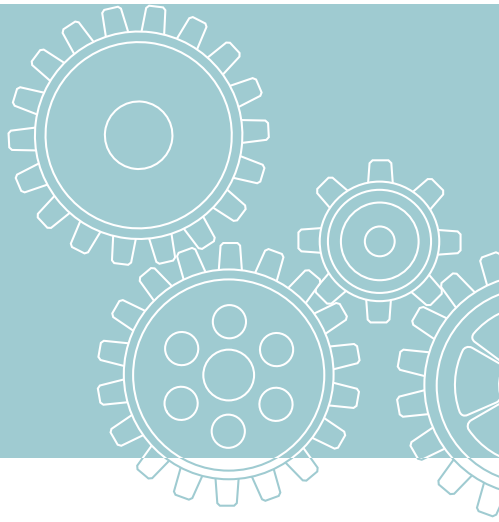
> (In Engineering) solving problems in the world depends on judgement, and this involves both command of scientific knowledge and technological skill, on the one hand, and the ability to assess situations from a cultural, historical and dialogical perspective on the other…. One telling example.. is the disaster that occurred at Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide production plant in Bhopal, India in 1984… UCC neglected to consider fully enough the social and political conditions of the region when placing and establishing the plant and its production practices…. Lethal pesticide ingredients, initially thought to be merely steam, leaked… killing over 2300 and injuring over 200,000 people… This case brings engineering students into direct contact with the often abstract issue of negotiating cultural differences.
>
> Practical reasoning and a valid higher education experience is about participation and engagement with real world problems and perplexities not the abstract dissection associated with critical thinking and traditional university analysis (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008: 10).

Top Learning Strategies – successful graduates (all professions)

In all of our professional capability studies we not only ask successful performers to rate the relative importance of the capabilities and competencies discussed above. We also invite them to identify what, in hindsight, were their most productive learning experiences at university. It is not surprising that the learning experiences favoured are real world, integrated, problem-based and multi-dimensional. These, say our successful graduates, can be developed through strategies ranging from case-based learning and simulations to practicum experiences which give specific focus to the top ranking capabilities identified for each profession.

Below the learning and assessment activities attracting an importance rating of more than 4/5 in the successful graduate studies are summarised:

- Make assessment more real-world and problem-based and less focused on memorising factual material.
- Use real-life workplace problems identified by successful graduates as a key resource for learning.
- Ensure that teaching staff have current workplace experience.
- Include learning experiences based on real-life case studies that specifically develop the interpersonal and personal skills needed in my particular profession.
- Focus more directly on the capabilities identified as being important by this study in university courses and assessment.
- Use successful graduates more consistently as a learning resource in university courses (e.g. as guest speakers).



- Make work-placements and simulations which test out the capabilities identified in this study a key focus in each course. Although personal and interpersonal capabilities can not be taught they can be learnt through reflection on experience using the highest rating capabilities for each area as a benchmark.
- Ensure that all teaching staff model the key attributes identified as being important in this study.

These findings on preferred learning activities:

- Align with the design standards identified in Section 1 of Diagram A and the commissioned research and analysis report to the Australian Review of Higher Education (Scott, 2008).
- Show that we are more likely to act our way into new ways of thinking than think our way into new ways of acting. As the old Chinese proverb says: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand."
- Identify problem-based learning is a key strategy, especially if it has a human as well as technical dimension.
- Align with the key findings by Sullivan and Rosin (2008) in their U.S. research.

Assessing Capability

I raised earlier on in this talk that it was not only important to ensure we have learning outcomes that are valid (i.e. focused on the capabilities that count) but to ensure that how we measure them is valid. Our successful graduate studies and broader research summarised in Scott (2008) indicate that valid assessment for course level outcomes needs to be:

- integrated – that is, it should focus on measuring the highest ranking graduate capabilities in combination;
- focused on how to handle the tricky real world problems typical of early career experiences in the profession concerned;
- centred around tasks which have a human as well as a technical dimension.

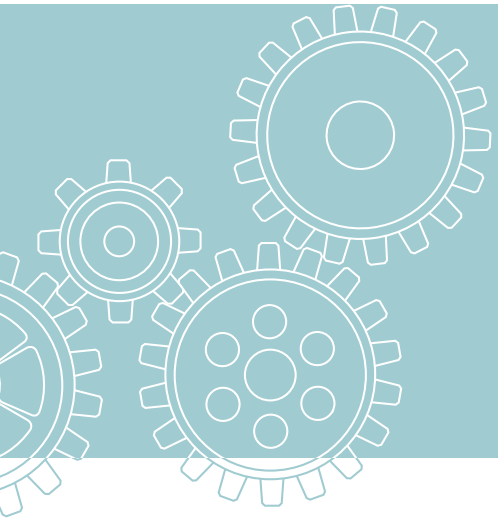
Here the motto is to assess less but assess better. Gathering in real world cases from early career graduates, using the practicum as the time to identify how well one can put into the practice the top 12 capabilities identified for each profession and the use of capstone assessment tasks are just three examples of what is possible.

Tests of memory, the delivery of key skills, problem solving, analysis or critical thinking in isolation from determining how well such capabilities and competencies can applied in real world situations are, in our research, not valid ways to measure university-level graduate outcomes.

Tracking & Improving Learning, Teaching & Assessment

I was asked to outline briefly how UWS uses targeted tracking of all of the areas identified in Diagram A to improve the quality of its assessment, learning design, support and delivery. An overview of the UWS TILT (Tracking and Improving Learning and Teaching) system is given on the Australian University Quality Assurance with acronym (AUQA) good practice database. The best way for you to get a feel for how the system works is to browse through the UWS Tracking and Improving Teaching and Learning (TILT) Site.

Here you will see how we use a nested set of surveys to track and improve what is happening from the University down to the course, unit and the teacher level; how we track not only importance but performance in our surveys; how we bring together a consolidated picture of the results for line staff and local leaders and how, by using CEQuery (a qualitative analysis tool) we have been able to access the student voice. The "*Pressure points for retention*" report on that site might be of particular interest.



The use of qualitative data from students is one key area for increased focus around the world over the next five years. If you would like to read more about CEQuery and how we can use qualitative data from students please see the Government Report *Accessing the Student Voice* (Scott, 2006).

Follow-up questions

In small groups you might like to identify with your colleagues:

1. One key aspect of the above paper you and your colleagues would like to follow up and how this might best be done.
2. Two or three key points you found to be most interesting and why.
3. Two or three areas you would like to clarify or know more about.

References and further reading

Fullan, M. & Scott, G. (2009). *Turnaround Leadership for Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass/ Wiley, San Francisco (see especially Chapter 4). At: http://au.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0470472049.html

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Scott, G., Chang, E., & Grebennikov, L. (2010). Using successful graduates to improve the quality of undergraduate nursing programs. *Journal of Teaching and Learning for Graduate Employability*, 1(1), 26-44. 4. Available at http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/123221/Journal_of_Nursing_Education_paper_final.pdf or at: http://au.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0470472049.html

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Vescio, J. & Scott, G. (2005). *Studies of successful graduates*. University of Technology: Sydney.

Wells, P., Gerbic, P., Kranenburg, I., & Bygrave, J. (2009). Professional skills and capabilities of accounting graduates: the New Zealand expectation gap? Accounting Education, 18(4) August.

Section 11
Ethics information sheet for participants

Note: this project started under the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (subsequently changed to the Office for Learning and Teaching) and the project leader was at Griffith University where ethics approval was provided. The project leader subsequently shifted to the University of Western Sydney however ethics approval continued with Griffith University where two of the project members (Alexander and Nulty) remained.

Inter-University Moderation & Standards ALTC Project
INFORMATION SHEET

Project Team Leaders

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause
Professor Geoff Scott
Dean (Student Outcomes), Director GIHE
PVC (Quality)
Griffith University
University of Western Sydney

Project Team

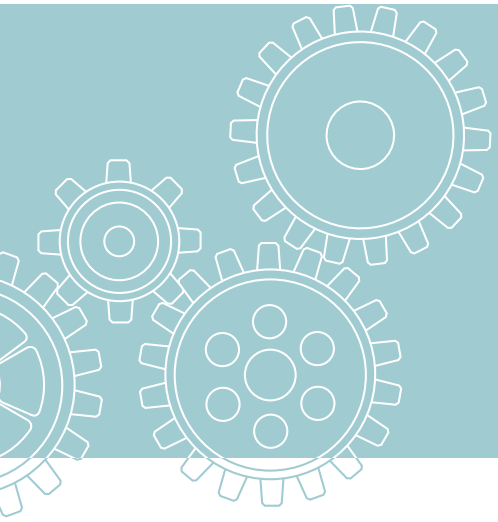
Professor Stuart Campbell (UWS), Associate Professor Martin Carroll (CDU), Professor Liz Deane (ANU), Dr Duncan Nulty (Griffith University), Professor Pip Pattison (The University of Melbourne), Professor Belinda Probert (La Trobe University), Professor Judyth Sachs (Macquarie University), Professor Suzi Vaughn (QUT).

Research Overview

The Project addresses the Government's search for a valid and efficient way to assure sector standards in relation to academic achievement, whilst assuring appropriate diversity and responsiveness. It seeks to identify a collegial approach for reviewing unit/subject 'inputs' such as unit outlines, learning objectives and assessment items, along with actual samples of student assessment outcomes. This approach is based on peer review among disciplinary experts in partner universities. It uses a sampling approach and is not unduly onerous.

Participant Involvement

Participants will be asked to participate in providing feedback on the moderation process. This may include: identifying aspects of the process that could be improved and offering suggestions as to how this could be achieved, participating in discussions with partner institutions on the moderating process, giving feedback on the process in informal and formal interviews. This process will be used to identify, critique and consolidate the indicators being used to identify the standards for learning outcomes, assessment processes, assessment tasks and marking in common areas of provision and specific disciplines across the partner institutions.



Risks and Confidentiality

There are no anticipated risks to this research; participant information will not be identifiable. All materials will be securely stored by the Project Officer, Ms Kate Aubin at Griffith University. Participants however are asked to note that they will have access to confidential information which must be respected.

Ethical Conduct of Research

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision to participate will in no way impact upon your relationship with your University or the ALTC. You are free to withdraw from this research at anytime.

This research has been approved by Griffith University which conducts research in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on 3735 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au.

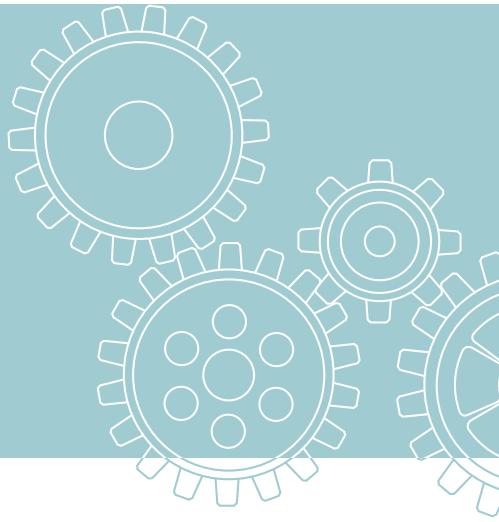
Further Information

If you have any questions or wish to receive further information on this research please contact Prof Kerri-Lee Krause, Project Team Leader on telephone 07 3735 5985, or k.krause@griffith.edu.au.

Privacy Statement

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University's Privacy Plan at http://www.griffith.edu.au/privacy-plan or telephone (07) 3735 5585.

Section 12
Sample participant agreement



Inter-University Moderation & Standards
ALTC Project

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted the following:

- I understand that my involvement in this research may include –
  - identifying common units of study in a specified discipline area
  - providing de-identified materials for nominated unit, as well as de-identified samples of student work for moderation
  - peer reviewing the quality of assessment inputs (e.g., unit outline) from partner institutions
  - marking de-identified samples of student work from partner institutions
  - providing feedback on the peer review and moderation process
  - reporting on progress;
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research and my participation in this research is voluntary and will not impact on my relationship with my university or the ALTC;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact Prof Kerri-Lee Krause;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without comment or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on 3735 5585 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project;
- My involvement in this research will include access to privileged information which although de-identified may still be attributed to member institutions;
- I will have access to comments and views of individuals which may not be reflective of the organisation they represent;
- I will respect the views and opinions of others in the moderation process; and
- I will not compromise anyone else's intellectual property or participant confidentiality in this research project.

Section 13
Spreadsheet template for collating peer review feedback

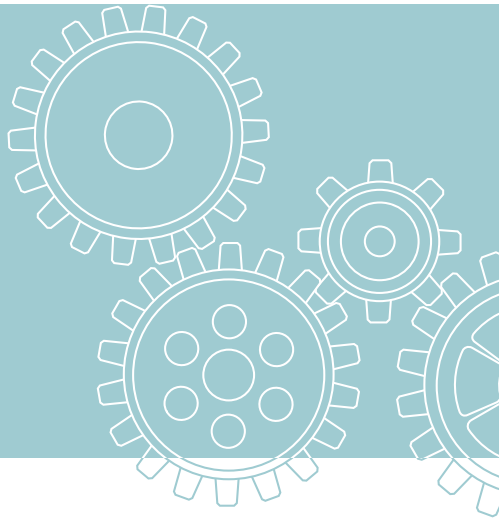
PEER REVIEW AND MODERATION FEEDBACK

Discipline
[Name]

Home University [Name or code]	**Partner University** [Name or code]			
SECTION A – UNIT OUTLINE **1. Appropriateness of unit outline**	**Three reasons for rating** **Reason 1**	**Reason 2**	**Reason 3**	**2a. Explanation of relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes**
2b. Explanation of relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes	**3. Clarity of explanation of requirements for achieving at grade levels**	**Comments**	**4. Best aspects of unit outline/learning guide**	**5. Suggestions for enhancing unit outline/learning guide**
SECTION B - FEEDBACK ON GRADING GUIDELINES **1. Clarity of explanation of requirements for achieving at grade levels**	**Elaborate on response**	**2. Appropriateness of grading criteria**	**Elabourate on response**	
SECTION C – FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT TASKS **1. Suitability of assessment tasks in assessing learning objectives**	**Elaborate on response**			
SECTION D – FEEDBACK ON PROCESS **1. Best aspects**	**2. How to improve**			
STUDENT WORK **Home Mark 1**	**Partner Mark 1**	**Home Grade 1**	**Partner Grade 1**	**Partner Comments 1**
			grade band difference	
Home Mark 2	**Partner Mark 2**	**Home Grade 2**	**Partner Grade 2**	**Partner Comments 2**
			gb difference	
Home Mark 3	**Partner Mark 3**	**Home Grade 3**	**Partner Grade 3**	**Partner Comments 3**
			gb difference	
Home Mark 4	**Partner Mark 4**	**Home Grade 4**	**Partner Grade 4**	**Partner Comments 4**
			0 gb difference	

KEY	Colour indicates
	1 grade band difference
	2 grade band differences
	3 grade band differences
	4 grade band differences

Section 14
Template for reporting discipline-level findings to peer reviewers



The following report template exemplifies the aggregated report provided to all peer reviewers in a particular discipline. The website includes a downloadable, ready-to-use template.

[Project Title]
Discipline Findings Report
[Discipline]
[Year/Time Period]

1. Overview

- This project is part of the [project name].
- During [year/time period], you and your discipline partners across [number] universities were asked to provide unit 'inputs' such as unit outlines, learning objectives, and assessment tasks, along with four samples of actual student work, at different levels of achievement. All materials were de-identified by removing university and student identifiers. Materials were then distributed to partner universities for peer review and 'blind' marking.
- The following report corresponds to questions asked in the peer feedback form. It provides a summary of the feedback from [discipline] partners.
- Please be aware that this report is intended for members of the project team and colleagues who recognise the project's guidelines for participants, as specified in the participant agreement.
- Detailed feedback on your own unit will be sent to you.

2. Recipients

- This report is designed for colleagues who took part in the peer review and moderation of [discipline] units and assessment tasks.
- A copy has also been sent to [identify any groups/stakeholders who have received this report. Note: Any distribution of outcomes needs to be covered by ethics approval].
- This report and detailed feedback material is not for public distribution.

3. Feedback from Peer Reviewers

3.1 Outcomes of Peer Review of Unit Outlines

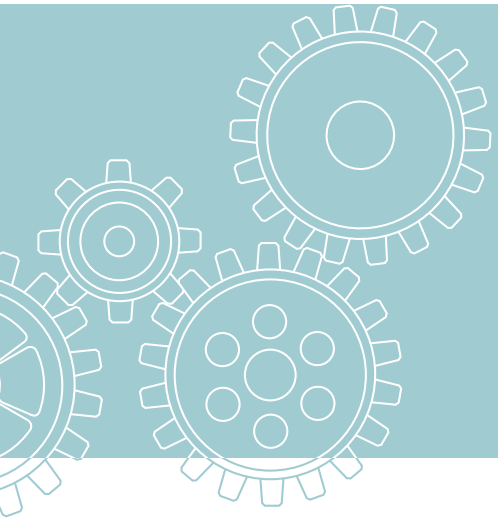
Appropriateness for level of study

The mean rating of the appropriateness of the unit outline for the level of study in [discipline] is [mean][1] and the spread of ratings is indicated in the table below.

	Not at all (1)	*Somewhat (2)*	*Adequately (3)*	*Very (4)*	*Completely (5)*
Frequency					

On average, peer reviewers considered unit outlines to be [descriptor associated with mean rating, e.g., adequately] appropriate for a final year [discipline] unit.

[1] We appreciate that mean ratings may or may not be useful in interpretation of data and encourage figures to be considered holistically.



Explanation of relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes

The mean rating of the degree of explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes is [mean][1]. The frequency of each rating is presented below.

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very Good (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency					

The average reviewer in [discipline] found the explanation of the relationship between the assessment tasks and the learning outcomes to be [descriptor associated with mean].

Explanation of relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes

Peer reviewers in [discipline] reported a mean of [mean][1] for the degree of explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes. The range of responses in [discipline] is presented below.

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very Good (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency					

Reviewers, on average, reported finding the explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes to be [descriptor associated with mean].

Clarity of explanation of requirements for achieving at grade levels

Feedback indicates that peer reviewers, on average, rated the clarity of the explanation of requirements for achieving at particular grade levels as [mean][1]. See below for the spread of ratings on this dimension in [discipline].

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very Well (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency					

On average, reviewers in [discipline] thought that the explanation of requirements for achieving at particular grade levels was [descriptor associated with mean] clear.

3.1.2 Qualitative Feedback on Unit Outlines

Best aspects

[Main theme] was frequently mentioned as a strength of the unit outline. For example, one reviewer [quote from reviewer]. Another reviewer mentioned [quote] as a best aspect of the unit outline reviewed.

Suggestions for enhancement

[Main theme] was a common suggestion for enhancement of unit outlines. In particular, reviewers suggested [specific theme]. One reviewer suggested that [suggestion], [quote]. Another suggestion was to [quote].

3.2 Outcomes of Peer Review of Grading Guidelines

Clarity & appropriateness for level of study

Peer reviewers were asked to comment on the clarity of grading guidelines and appropriateness of grading criteria for a final year undergraduate unit. On this dimension, peer reviewers, reported a mean of [mean][1]. The spread of responses are displayed below.

Clarity of grading guidelines

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency					

The majority of reviewers considered grading guidelines to be [descriptor].

Appropriateness of grading guidelines

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency					

Peer reviewers mostly found grading guidelines to be [descriptor].

3.2.1 Qualitative Feedback on Grading Guidelines

Clarity of grading guidelines

In line with the suggestions for enhancement of the unit outline, several reviewers indicated that [theme].

Appropriateness of grading guidelines

Generally, reviewers found the grading guidelines to be [descriptor] for a final year unit, for example, [quote]. One reviewer thought that a particular set of guidelines was [quote].

3.3 Outcomes Peer Review of Assessment Tasks

Suitability of assessment tasks in assessment of key learning objectives

Peer reviewers were asked to comment on the suitability of assessment tasks for assessing the key learning objectives listed in the learning outline. The mean rating on this dimension was [mean]1. See below for the range of responses.

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very Well (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency					

On average, reviewers in [discipline] considered assessment tasks to [descriptor] assess the key learning objectives listed in the learning outline.

3.3.1 Qualitative Feedback on Assessment Tasks

Suitability of assessment tasks to assess learning objectives.

[Description of main theme] was a recurrent theme in reviewers' comments on assessment tasks. For example, [quote]. Another reviewer suggested [quote].

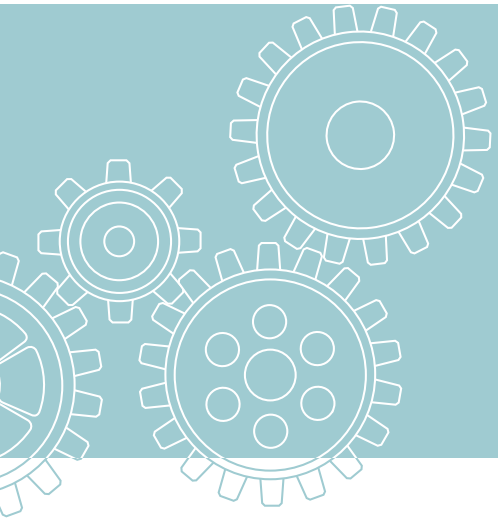
3.4 Feedback on the Peer Review Process

Best aspects

Reviewers appreciated [frequently mentioned aspect]. One reviewer commented [quote]. One reviewer reported [quote].

Improvements

Several reviewers suggested [improvement], for example, [quote]. Another common suggestion for improvement was [quote].



4. Outcomes of Peer Reviewed Student Work

Partner universities were asked to assess four samples of student work from each university, using the home university's marking criteria. The four samples of work represented four grade bands – fail, pass, credit, distinction/high distinction. The results of the peer review process are summarised below. The first table provides the mean grade band difference between grades awarded by the home university and grades awarded by the partner university. A '0' grade band difference means that markers in the home and partner universities agreed with one another on the grade allocated for a particular assessment item; by contrast a grade band difference of '4' indicates that there was a discrepancy between markers of four grade bands (i.e., one marker allocated a fail grade while a second marker allocated a distinction/high distinction for the same piece of assessment). The table below indicates that the majority of markers either agreed with the original grades allocated (i.e., grade band difference of '0') or differed by one grade band. The final table illustrates the extent of the marker differences with regard to pass/fail grades.

In order to reach this figure, all grades above pass were aggregated to form the 'pass' category. This analysis was undertaken to identify whether or not there were any instances of disagreement among peer reviewers with respect to the judgments about pass/fail grades.

Grade band difference between grades awarded by the home university and grades awarded by the partner university.

Grade band difference	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*
Frequency					

The majority of reviewers [awarded/did not award] the same grade as allocated by the home university. Where there was a difference, it was generally a difference of [number] grade band/s.

Extent of peer reviewer agreement relating to pass and fail grade bands

Grade band move	*Fail allocated by home uni, but pass allocated by peer reviewer*	*Pass allocated by home unit, but fail allocated by peer reviewer*
Frequency		

Of the [number] samples of work that fell into the pass or fail category, as assessed by the home university, there were [number] items of work on which peer reviewers disagreed. [In other words, there was considerable agreement among peer reviewers across [number] universities about what constitutes a threshold passing grade for the samples of work shared in this study] OR [This may be an outcome which home universities discuss as they review their feedback.]

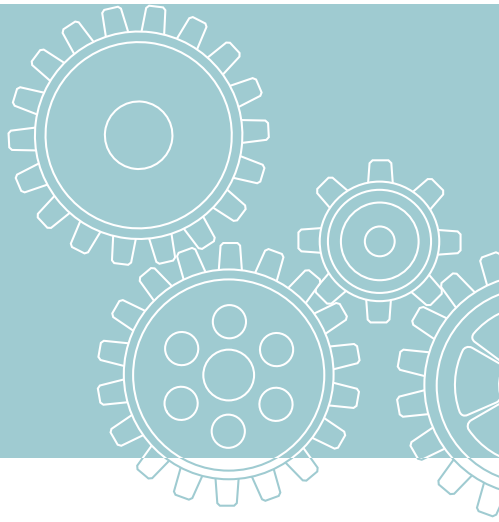
5. Concluding Remarks

As you and your course/program teams consider this feedback, we encourage you to consider this holistic report for your discipline along with your individualised feedback from partner universities.

We welcome feedback on this report and any suggestions for improvement. To provide feedback, please contact the Project Officer, [name and email] or Project Leader, [name and email].

Thank you so much for your contribution to this important project. We will be in touch to provide you with further information about the outcomes of the project across the disciplines.

Section 15
Sample semi-structured interview protocol for peer reviewer feedback



1. Overall what is your feedback on the process, including:
   a. what worked well?
   b. suggestions for improvement?

We would like feedback on the process and specifically on the Forms as well as suggestions for improvement.

2. Anonymity: we intentionally maintained anonymity in the peer review process by removing the names of universities from the unit inputs and student outputs so that it was a blind peer review process.
   a. Was this necessary from your perspective?
   b. What were the benefits/limitations of blind peer review of both inputs and outcomes for you?
   c. Would you advise doing it differently? Why/why not?

3. How relevant and useful was this approach for your discipline? i.e.
   a. is this something worth progressing in the future?
   b. Is it scalable, from your perspective?
   c. If not, what suggestions do you have for modifying the approach?

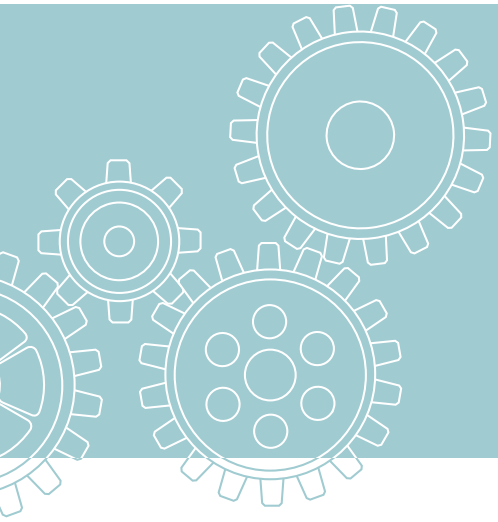
Prompts if necessary:
- e.g., would it be useful to bring colleagues together to do work on a day or two?
- Would you have found it useful to have an opportunity to discuss differences in marking of work. Reach consensus?

4. Do you plan to share this approach and the outcomes of your involvement with colleagues and/or do you think you might use this peer review of standards approach in the future?

5. How do we ensure that we maintain a focus on both unit and program level outcomes? What advice do you have for ensuring that we get feedback at both of these outcome levels?

6. From your experience of the peer review process, what reference points did you draw on to make judgments about standards in relation to the unit materials, the assessment items, and the samples of student work?

7. Any other comments, suggestions or feedback?



Section 16
Project officer responsibilities and capabilities

During the course of the project, several stakeholders and project team members commented on the important coordinating role of the Project Officer. Each institution would have a generic position description for project officers. The following responsibilities are suggested as a guide for inclusion in such position descriptions.

The major responsibility of the Project Officer is project management across the spectrum of activities relating to the project.

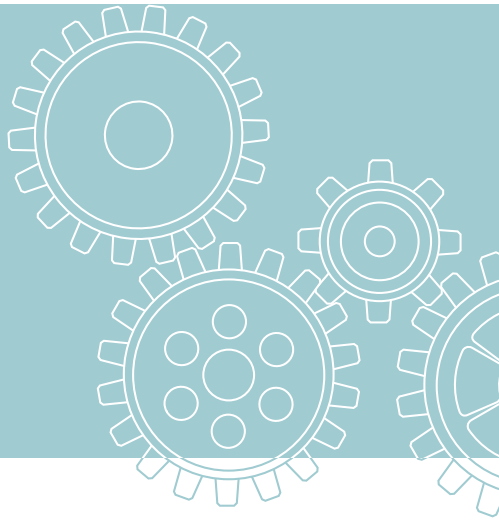
Key responsibilities include:

i. project coordination involving management of timelines, monitoring of achievements against project targets and outcomes, budget oversight;
ii. administrative duties such as organising project team and steering group meetings, taking project meeting notes, distributing meeting notes and actions, and ensuring follow-up on meeting actions;
iii. liaison with key stakeholders within the project team as well as participants and institutional representatives, and external stakeholders requesting information about the project;
iv. design of mixed methods data collection activities (e.g., semi-structured focus group interviews, survey design and analysis);
v. data collection (including conduct of focus group interviews) and analysis;
vi. report writing to ensure the delivery of project outcomes on time and within budget.

Key capabilities include:

i. capacity to work independently with a high level of initiative and problem-solving skills;
ii. interpersonal communication and negotiation skills, including ability to liaise effectively with academic staff stakeholders, international collaborators and senior leaders in universities and government organisations;
iii. time management skills;
iv. demonstrated experience with a range of software packages including word processing and database programs;
v. data analysis experience in both quantitative (e.g., SPSS) and qualitative (e.g., NVivo) domains;
vi. report writing skills;
vii. ability to be flexible, to review processes and refine where necessary.

Section 17 Sample policy statements on moderation and peer review of standards



During the course of this project we collated the assessment policies of each university in the project team, along with numerous exemplars from other universities. The aim of this exercise was to gauge the extent to which university policies included references to standards-related matters such as use of reference points to inform academic judgements about standards, moderation, double marking, consensus moderation, calibration, peer review of learning standards within and between universities and benchmarking of teaching and learning standards.

Sections 17.1 to 17.8 include relevant policy statement excerpts. Section 17.9 provides a policy checklist to guide adaptation of institutional assessment policies to ensure that they reflect a commitment to collegial peer review as a means of calibrating academic staff and of monitoring and assuring standards.

17.1 Charles Darwin University

CDU has an *Academic Assessment and Moderation Policy* which states that:

Moderation is central to the quality assurance processes built into programs of learning development, implementation and monitoring

Moderation at the University, including monitoring and adjustment of the quality of assessment, will be built into quality control processes throughout the program of learning life-cycle.

Moderation should be based on a commitment to open communication and quality improvement.

Moderation should take a holistic approach, based on the best available data and using a range of appropriate techniques.

Programs of learning management and coordination, including moderation procedures, ensure consistent and appropriate assessment.

The academic standards intended to be achieved by students and the standards actually achieved by students in the program of learning will be benchmarked against similar accredited programs of learning offered by other tertiary education providers.

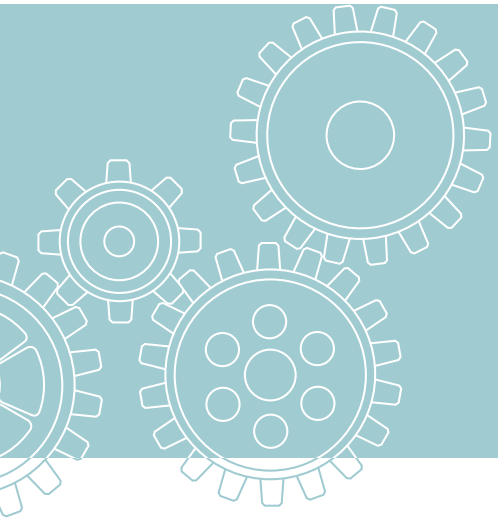
Moderation assists academic staff to work towards judgements that are valid, reliable and consistent, fair and equitable, and actively improve learning and teaching.

Source:

Charles Darwin University Academic Assessment and Moderation Policy (source: www.cdu.edu.au/governance/policies/POL002.pdf)

17.2 Griffith University

The Griffith University assessment policy states that: The standard of performance that is required for the award of a particular grade is a judgment that is based on the professional expertise of the various staff who contribute to the assessment process and is informed by experience with accepted standards, including, where appropriate, standards in other institutions.

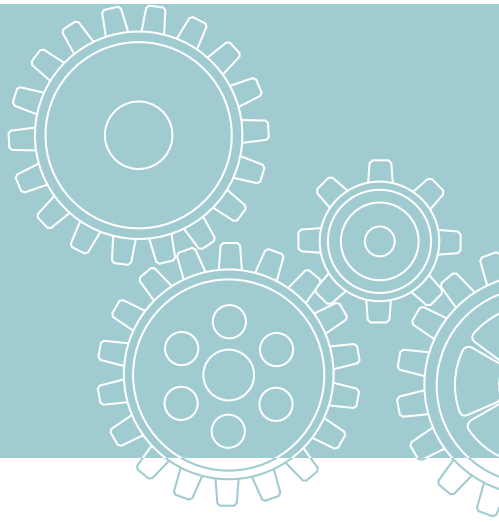


Section 4 of the policy, Moderation Processes, states the following:

> Consensus moderation processes are used to develop a common disciplinary understanding of the course standards that underpin comparability and ensure consistency of marking. One or more of the following approaches to moderation are conducted every time a course is offered:
>
> - **Course level planning** e.g. self and peers (internal or external to the course) review the assessment plan to ensure the assessment regime and tasks are appropriate to the learning objectives of the course (Refer Section 3.1).
> - **Individual student work** e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) develop and use marking guides/rubrics specifying predetermined criteria so the bases for marking are consistent and communicated to both students and examiners.
> - **Recommended course grades** e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) review assessment exemplars across different grades at the end of a course to assure consistency of assessment judgements.
> - **Course standards over time** e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) review assessment exemplars and marks awarded to current students with those awarded for comparable exemplars from previous course offerings.
> - **Cognate courses** e.g. Griffith colleagues, colleagues external to the University or through professional accreditation processes, review marks and/or grades awarded to assessment exemplars to assure comparability of course standards within the degree program, across the qualification level and across like programs offered by other providers.
>
> The Course Convenor documents the moderation process with the teaching team, in conjunction with the recommended grades, for consideration by the School Assessment Board.

Griffith has a resource site entitled *Assessment Matters* (http://app.griffith.edu.au/assessment-matters/docs/consensus-moderation). It includes definitions of key terms including 'consensus moderation' and 'peer review', as outlined below.

- **Moderation of assessment** is defined as: the process used to ensure the quality of assessment and its outcomes; it ensures that the judgments of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker.
- **Consensus moderation** is defined as follows: Consensus moderation of assessment is the processes used to reach a general agreement about what quality assessment and its outcomes 'looks like'; it ensures that the judgments of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker.
- Consensus moderation is most commonly conducted via a peer review process, where the aim is to reach agreement. At its best, the process will also facilitate the resolution of any minor objections, resulting in agreement and consent by all participants.
- To ensure the quality of assessment and its outcomes consensus moderation needs to be applied throughout the whole assessment design process, not just at the marking or grading level.
- As a part of the assurance of quality, consensus moderation is also used to ensure there is no 'slippage' of assessment standards and judgments over time i.e. that consistency is maintained over time. Furthermore, we want to ensure that the standards required of students are essentially equivalent across related courses (and institutions) i.e. those standards are comparable.



Sources:

Griffith University Assessment Policy (source: policies.griffith.edu.au/pdf/Assessment%20Policy.pdf)

Griffith Assessment Matters website (source: http://app.griffith.edu.au/assessment-matters/docs/consensus-moderation)

17.3 La Trobe University

The La Trobe University Assessment Policy states that:

- Assessment should be moderated using appropriate methods.

The Comparability of Assessment (Moderation) Guidelines require that:

- a sample of assessment is moderated where there is more than one instance, or more than one person marking assessment tasks by (for example)
  - Double marking of 'A's and Fail grades,
  - Exchange marking of examination scripts,
  - Exchange marking of a major piece of assessment.

Sources:

La Trobe University Assessment Policy (source: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/policy/academic)
La Trobe University Comparability of Assessment (Moderation) Guidelines (source: http://www.latrobe.edu.au/policy/academic)

17.4 Macquarie University

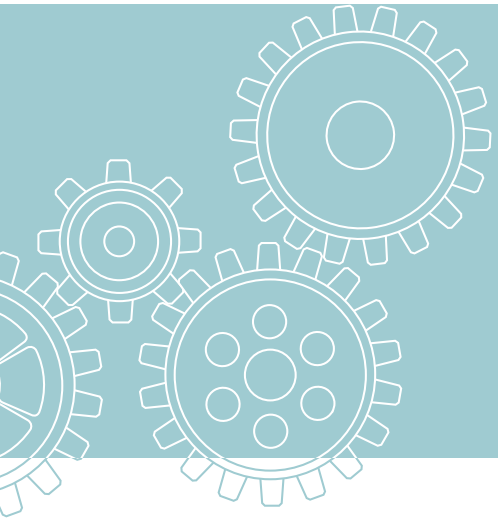
The Macquarie Assessment Policy requires that: "all assessment tasks undergo regular cycles of moderation."

- The assessment guidelines expect: "a shared understanding of standards and expectations in regard to assessment of learning."
- Staff of the university are expected to have: "sound connections with related professional and accrediting bodies and employer groups to establish a clear and shared understanding of the standards of achievement implied in graduates' credentials they receive from the University."
- Academic staff are expected to: "seek external expert moderation of assessment design and grading practices to gain feedback on the academic and disciplinary standards they entail."

Sources:

Macquarie University Assessment Policy (source: http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/policy.html)

Assessment Guideline (source: http://mq.edu.au/policy/docs/assessment/guideline.html)



17.5 Queensland University of Technology

The QUT Assessment Policy states that:

- While the development of well-designed criteria and 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.
- Unit coordinators are required to internally moderate all units to ensure that marks awarded between tutorial groups and by different teaching staff are internally consistent, comply with the QUT Grading Scale (and meet appropriate academic standards. Course coordinators are responsible for external moderation of assessment to assure academic standards of the course are appropriate.

The Course Quality Assurance Policy states that:

Course cycle, external review and accreditation contribute to Course Quality Assurance through the independent validation of professionally recognised standards, and facilitates benchmarking. Faculties with courses that are not covered by professional accreditation are expected to include course cycle and external review approaches as part of periodic curriculum approval and review between corporate review cycles.

Sources:

QUT Assessment Policy (source: http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/C/C_05_01.jsp)

QUT Course Quality Assurance Policy (source: http://www.mopp.qut.edu.au/C/C_04_06.jsp)

17.6 The Australian National University

The ANU assessment policy states that:

- The assessment tasks and the judgements made of student learning in a course are moderated before being approved to ensure that the judgements of student performance are appropriate, consistent, transparent, reliable and valid. (12.6)
- The assessment tasks and the judgements made of student learning in the University's courses are subject to periodic benchmarking to ensure the maintenance of appropriate academic standards. Benchmarking involves comparing academic standards in one course with the academic standards applied (a) in the same course at different times, (b) in different courses in the same institution or (c) similar courses in other institutions. (21.1.)
- Colleges are responsible for keeping examples of anonymous student work at different levels of achievement and records of learning outcomes, assessment processes and the outcomes of assessment.

Source:

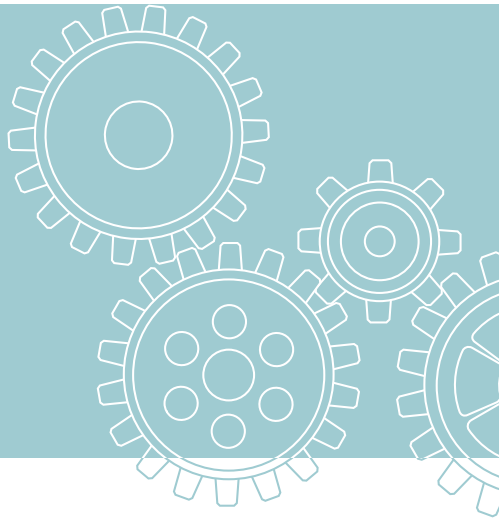
Australian National University Assessment Policy (source: policies.anu.edu.au/policies/assessment_of_student_learning/policy)

17.7 The University of Melbourne

The *University of Melbourne Coursework Assessment Design and Methods Procedure* document states that:

To ensure that assessment is perceived to be unbiased, academic staff must:

- be aware of any potential conflict of interest, for example as a result of a familial or other relationship with a student; and
- ensure that marking practices (for example ensuring blind marking, or seeking double marking of assignments where appropriate) are exercised to eliminate any perception of unfairness.



Standardisation or moderation of provisional results of a subject may be undertaken when a subject coordinator:

- identifies an error in the application of marking guidelines, or
- discovers that results for a cohort are disproportionate, or
- observes an irregular distribution of grades (that is, where results are outside an appropriate distribution),

Source:

The University of Melbourne Coursework Assessment Design and Methods Procedure (source: http://policy.unimelb.edu.au/MPF1200)

17.8 University of Western Sydney

The Assessment Policy is closely aligned with the UWS Academic Standards and Assessment Framework. The Framework provides an overarching approach to curriculum design, delivery and support.

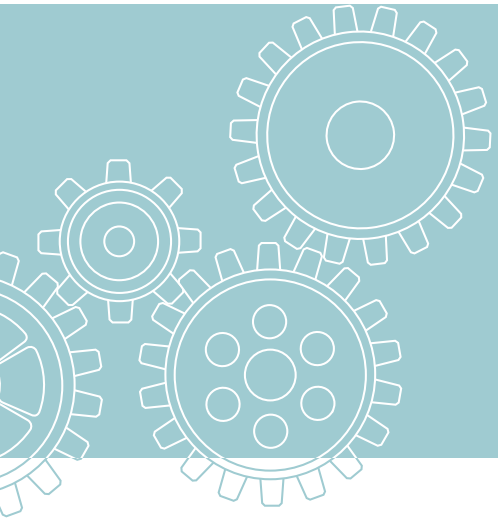
The UWS policy states that:

- Standards will be benchmarked against acceptable levels of performance within the University, discipline and/or profession; and
- Clear criteria and standards of performance developed for each assessment task, based on criteria published in the Learning Guide. These criteria and standards will be described so that students are informed about the level of performance required for each assessment task.
- "Consistency in marking standards across units and academic programs" is a priority.
- "Moderation will occur:
  1. before marking assessment tasks to ensure markers have a shared understanding of standards;
  2. after marking to ensure markers have applied standards consistently."

Sources:

University of Western Sydney Assessment Policy (source: http://policies.uws.edu.au/view.current.php?id=00227)

University of Western Sydney Academic Standards and Assessment Framework (source: policies.uws.edu.au/download.php?id=568)



17.9 Suggestions for institutional policy

Policy checklist for institutional peer review of standards

During the course of this project we collated the assessment policies of each university in the project team, along with numerous exemplars from other universities. The aim was to gauge the extent to which university policies included references to standards-related matters such as use of reference points to inform academic judgements about standards, moderation, double marking, consensus moderation, calibration, peer review of learning standards within and between universities and benchmarking of teaching and learning standards.

17.9.1 Policy checklist: embedding peer review of standards in policy and practice

Following are 10 policy checkpoints to guide review of existing assessment and related policies and guidelines to assist institutions in the design and implementation of policies and practices that reflect a commitment to collegial peer review among academics in disciplines to monitor and assure teaching and learning standards.

- ☑ Checkpoint 1: Define key terms.
- ☑ Checkpoint 2: Develop an institutional standards framework to provide a rationale and context for peer review of teaching and learning standards.
- ☑ Checkpoint 3: Articulate benefits of collegial peer review and moderation.
- ☑ Checkpoint 4: Build professional development into the peer review process for all staff with teaching and assessment responsibilities, including sessional staff.
- ☑ Checkpoint 5: Clarify expectations of staff.
- ☑ Checkpoint 6: Ensure that peer review and moderation responsibilities are included in position description and workload allocations.
- ☑ Checkpoint 7: Adopt a tiered approach to monitoring and assuring teaching and learning standards that emphasises local, department level peer review, as well as inter-institutional approaches.
- ☑ Checkpoint 8: Integrate peer review into course quality assurance and enhancement cycles.
- ☑ Checkpoint 9: Design systems, policies and guidelines to enable sharing of student assessment samples.
- ☑ Checkpoint 10: Review your benchmarking policy and partnership arrangements to ensure that they include scope for benchmarking teaching and learning standards.

17.9.2 Expanded policy checkpoints with exemplars

☑ **Checkpoint 1: Define key terms.**

Key terms may include: moderation, consensus moderation, teaching standards, learning standards, peer review, calibration. See Glossary of Terms (Appendix A) 'the companion Final Report 2013' document, for definitions.

Examples from Griffith University:

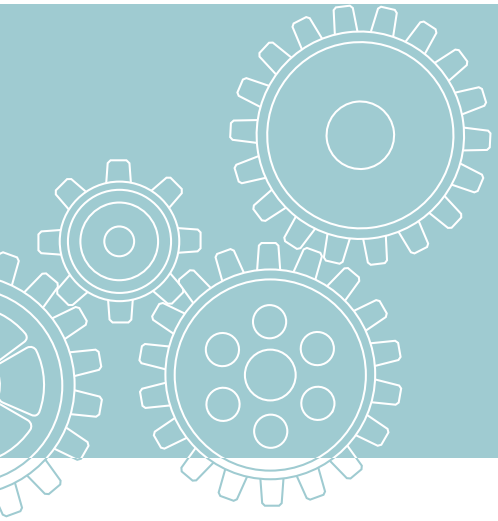
- **Moderation of assessment:** The process used to ensure the quality of assessment and its outcomes; it ensures that the judgments of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker.
- **Consensus moderation is defined as follows:** Consensus moderation of assessment is the processes used to reach a general agreement about what quality assessment and its outcomes 'looks like'; it ensures that the judgments of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker.

Examples from the University of Tasmania:

- **Performance standard:** A clearly articulated description of the level of attainment that acts as a stable reference point or recognised measure for the purposes of reaching a decision on the quality of a student's work. (source: UTas Assessment policy www.utas.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/30995/TLP-2.1-Assessment-Policy.pdf&sa=U&ei=W3zmUITjHsWjkgW04oEo&ved=0CAcQFjAA&client=internal-uds-cse&usg=AFQjCNF923ogXT1oag9-RXjG7yJt4YD-IA)
- **Benchmark:** A point of reference against which something may be measured. Benchmarks are data comparisons
- **Benchmarking:** The systematic comparison of an organisation's inputs, systems, processes and outputs both against those of external bodies and internally against previously collated in-house data (source: University of Tasmania draft benchmarking policy – http://www.utas.edu.au/governance-legal/policy/policy-under-development-and-review)

☑ **Checkpoint 2: Develop an institutional standards framework to provide a rationale and context for peer review of teaching and learning standards.**

- An example of a useful framework is the University of Western Sydney Academic Standards and Assessment Framework (see Diagram A). This framework provides a context for institutional dialogue and action relating to inputs (teaching standards) and outputs (learning standards). It emphasises the shared responsibility of the university community for inputs or teaching standards relating to such areas as student orientation, the Library, the learning management system and course design.
- The University of Tasmania has developed a University Standards Framework which has been tested and endorsed. It comprises six domains: Research, Research Training, Curriculum, Learning, Teaching, and Student Experience. Online resources and publications are available at: http://www.utas.edu.au/student-evaluation-review-and-reporting-unit/academics-standards-projects
- The goal is for academics to be confident in their own informed and calibrated judgements, and able to trust their colleagues' abilities to make routine appraisals of student works with an appropriate degree of detachment and self-regulation. Furthermore, the way in which academic achievement standards are assured needs to be transparent to colleagues, students, quality assurance agencies and the wider society (Sadler, 2012, p.14).



Checkpoint 3: Articulate benefits of collegial peer review and moderation.

Sample statements include:

- Consensus moderation processes are used to develop a common disciplinary understanding of the course standards that underpin comparability and ensure consistency of marking.
- Consensus moderation is most commonly conducted via a peer review process, where the aim is to reach agreement. At its best, the process will also facilitate the resolution of any minor objections, resulting in agreement and consent by all participants.
- As a part of the assurance of quality, consensus moderation is also used to ensure there is no 'slippage' of assessment standards and judgments over time i.e. that consistency is maintained over time. Furthermore, we want to ensure that the standards required of students are essentially equivalent across related courses (and institutions) i.e. those standards are comparable. (source: Griffith University)
- Moderation assists academic staff to work towards judgements that are valid, reliable and consistent, fair and equitable, and actively improve learning and teaching. (source: Charles Darwin University)

Checkpoint 4: Build professional development into the peer review process for all staff with teaching and assessment responsibilities, including sessional staff.

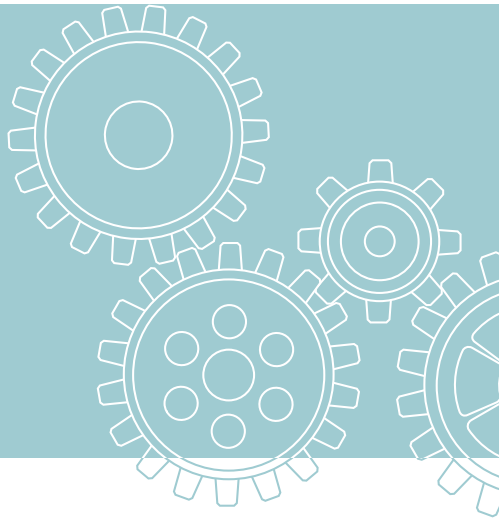
Sample statements include:

- All academic staff, including sessional staff, with teaching, unit coordination and assessment responsibilities will have access to a peer review and feedback guide (online) to be used as the basis for peer review of teaching and learning standards within their academic department.
- The academic development unit (or equivalent) will facilitate professional development activities to support staff skill development in the area of peer review of standards, consensus moderation and calibration of academic staff to assist in the assurance of academic standards. Professional staff development in the area of peer review and consensus moderation may be integrated into sessional staff induction programs, academic staff introductions to university teaching programs or in graduate certificate in higher education programs, or the like.
- In addition to centrally supported professional development, each Department will be responsible for facilitating academic calibration professional development activities at least once per year for each course/program. This calibration process includes staff 'tuning' staff 'judgement-making ability' (Sadler, 2012) to ensure that grading is valid, reliable and self-regulated. The aim of department-based professional development in the area of calibration is to build academic and sessional staff confidence in their own informed and calibrated judgements, and to build trust in their colleagues' abilities to make routine appraisals of student works with an appropriate degree of detachment and self-regulation (Sadler, 2012, p.14).

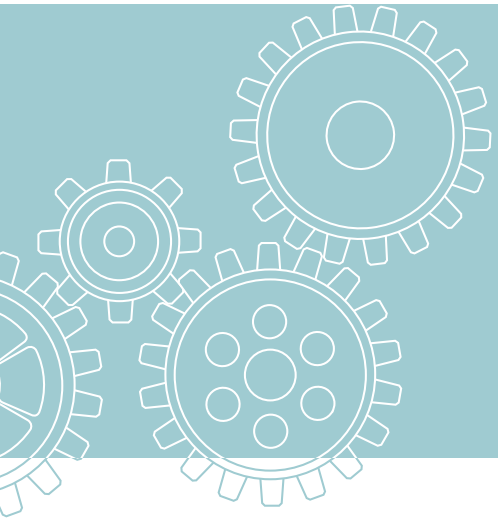
Checkpoint 5: Clarify expectations of staff.

Sample statements include:

- Moderation should be based on a commitment to open communication and quality improvement.
- Moderation should take a holistic approach, based on the best available data and using a range of appropriate techniques. (source: Charles Darwin University)



- Consensus moderation processes are used to develop a common disciplinary understanding of the course standards that underpin comparability and ensure consistency of marking. One or more of the following approaches to moderation are conducted every time a course is offered:
  - Course level planning e.g. self and peers (internal or external to the course) review the assessment plan to ensure the assessment regime and tasks are appropriate to the learning objectives of the course.
  - Individual student work e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) develop and use marking guides/rubrics specifying predetermined criteria so the bases for marking are consistent and communicated to both students and examiners.
  - Recommended course grades e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) review assessment exemplars across different grades at the end of a course to assure consistency of assessment judgements.
  - Course standards over time e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) review assessment exemplars and marks awarded to current students with those awarded for comparable exemplars from previous course offerings.
  - Cognate courses e.g. Griffith colleagues, colleagues external to the University or through professional accreditation processes, review marks and/or grades awarded to assessment exemplars to assure comparability of course standards within the degree program, across the qualification level and across like programs offered by other providers.
  - The Course Convenor documents the moderation process with the teaching team, in conjunction with the recommended grades, for consideration by the School Assessment Board. (source: Griffith University)
- The Comparability of Assessment (Moderation) Guidelines require that: a sample of assessment is moderated where there is more than one instance, or more than one person marking assessment tasks by (for example):
  - Double marking of 'A's and Fail grades,
  - Exchange marking of examination scripts,
  - Exchange marking of a major piece of assessment. (source: La Trobe University)
- The Macquarie Assessment Policy requires that: "all assessment tasks undergo regular cycles of moderation."
- The assessment guidelines expect: "a shared understanding of standards and expectations in regard to assessment of learning."
- Staff of the university are expected to have: "sound connections with related professional and accrediting bodies and employer groups to establish a clear and shared understanding of the standards of achievement implied in graduates' credentials they receive from the University." (source: Macquarie University)



☑ **Checkpoint 6: Ensure that peer review and moderation responsibilities are included in position description and workload allocations.**

Sample statements include:

- Academic staff are expected to: "seek external expert moderation of assessment design and grading practices to gain feedback on the academic and disciplinary standards they entail." (source: Macquarie University)

All academic staff, including sessional staff, with teaching, unit coordination and assessment responsibilities will have access to a peer review and feedback guide (online) to be used as the basis for peer review of teaching and learning standards within their academic department.

☑ **Checkpoint 7: Adopt a tiered approach to monitoring and assuring teaching and learning standards that emphasises local, department level peer review, as well as inter-institutional approaches.**

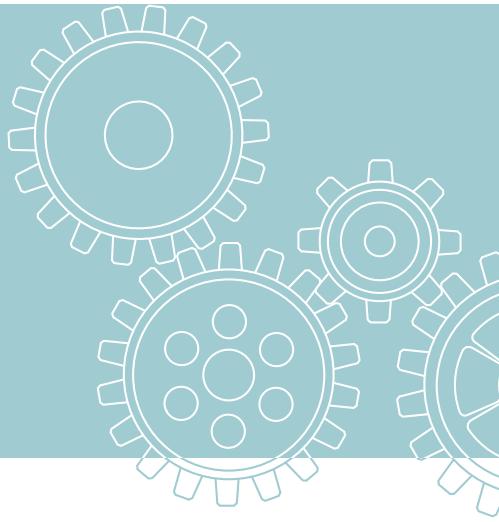
Sample statements include:

- While the development of well-designed criteria and 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.
- Unit coordinators are required to internally moderate all units to ensure that marks awarded between tutorial groups and by different teaching staff are internally consistent, comply with the Queensland University of Technology Grading Scale (and meet appropriate academic standards. Course coordinators are responsible for external moderation of assessment to assure academic standards of the course are appropriate. (source: Queensland University of Technology)
- The assessment tasks and the judgements made of student learning in the University's courses are subject to periodic benchmarking to ensure the maintenance of appropriate academic standards.
- Benchmarking involves comparing academic standards in one course with the academic standards applied (a) in the same course at different times, (b) in different courses in the same institution or (c) similar courses in other institutions. (source: The Australian National University)

☑ **Checkpoint 8: Integrate peer review into course quality assurance and enhancement cycles.**

Sample statements include:

- Moderation is central to the quality assurance processes built into programs of learning development, implementation and monitoring
- Moderation at the University, including monitoring and adjustment of the quality of assessment, will be built into quality control processes throughout the program of learning life-cycle. (source: Charles Darwin University)
- The Course Quality Assurance Policy states that:
    - Course cycle, external review and accreditation contribute to Course Quality Assurance through the independent validation of professionally recognised standards, and facilitates benchmarking. Faculties with courses that are not covered by professional accreditation are expected to include course cycle and external review approaches as part of periodic curriculum approval and review between corporate review cycles. (source: Queensland University of Technology)



☑ **Checkpoint 9: Develop systems, policies and guidelines to enable sharing of student assessment samples.**

Sample statements include:

- Colleges are responsible for keeping examples of anonymous student work at different levels of achievement and records of learning outcomes, assessment processes and the outcomes of assessment. (source: The Australian National University)
- All graded assessment will be submitted electronically and stored in the nominated repository to facilitate sharing of de-identified samples of student work for the purposes of peer review within and beyond the institution.
- Student assessment cover sheets will include a statement indicating that de-identified assessment samples may be distributed to peer reviewers within and beyond the university for the purposes of quality assurance.

☑ **Checkpoint 10: Review your benchmarking policy and partnership arrangements to ensure that they include scope for benchmarking teaching and learning standards.**

An example from the University of Tasmania draft benchmarking policy:
(source: http://www.utas.edu.au/governance-legal/policy/policy-under-development-and-review)

- Benchmarking can take a number of forms, and may be characterised on three dimensions: the nature of the benchmarking exercise; the organisational level at which it is undertaken; and the partnership arrangements involved.

3.1.1 Nature of benchmarking:

i. ***Data comparison:*** the phenomenon in question is compared against some sort of reference point or benchmark; this might be quantitative (e.g. the attrition rate) or qualitative (e.g. threshold standards for learning outcomes).

ii. ***Investigative:*** a detailed investigation is carried out to understand the phenomenon in question, the level of performance, the reasons for that performance, and means of improving performance.

3.1.2 Organisational level:

i. ***Whole of organisation***.

ii. ***Organisational sub-unit***, e.g. faculty, school, university institute, division, campus.

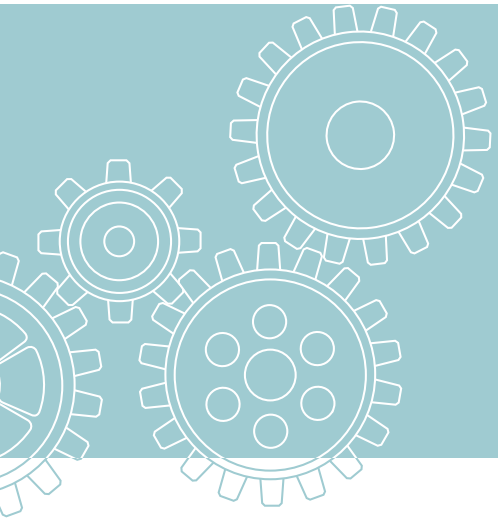
3.1.3 Partnership basis:

i. ***Informal relationship*** often deriving from personal connections and usually involving an agreement to undertake one benchmarking exercise.

ii. ***Formal relationship*** that may involve one benchmarking exercise or an ongoing series of exercises, and is often codified into a formal memorandum of understanding.

iii. ***Membership relationship*** where the organisation participates in collecting and sharing information on one or more phenomena as a result of belonging to a particular organisation (e.g. Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) and Council of Australian University Directors of Information Technology (CAUDIT)).

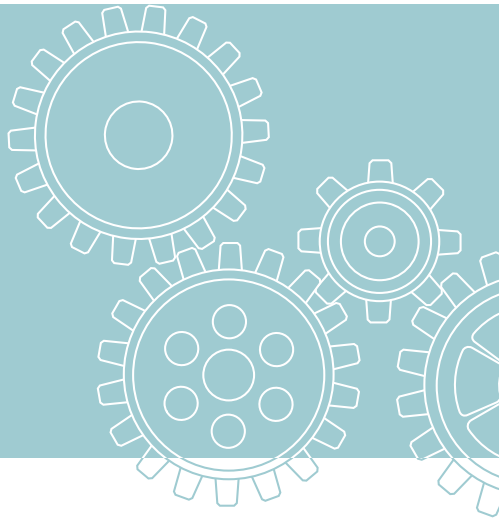
iv. ***Internal*** benchmarking where the benchmarking occurs across organisational units within the one organisation.



There are many kinds of benchmarking methodologies, including process, outcome, sector/functional, strategic, activity, internal, performance, public information, competitive, horizontal and vertical benchmarking. More details are provided in Benchmarking Procedures.

Benchmarking exercises will often involve a partnership with one or more other organisations or organisational units. Such partnerships may be reflected in a formal agreement such as an inter-institutional memorandum of understanding, a membership agreement or a less formal arrangement. Formal agreements require approval at the appropriate level in the University, determined by Governance and Legal.

Section 18
Guidelines for gathering and documenting peer review and benchmarking of teaching and learning standards in your institution



Benchmarking and Peer Review Stock-take

School/Department:

External Benchmarking & Peer Review Processes **Research/Teaching/Engagement** e.g. Professional accreditation (who are your external partners? Brief summary of the nature of the peer review and its frequency, when was the most recent peer review conducted?)	**Internal Peer Review Moderation Processes** **Learning and Teaching & Academic Standards outcomes** e.g. Assessment moderation, double marking, external marking (brief explanation of how you monitor and assure academic standards)	**Benchmarking of learning standards and/ or assessment standards against similar courses of study offered by other higher education providers** e.g. Who are your external partners; what was the nature of the benchmarking and what were the outcomes; frequency (past, current, future)?
Institution name Location Purpose of benchmarking Local contact for follow-up		

Section 19
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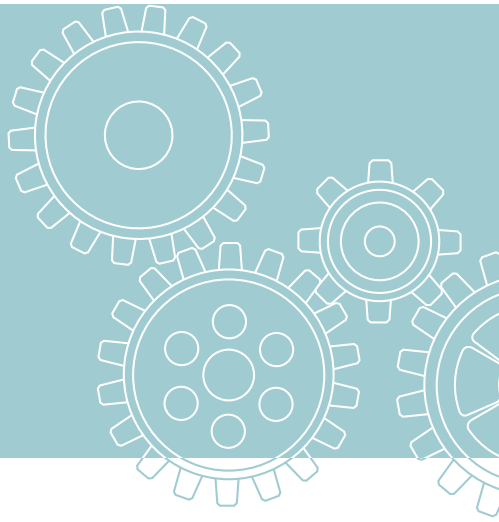

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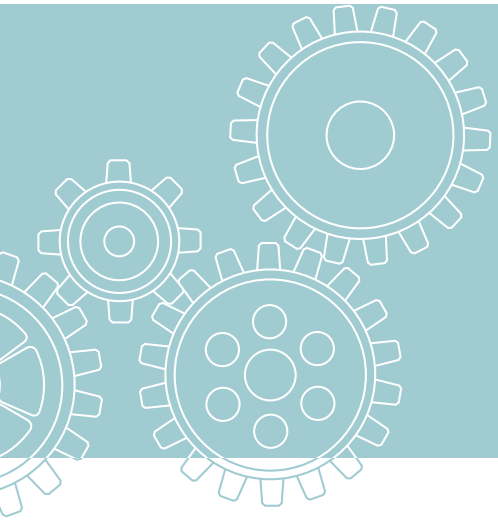

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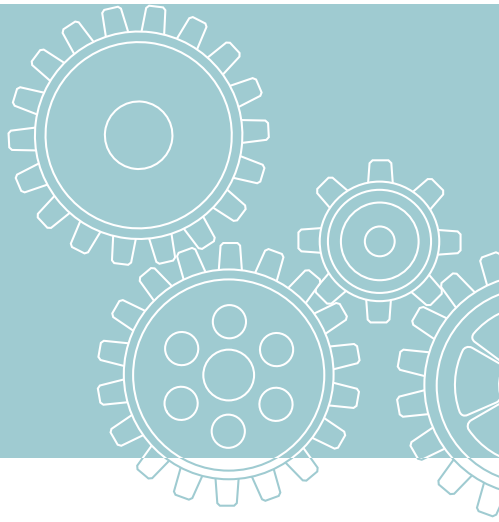

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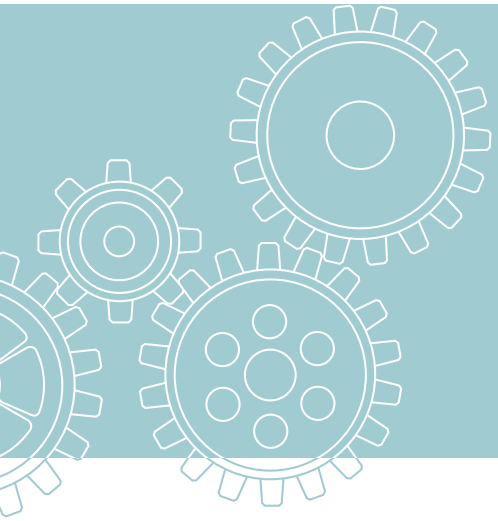

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