

# ROUNDTABLE: THE CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

## THEMATIC DISCUSSION GROUPS

### ***Strategies for Dealing with Factors Affecting the Implementation of Improved Assessment Practices Summary***

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### **Structural and Attitudinal Influences on Assessment**

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This thematic group conducted a hypothetical to elicit ideas about the structural and attitudinal influences on assessment. Participants were divided into two groups of either senior management or teaching staff. Each group was asked to make recommendations to the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Hart Askmaster to tackle the problem. The hypothetical scenario was as follows:

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#### **Group Activity**

This thematic group will operate as a hypothetical.

Each of you is a member of the University of Infinite Enlightenment at either program level or at senior management level – your choice. In response to an AUQA audit, the new Vice-Chancellor, Prof Hart Askmaster, has decided that the University needs clear directions on assessment practice for its staff.

#### **(a) Working party of senior management**

The Vice-Chancellor has said he wants a more positive culture around assessment. You have accepted an invitation to join the working party that will:

- recommend how the University can foster positive attitudes and approaches to assessment and develop institutional structures to support effective assessment.

Your working party has been asked to make three key recommendations.

### **(b) Program-level group**

The Vice-Chancellor has specified he wants assessment practices to be more transparent between colleagues and across the university. You are a member of the course management committee for the Bachelor of Everything (B. Ev.). Your committee has been asked for submissions regarding:

- strategies to encourage co-operation and development of best assessment practice amongst staff

Your committee has been asked to make three key recommendations.

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The following notes were made during the discussions at each table and culminate in the recommendations in each case

### **FROM THE MANAGEMENT TEAM...GROUP 1**

#### **Causes of negative culture**

For University of Infinite Enlightenment

- Dramatic ↑ workload due to budgeting constraints → imposed from top
- Casualization of teaching staff

#### **What can be controlled?**

Change priorities → how to signal assessment is a priority

New methodologies

Showcase alternatives

Continuous professional development

Need carrots for staff - promotion awards: make assessment a priority

- Prof AskMaster award for excellence in assessment practice

Find out where efficiencies can be made → alternative ways of getting admin done.

Does the workload model skew priorities?

How do you measure excellence?

- benchmarking with other Unis

**Sticks:** quality assurance models

**Carrots:**

Faculty funding model includes rewards for teaching excellence

- student CEQ style surveys

Continuous professional development

- seeing assessment as enabling rather than a barrier
- intrinsic to their own professionalism
- linked to probation and performance review
- moves away from externally applied pressures
- demonstrate respect for staff

Combining research with teaching

- incentives for scholarship of teaching: grants, teaching-focussed appointments for teaching scholarship

**Policies**

Currently largely procedural → compliance

Make a statement about the importance and value of assessment

Make this align with procedures

### **THREE RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. signal that assessment is an institutional priority and that staff will be supported to enhance assessment practice → align carrots
2. develop an institutional framework for quality assurance/enhancement /improvement linked to promotion/probation, compliance mechanisms and performance management
3. provide resources and support for staff to make change → variety of mechanisms and a PVC Assessment to drive change.

## FROM THE MANAGEMENT TEAM...GROUP 2

What is a positive culture?

How will we know if we are successful?

- when staff don't complain about assessment being hard work
- evidence that staff are engaged in assessment (promotions/awards, recognition strategies) → core business not an optional extra
- students: evidence that students see that their assessment supports their learning → surveys/ portfolios
- assessment is aligned to agreed objectives relevant to students/ stakeholders
- all relevant stakeholders involved in assessment practice
- University support structures are enabling (opportunity) rather than punitive (liability)
- staff are confident they will be effectively supported in staff development

If have already done an audit of assessment practice

- identify "poor" practice and inefficiencies

What is good practice in assessment?

University → scaffold

Adapt an existing list to what is appropriate for our University and its priorities = **working party** (=joy!)

Core: assessment **as** learning but also need assessment **of** learning

Allocate performance-based funding to Faculties on the basis of the indicators (1st sheet)

- make Deans personally responsible
- distribute the LTPF to the Faculties

### Supports

- time release for curriculum development
- grants for transferable initiatives with appropriate time release
- appointment of supporting expertise → academic development
- programs for Deans → skills to support change

What engenders positive attitudes?

Want enthusiastic engagement

- recognition/support from senior staff
- excellent student performance is intrinsically exciting
- space and focus for curriculum renewal

### **Considerations**

Assessment is covert

Researchers do not always make good teachers

Use distributive leadership model to excite, engage inspire

- promote leadership and empower staff
- breakdown hierarchy
- praise: personal thankyou's, recognition by colleagues, lots of small rewards

### **THREE (!) RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Define indicators of a positive culture: KPI for responsible staff. Includes dialogue with Uni about what is good practice in assessment.
2. Institutional reward strategies: funding (assessment performance based), recognition (showcases/ awards etc)
3. provision of resources to support: change management, distributive leadership
4. review current approaches to enable change in practice of students and staff.

### **From the staff team...Transparency**

Everything should be on the Web

Nobody knows what happens

"secret academic business"

need all assessment explained with the graduate attributes they represent

tertiary literacy e.g. rubric,

**Need to see models of assessment**

“word” of law vs. “spirit” of law

what makes assessment good or bad?

Run risk of a competency-based approach – TAFE vs Uni

Rubric/weightings

NOT about achieve/not achieve

Forums for discussion (QA) → course flow developmental

Staff training

Establish/ develop best practice

Challenges: identify common language and terminology

Gather/express experience from previous cohort

Get students to write down marking criteria

**RECOMMENDATIONS (GROUP 1)**

1. Staff forums (systematic) to:

- Share and develop language
- Reflect on prior instances
- Examine wider-context and “fit” into overall course

2. Prepare a manual/web material/ documentation/ database to provide exemplars of:

- Student assignments of different types
- Criteria/instructions provided by staff (feedback)
- and to provide/allow for further development.

3. Rewards/support/incentives to get staff engagement → recognition through promotion/awards – valuing a staff member’s portfolio

**RECOMMENDATIONS (GROUP 2)**

1. Make assessment public (create standards)

- propagation of best practice
- consistent framework
- routine(ised) , template(d)
- open access to standards website

- exemplars
  - workshop to develop framework
  - also benchmark
  - moderation of tasks
  - peer review
2. Staff professional development
    - ensure consistency
    - evidence-based rather than intuition-based
  3. Stakeholders
    - Test our standards with stakeholders: students, industry, professions