MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY, 8TH DECEMBER 2009

PRESENT
Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics (Dr Angus Tavner) – Acting Chair
Director of Institutional Research Unit (Dr Greg Marie)
President of the Guild (Ms Emma Greeney)
Faculty representatives from the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee:
   Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (Dr Brenton Knott)
   Assistant Professor Eileen Thompson (CATLyst, UWA Business School)

Ms Sue Smurthwaite, Associate Director, Education Policy Services as Executive Officer

APOLOGIES
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) (Winthrop Professor Jane Long) – Chair
Associate Chair of Academic Board (Professor Brett Kirk)
Director of Centre for Advancement of Teaching and Learning (Professor Denise Chalmers)
Director of Student Services (Mr Jon Stubbs)
Professor Sid Nair (Higher Education Development (Evaluations), CATL1

WELCOME
The Acting Chair welcomed members to the inaugural meeting of the Assessment and Evaluation Standing Committee.

APOLOGIES
The Acting Chair informed members that the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Winthrop Professor Jane Long, had extended last minute apologies due to illness and was unable to attend the meeting. He further advised members that Professor Long had requested that the meeting proceed, whilst acknowledging that it would now be inquorate. As such, members present noted that any ‘resolutions’ would need to be circulated to the full Committee for ratification or further discussion, and the focus of this meeting, therefore, would be to provide comment from those present to the Chair.

1. ITEMS TO BE DEALT WITH ENBLOC

The following items were noted from Part 1 of the agenda, there were no items in Part 2:

i) Items/Business in Progress from the Assessment Standing Committee – Ref: F7739, F25751
ii) Assessment and Evaluation Standing Committee – Terms of Reference – Ref: F29274
iii) Meeting Dates in 2010 – Ref: F29275

1 It was noted that Professor Nair had not, as yet, commenced at UWA and would be joining CATL early in 2010
2. FORMULATION OF DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK (DAF) – REF: F29500

Members noted that the formulation of a Development Assessment Framework was being undertaken by the Centre for Advancement for Teaching and Learning and a paper had been attached to the Agenda that introduced various different forms of assessment which were commonly available and when they were best used.

However, it was agreed that discussion of this item would be inappropriate as a number of members were absent, but especially the author, Professor Chalmers, who was not present to introduce the item and outline any further progress or contribute to discussion. The item was held over until the next meeting of the Committee.

3. REVIEW OF THE UNIVERSITY’S ASSESSMENT POLICIES – REF: F29501

By way of background, members noted that the University had a number of guidelines/policies that touched on matters relating to sound assessment practice, including: identification of clear outcomes for courses and units; good communication between students and their teachers; commitment to regular critical review of existing practices; and acceptance of the imperative of open and transparent processes. These guidelines/policies were: Guidelines on Assessment, Guidelines on Learning Skills, Minimum Essentials for Good Practice in Assessment, and Guidelines for the provision of ungraded passes and fails.

Furthermore, in 2008, a review of school-level policy and procedure relating to teaching and learning and assessment had been conducted as part of the TQI (Teaching Quality Indicators) project, which undertook an audit of current teaching and learning policy and practice at UWA. It had become evident from this review that the extent to which the current assessment guidelines were used when setting school-level policy was unclear. Further, there has been ongoing concern around the level of compliance across the University with the minimum essentials, and continuing discussion about the significant differences in policy and practice that existed in individual faculties and schools across the University.

In acknowledging the far-reaching inconsistencies in assessment policies and procedures and their applications across the University, the Assessment Standing Committee (which preceded the Assessment and Evaluation Standing Committee), at its meeting held in April 2009, had agreed that a review should be undertaken of the University’s assessment policies and practices with a view to establishing some compliance procedures for University-wide implementation. The Committee had therefore recommended (via the Teaching and Learning Committee and Academic Council) that the Future Framework Implementation Working Party on “Framework and Definitions” be requested to consider the development of a University-wide assessment policy as part of the Future Framework reforms.

At its meeting held on 23rd September 2009, the Future Framework Implementation Committee had discussed and concluded that it would be appropriate for such a review to be carried out by the Assessment Standing Committee, (in liaison with the Framework and Definitions Working Party) as the mainstream University committee which already had the review of assessment-related practices and policies as a core function of its terms of reference.

Members now had before them a paper entitled ‘Assessment Policy at UWA – a short briefing paper for the consideration of the Assessment & Evaluation Standing Committee’ which, as noted in the Agenda, proposed the following actions:

- develop an assessment policy which sets out minimum standards for assessment administration and also for matters relating to design of assessment practices in the curriculum;
- that any faculty/school level policy/procedure should be aligned with the University assessment policy;
• that the data already collected by the TQI project may be used to identify common themes / inclusions in current assessment policies and where the differences lie
• update a previous desk-top audit of assessment policies at Australian Higher Education institutions and review a number of recent ALTC (Australian Learning and Teaching Council) projects on assessment policy to identify the key aspects of the new assessment policy for UWA.

Members agreed that broad discussion based on the recommendations contained within the Agenda would be appropriate and the Acting Chair invited comment from members present and the following main comments were noted:

• Implementation of the new courses of study provided an excellent opportunity to formulate a consistent approach to assessment.
• High on the assessment agenda should always be - what is the purpose of assessment and why is it being done. Members noted that there might be a tendency to assess because we always had done so.
• It was noted that lack of awareness of current policies and best practice with regard to assessment was, and continued to be, an issue.
• It was generally agreed by those present that both staff and students would appreciate appropriate assessment parameters, and that such parameters would be beneficial at the University-wide level.
• Assessment was an opportunity to demonstrate learning and was integral to the education process. However, a member queried the concept of real learning and expressed that maybe assessment was more focussed on content capture.
• The purpose of examination during first year was raised. It was noted that other options were not to assess in first year, given that students had already indicated high levels of performance by attaining entry to UWA; a second option was that first year assessment would not attract a mark, but would be a pass or fail.
• The issue of the optimum length of exams was briefly raised, and members noted that feedback was currently being sought on a paper circulated to faculties earlier in the year (refer items in progress) on the impact within faculties on assessment practices associated with examinations and that this issue would be referred to the Committee in due course.
• The Guild President raised some issues on behalf of the student body, including concern that some units were 100% assessed by end of semester examinations and the student body favoured regular assessment during a semester which could be complemented by end of semester examinations; assessment should be clearly applicable to course content; any assessment should always be clearly articulated in the assessment mechanism statements; there should be uniformity with regard to assessment but also flexibility.
• There should be uniformity regarding assessment policies for undergraduate and postgraduate students or where differences were necessary, they should be clearly articulated.
• The student experience could be improved if faculties and schools coordinated the provision of assignments. At present it was common for a number of assignments to be required during the same week.
• There was some confusion within faculties and schools as to whether the University’s current guidelines and minimum essentials were mandatory or just guidance. The Executive Officer clarified that the current implementation of the policies project, which required University policies to be formulated or rewritten into a common University-wide format, including procedures and terminology, would clarify that such policies were mandatory and not provided as guidance that could be disregarded. If it was not intended that a policy be mandated, then the guidelines would be written up as a good practice guide rather than a University approved policy. It was anticipated that all existing policies would be rewritten by the end of 2010.
• Members noted from the agenda papers that it was proposed “that any faculty/school level policy/procedure should be aligned with the University assessment policy”. In so noting, members strongly recommended that an appropriate mechanism be incorporated into the University’s policy to ensure such alignment and accountability.
In concluding discussion, the Acting Chair thanked members for their input and it was agreed that the minuted discussion be referred to the Chair for her information and consideration when progressing this issue, and that since the meeting was inquorate, absent members may also wish to provide their feedback to the Chair direct.

4. **A REVIEW OF EVALUATION OF TEACHING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA – REF: F27278**

Members noted that one of the University’s strategic priorities was to develop and promote teaching evaluation strategies in order to provide: high quality teaching and learning opportunities at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels; courses that were responsive to ‘consumer’ needs and demands; and performance indicators for teaching and learning. Evaluation of teaching at UWA was undertaken through the following instruments:

- Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)
- Students’ Unit Reflective Feedback (SURF)
- Student Perceptions of Research Supervision (SPORS)
- Peer Review of Teaching

Attached to the Agenda for noting were extracts from a report, by Associate Professor Janice Orrell, that assessed the strengths and limitations of the system that was currently in place at UWA to conduct its evaluation of teaching and its evaluation of the students’ learning experience. In comparing the University’s current practices and procedures with those in a number of other Australian Universities, the report made a case for proposing major changes to the policy, practices and procedures of evaluation of teaching at UWA.

Members noted that this report had been forwarded to the University’s Executive and anticipated that the full report, “A Review of Evaluation of Teaching at the University of Western Australia” would be referred to the Committee in due course.

In the interim a couple of issues were briefly raised and it was agreed that the following comments be referred to the Chair for her information:

- Evaluation of the effectiveness of assessment would not necessarily be addressed by either SURF or SPOT. It was noted that SURF did include questions regarding assessment, however, its effectiveness was not addressed.

  *Executive Officer’s Note: the following are the current six SURF questions:

  Q1. It was clear what I was expected to learn in this unit.
  Q2. The assessment requirements were clearly stated.
  Q3. The assessment tasks were closely linked to the unit objectives.
  Q4. The unit was well organised.
  Q5. The learning resources (handouts, text, web resources, etc) were adequate for my study in the unit.
  Q6. Overall, this unit was a good educational experience.*

Members agreed that this was an important issue and how to clarify the effectiveness of assessment should be considered as an important part of the review of evaluation of teaching.

- What students learn is often driven by what is assessed and members agreed that the student learning experience would be improved if the nexus between learning and assessment was lessened. A member outlined her experiences with tutorials whereby regular student presentations were required, but not marked. This encouraged learning, but was not driven by the awarding of marks.
5. **INFORMAL REPORT FROM THE CHAIR – Ref F29275**
The Chair was absent from the meeting.

6. **NEXT MEETING**
Members noted that the next meeting would be held on 4th February 2010.

7. **OTHER BUSINESS**
A member suggested that publication of the examination timetable be brought forward to the beginning of semester, or as early as possible in the semester. This would benefit all students, but in particular overseas students who could organise earlier, and hence cheaper, flights home. It would also benefit all students who might be considering undertaking travel and/or research during semester breaks. It was noted that the provision of unit outlines, which included assessment mechanism statements, had been brought forward to at least one working day prior to the beginning of semester and any consequent flexibility regarding provision of the examination timetable was raised. Examinations came within the purview of Student Services and it was agreed to refer this suggestion to the Director of Student Services for consideration and advice. Should the matter require further discussion, it could be referred to the next meeting.

Confirmed

Chair

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