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Support for assessment practice: developing the Assessment Design Decisions Framework

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Abstract

There are many excellent publications outlining features of assessment and feedback design in higher education. However, university educators often find these ideas challenging to realise in practice, as much of the literature focuses on institutional change rather than supporting academics. This paper describes the conceptual development of a practical framework designed to stimulate educators' thinking when creating or modifying assessments. We explain the concepts that underpin this practical support, including the notions of 'assessment decisions' and 'assessment design phases', as informed by relevant literature and empirical data. We also present the outcome of this work. The Assessment Design Decisions Framework. This provides key considerations in six categories: purposes, contexts, tasks, interactions, feedback processes and learning outcomes. By tracing the development of the Framework, we highlight complex ways of thinking about assessment that are relevant to those who design and deliver assessment to tertiary students.

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1 **Support for assessment practice: developing the Assessment Design Decisions**

2 **Framework**

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1 **Abstract**

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3 in higher education. However, university educators often find these ideas challenging to

4 realise in practice, as much of the literature focusses on institutional change rather than

5 supporting academics. This paper describes the conceptual development of a practical

6 framework designed to stimulate educators' thinking when creating or modifying assessments.

7 We explain the concepts that underpin this practical support, including the notions of

8 'assessment decisions' and 'assessment design phases', as informed by relevant literature and

9 empirical data. We also present the outcome of this work, the Assessment Design Decisions

10 Framework, which highlights key considerations by offering prompts for thinking under six

11 categories: purposes, context, tasks, interactions, feedback processes and learning outcomes.

12 By tracing the development of the Framework we highlight complex ways of thinking about

13 assessment that are relevant to those who design and deliver assessment to tertiary students.

14

15 **Key words**

16 Assessment, higher education, educational design, decision-making, feedback

1 **Introduction**

2 Assessment and feedback can be troublesome areas for university educators, but this is not

3 through want of higher education scholarship. A range of conceptual and empirical

4 publications informing assessment is readily available to most university teachers (eg Boud

5 and Associates 2010; van der Vleuten et al. 2012; Gore et al. 2009; Falchikov 2013). In

6 general, the literature focuses more on the learner and their experience of assessment (eg

7 Bailey and Garner 2010; Nicol 2010; Shipman et al 2012) and less on the central role of the

8 educator in designing, implementing and judging assessments. This creates a conundrum for

9 those who wish to improve assessment: how to keep the focus on the learner while including

10 the educator who holds the primary responsibility for assessment. This paper describes the

11 conceptualisation and development of a learner-focussed resource, which supports educators'

12 agency in making considered, nuanced and effective assessment design choices.

13 The need for such a resource is supported by a range of conceptual and empirical literature.

14 Previous work highlights the organisational and policy challenges of supporting good

15 assessment practice (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Macdonald & Joughin, 2009; Meyer et al.,

16 2010; Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011). In particular, Price et al. (2011) suggest the

17 need to enhance the pedagogic and assessment literacy levels of both faculty and students

18 (Price et al. 2011, 490).

19 Developing assessment literacy seems a reasonable aim, but on further inspection may only

20 be one part of the solution. Studies into conceptions of assessment indicate the significant

21 variation in how individual academics think about assessment (Fletcher et al. 2010) and how

22 these conceptualisations can be at odds with what academics do (Norton, Norton and

23 Shannon 2013). Offerdahl and Tomanek (2011) describe how individuals' changed thinking

24 about assessment may not lead to changed teaching practices. In this case study, three

25 educators considered student-centred strategies, such as using formative assessment that

1 revealed information about students' progress to inform teaching. These strategies were

2 implemented, but ultimately realigned to the previous didactic approach that focussed on

3 students' provision of correct 'answers'. Offerdahl and Tomanek (2011) speculate that a

4 stronger degree of dissatisfaction with the status quo may be required to stimulate genuine

5 change. Their study highlights three issues. Firstly, it is more difficult to change assessment

6 practices than it is to change theoretical understandings. Secondly, there is little data that

7 reveals the reasons for educators' assessment choices. Finally, if institutions and departments

8 wish to support individual educators to improve assessments, they must consider the

9 influence of the many contextual factors which shape educator practice.

10

11 These complexities and tensions underlying assessment practice formed the driver for our

12 multi-institutional project *Improving assessment: understanding educational decision-making*

13 *in practice.* The purpose of this project was to develop supports for the design of

14 assessments, which are take into account the challenges of local contexts. This may be

15 conceptualised as the challenge of supporting 'work-as-done', which is distinguished from

16 supporting 'work-as-imagined'. Braithwaite, Wears & Hollnagel (2015, 419) note: 'work-as-

17 imagined always differs from what actually goes on— work-as-done'. In the context of

18 higher education assessment, 'work-as-imagined' is well represented by institutional visions

19 and policies, as well as the many excellent models and innovations within the assessment

20 research literature. There is considerably less work which considers 'work-as-done', or the

21 actual experience of assessment practice, and even less work again which supports 'front line'

22 educators to enhance their assessments. This is the gap that our project intended to address.

23 This paper describes the conceptual approaches which underpin the development of these

24 'front-line' assessment design supports. Firstly, we describe our perspectives on the role of

25 assessment followed by an account how we came to define 'assessment design decisions'.

1 Next, we document the progression of our thinking about how educators produce assessment,

2 drawing from theory, published research, our own work as assessment practitioners, and an

3 empirical dataset collected as part of the project. We then outline the Assessment Design

4 Decisions Framework, which is intended to support and motivate educators to produce and

5 implement good assessment designs, without being prescriptive or reductive. This

6 Framework stimulates educators to consider the tensions in assessment design, whilst

7 acknowledging constraints and affordances of their particular contexts. Finally, we reflect on

8 what may be important in supporting educators to design assessments and provide some

9 directions for future research, including evaluating the Framework's impact.

Comment [MB1]: Reviewer comment 1

10 The Assessment Design Decisions Framework is intended for the specific context of the

11 Australian higher education environment. However, we deliberately took a broader approach.

12 We drew from international literature to ensure that while our project reflected Australian

13 disciplinary and institutional variation, it was also relevant to global contexts where

14 assessment practices may be different.

15 **Perspectives on assessment**

16 An initial step for our project team was to document an explicit and reflexive shared

17 understanding of what was significant about assessment. Then, as at present, we define

18 university assessment as the graded and non-graded tasks, undertaken by an enrolled student

19 as part of their formal study, where the learner's performance is judged by others (teachers or

20 peers). Like Price et al. (2011), we hold to the premise that, while assessment *strategies*

21 should balance complex and interdependent purposes including accreditation and portrayal of

22 achievements, assessment *activities* should focus on learning and discourage mechanical

23 approaches to study. We also claim that assessment practices should develop learners' own

24 capacities to evaluate their own work to prepare them for future challenges beyond the

25 support of teachers and courses. Assessment necessarily directs learners' efforts to mastering

1   the 'rules of the game', whether that be writing an essay, answering a multiple-choice

2   question, or conducting an interview. It does so in ways that are not neutral; assessment

3   always acts as an intervention into student learning. We hold that feedback processes are

4   critical to effective learning through assessment (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) and that

5   iterative opportunities for learners to incorporate feedback is a key component of effective

6   practice (Boud and Molloy 2013). These views, whilst contemporary, are uncontroversial and

7   well represented in the literature.

8   **Defining assessment design decisions**

9   There are few publications examining the processes educators undertake to optimally design

10   and judge assessments in complex practice environments. As discussed earlier, studies

11   indicate a gap between what educators conceptualise as good assessment practice and what

12   they actually do (Offerdahl and Tomesek 2011, Norton, Norton and Shannon 2013), however

13   these studies offer only limited insight into *why* the educators ultimately failed to change their

14   practices. In his study of general teaching practice, Eley (2006) examined university

15   educators' thinking when planning for teaching. He concluded that specific decisions stem

16   from contextualised teaching repertoires, rather than abstract principles of 'good teaching'.

17   The notion of 'decision making' for teachers in higher education resonates with other

18   industries where practitioners have to make decisions that balance competing and

19   multifactorial demands. Although Eley (2006) does not reference it, there is a body of

20   literature on 'decision-making' drawing primarily from cognitive traditions (Borko et al.

21   2008) in industries such as aviation (Plant and Stanton 1998), healthcare (Croskerry 2005), as

22   well as in teacher education (Borko et al. 2008). At the commencement of the project, we

23   postulated that assessment practice, with the complexity of its competing tensions (Price et al.

24   2011) and contextual constraints (Macdonald and Joughin 2009) could likewise be

25   understood as educators making a series of decisions.

1   Assessment decision-making is not an established construct in the literature. Our initial

2   conceptualisation began by considering what actions are taken and by whom. We noted that

3   different decisions about assessment occur at different points in the lifespan of a program,

4   and different people make these decisions for different purposes. Some assessment decisions

5   are made at a policy level (for example, maximum weightings mandated for exams), often by

6   senior staff, who may have no direct relationship with students and are independent of an

7   actual course. Other assessment decisions are made during the design of the unit or module

8   (for example, types of task and criteria for success), usually by university teachers as

9   individuals or in teams, who have some relationship or responsibility for the unit or overall

10 course. We clustered these decisions into a 'design phase'. Finally, there is assessment in the

11 form of day-to-day judgements of student work (for example, types of feedback and grades

12 given to a particular student), often made by assessors who may be tutors or colleagues

13 without responsibility for the assessment design. All three types of decisions influence and

14 are influenced by each other. However, the decisions surrounding each phase can often be

15 undertaken independently of each other.

16   All three types of assessments decisions – policy, design and judgement – are significant but,

17 given that they are taken by different people at different times, require different supports. The

18 focus of this project was specifically on assessment design decisions, but understood within

19 this broader context. 'Assessment design decisions' can then be defined as the corpus of

20 choices regarding assessment, made by university educators who take responsibility for the

21 module or unit or overall program at a curricular level.

22 These design decisions are critical to ensure that assessment supports learning. The selection

23 and location of appropriate tasks, feedback processes and other associated features are

24 significant in enabling students to learn (Boud and Molloy 2013), but are often neglected

25 because of a focus on the judgements of work quality or grades (Dijkstra, Van der Vleuten,

1 and Schuwirth 2010). Additionally, Bennett et al's 2011 study indicates that Australian

2 university educators have 'significant flexibility and freedom' in how they develop and

3 deliver their units. This suggests that in some contexts at least, supporting educators could

4 lead to real changes in how students experience assessments.

5 **The reality of assessment decisions: how educators design assessments**

6 When seeking to understand 'work-as-done', we felt it was critical to seek views of those

7 university educators, about their assessment design choices and processes. The full details of

8 the empirical study are not discussed here; a more thorough account will be reported

9 elsewhere. Instead, we present here those aspects of the data that informed the development

10 of a resource to support assessment design.

11 We sought views from educators at four very different Australian universities. One institution

12 was a traditional 'sandstone' university, one was developed in the mid 20th century but was

13 research intensive, one had originally been an 'institute of technology', and one was a more

14 recent, teaching focussed institution. We sampled from four broad disciplinary groupings;

15 'pure arts' such as history or languages, 'applied arts' such as education or journalism, 'pure

16 sciences' such as chemistry or physiology and 'applied sciences' such as engineering or

17 physiotherapy. As the focus was on assessment design, we identified teaching units that had

18 significantly changed assessments in the previous twelve months, either through paperwork

19 review or nomination. We contacted unit/subject coordinators, who were responsible for

20 assessment design, and requested interviews. We wanted to understand what might lead

21 educators to innovate in assessment, in particular what prompted them to think beyond

22 'normal' practice. We wanted to understand the factors that supported or constrained good

23 ideas and their translation, or lack of, into practice. We also wanted to understand how to

1 support educators who are motived to teach well as part of their general academic practice,

2 but are perhaps less interested in building particular expertise in assessment.

3 The initial ten interviews exposed the thoughtful commitment of the educators to develop

4 meaningful and valuable assessments. There was a wider range of tasks than we anticipated.

5 For example, participants described role-plays (geography), site visits (education), interviews

6 (journalism) and reflections on videotaped practice (physiotherapy), as well as more

7 traditional forms such as exams (biological sciences) and essays (social work). The

8 interviews also highlighted the generally iterative nature of assessment development.

9 Particularly, the data indicated that the foundation of an assessment task was most frequently

10 drawn from a previous task. This included assessments experienced by the educator as a

11 student or implemented at another institution. Most commonly, assessment activities were

12 revised versions of the unit's previous assessment, sometimes with the expectation of further

13 'tweaking' in the next iteration:

14   '…we didn't like the marking rubric for the blog assignment. So, this year, I changed

15   it…my lead tutor from last year, from the course, she redesigned it for me. … I tested

16   it [on] the summer term, where I had three students…. But I didn't like … some

17   aspects of it. So, for this semester, I merged her marking rubric and my marking

18   rubric and it's much, much better.' (Education lecturer)

19 We also realised that when educators were designing or revising assessments, they did not

20 appear to follow a systematic decision-making process. Interviewees repeatedly described an

21 inspiration followed by an almost complete solution, which then required some tweaking.

22 This did not appear to be a series of considered choices, but more of a creative act:

23   'I wanted to make it practical and real, and connected to education … but I wanted

24   them to think out of the box... That's when I had the epiphany of going to these other

1   spaces like [the children's gallery] and inspire them to think out of the box. So, they're

2   not just thinking, "Well, what's typically in a classroom? How can I really create a

3   very inspiring and engaging educational space?"' (Education lecturer)

4 Lawson (2005) in his summary of the creative process, describes firstly a formulation of the

5 problem, followed by some early conscious ideas and then by a period without conscious

6 thinking. Finally, there is an 'illumination' or a 'sudden emergence of idea', which can then

7 be once again worked on consciously. This was most akin to the process interviewees

8 described, although they generally struggled to describe their thinking. These 'epiphanies'

9 underlined the differences between our dataset and the constructs described by cognitively

10 oriented decision-making literature from other disciplines such as healthcare and aviation.

11 Our thinking began to shift towards supporting educators to develop contextualised and

12 creative solutions and we grappled with how to achieve this beyond the many excellent

13 guidelines or 'how to' approaches, which are already readily available.

14 Following our initial set of ten interviews, we decided to include those who were responsible

15 for large compulsory units where assessments tend to be more stable over time. In these

16 further 21 interviews, again across four institutions and a range of disciplines, our rationale

17 was to capture more of the routine decision-making involved in assessment design. This

18 second set of data highlighted the distributed nature of assessment design. The person

19 responsible for designing the assessment prior to semester was rarely the person who

20 developed the original paperwork for the unit to be approved. Design was conducted by many

21 individuals, usually with the unit coordinator having primary responsibility, sometimes

22 simultaneously in teams, sometimes sequentially over years:

23   'When I first took this unit over … I did make some changes [to the assessment].

24   They had more pracs, they had some oral presentations. ... I added a prac and I

1   removed a prac based on how relevant I felt the pracs were and how well aligned with

2   the lecture content they were. … I changed the format of the exam slightly… there

3   was a bit of a gap there.' (Science lecturer)

4 The influence of the overarching course or program was notable; it was harder to change

5 assessment in core units when many other units depended upon them. There appeared to be a

6 real difference in the capacity to change assessments in different situations. The educator

7 leading a decades-old foundational unit could make marginal and incremental changes, while

8 the educator instigating an elective unit for the first time had more freedom to innovate.

9 Educators described the impact of the departmental culture on their assessment practice,

10 particularly the influence of the Head of Department. The latter could promote or discourage

11 innovative assessment design, despite having no apparent immediate responsibility for

12 particular units. In general however, the data, which was from a broad range of institutions

13 and course types, supported Bennett et al's (2011) contention that Australian educators have

14 considerable control over assessment design.

15 As has been noted elsewhere, the influence of the unit's disciplinary traditions (such as an

16 established custom of essays or exams) on the assessment design was pervasive (Meyer et al.

17 2010). What was most striking was that the educators themselves were often unaware of this.

18 For example, in the following quotes interviewees consider the possibility of not including an

19 exam:

20   'Well I suppose, yeah, I suppose... Well, I don't know actually. It depends whether it's

21   important to test whether they have any basic knowledge, I don't know. I feel

22   uncomfortable not having exams.' (Science lecturer)

23   'I don't think that probably crossed our mind, not having an exam.' (Science lecturer)

1   This indicated that the data, while illuminating, was also limited. It illustrated what practice

2   was, not what it *might be*, because the educators themselves did not have the broader context,

3   or sometimes expertise, to see beyond their immediate circle of circumstance. For example,

4   some participants were more concerned with standards or plagiarism at a micro level than

5   focusing on learning with a particular form of assessment. The data was additionally limited

6   due to its scope; care must be taken not to overgeneralise from a set of interviews in an

7   Australian context to other contexts in which an educators' opportunities for decision may be

8   more constrained.

9   In order to develop supports for good assessment practice, we needed provide a more

10   comprehensive view. In particular, many of the theorists and researchers already mentioned

11   in this paper (eg Price, Carroll, O'Donovan, & Rust, 2011, Boud and Molloy 2013, Dijkstra,

12   Van der Vleuten, and Schuwirth 2010, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick, 2006) informed how we

13   developed the Framework. At the same time, we wished to take into account the real

14   priorities and challenges faced by university educators in local contexts.

15   **Learning-centred but educator-focussed: the Assessment Design Decisions Framework**

16   While the interview data provided key insights into the complex and 'messy' world of

17   localised assessment practice, the literature provided the conceptual and empirical

18   foundations for learning-centred assessment. A framework that supports assessment design

19   should draw from both of these, and therefore both advocate for learning as well as support

20   the educator.

21   As we began to conceptualise the Framework, our conception of the term 'decision' became

22   more nuanced. The term 'decision' rightly acknowledges educators' capacities to make

23   choices about assessment. On the other hand, a 'design decision' is not 'decision-making' as

24   other industries such as aviation and healthcare might characterise it. The interview data

1 clearly indicated that the assessment design process is less reductive and more holistic than

2 other forms of decision-making. In other words, there is no suggestion that assessment can be

3 developed through selecting branches of a decision tree that lead to an optimal outcome.

4 Our approach asks educators to reflect on a range of 'assessment considerations' that

5 underpin the designs available within the constraints of their own environment. These

6 considerations present some of the necessary tensions within assessment design without

7 providing easy answers. This is intended to promote 'assessment thinking' rather than

8 present a checklist of idealised solutions. If the educator wishes for further information

9 regarding the 'how to' of assessment for tertiary education, the resource provides links to the

10 many available publications. The Framework is intentionally agentic, reflecting our aim to

11 provide the educator with a way of analysing the choices available to them that creates

12 meaningful design responses within their own environments. If considerations are not

13 relevant or out of the educator's control, then the educator does not have to engage with them.

14 The Assessment Design Decisions Framework comprises six categories of assessment

15 considerations, which together present a learning-centred approach to assessment design.

16 While none of these would be at all surprising to those immersed in the assessment literature,

17 it is the ways in which they are represented in terms of the focus on impact on learners and it

18 relation to the academic context, which provides a new contribution. The graphical

19 representation is a circle, which indicates that no category has primacy, and that educators

20 may wish to consider various elements independently of each other. The categories are

21 outlined below.

22   • *Purposes of assessment:* This category explores the educators' possible intentions in

23   designing assessment and draws from Boud's (2000) work on sustainable assessment,

1 which focusses on assessment that drives learning and enhances students' future

2 capacities to make judgements.

3 • *Contexts of assessment:* This category is derived from the interview data and

4 represents the various and sometimes competing environmental and personal factors

5 which can influence assessment design.

6 • *Learner outcomes:* This category brings together the literature and understandings

7 from the interview data to assist the educator in integrating assessment with various

8 documented or unwritten learner outcomes.

9 • *Tasks:* This category serves to link the educator to the types of considerations which

10 can help navigate the available assessment literature as the choice and selection of

11 assessment tasks is critical.

12 • *Feedback processes:* This category is drawn from contemporary views of feedback, as

13 discussed by Boud and Molloy (2013), which place feedback as a necessary and

14 iterative part of learning through assessment.

15 • *Interactions*: This category is primarily derived from the interview data and orients

16 the educator to the types of interactions which will optimise the benefit of good

17 assessment design across units and programs. Educators can overtly consider how to

18 connect with learners and colleagues as a necessary part of their assessment practices.

19 Box 1 provides a summary of the Framework.

20 <Box 1> here

21 A website was developed as a resource directly available for educators. The associated web

22 guide to the Framework (Bearman et al. 2014b) provides expansions for each consideration,

23 with illustrative quotes from educators and links to resources. The Framework was reviewed

24 by a reference group and potential users, and an independent evaluator concluded that the:

1 'project has been successful in producing quality outputs, as judged by experts and the target

2 user cohort of academics' (Dawson et al. 2014).

3 **Reflections on the Assessment Design Decisions Framework**

4 The process of developing the framework led to some interesting observations about how

5 educators develop assessment in higher education and how to support them. Firstly, in

6 general, we were heartened by the thinking that we encountered about assessment. It was

7 creative and considered. There were diverse examples of innovation and, even with very

8 traditional forms like essays, many of our participants gave deep consideration to making the

9 task interesting and meaningful for students. This may be a consequence of our sample; some

10 invitations were not accepted and it could be that these were less confident and/or committed

11 educators. Our initial focus on 'new units' may also have biased the sample to include more

12 innovative academics. However, the majority of our sample would not regard themselves as

13 expert educators or identify themselves as innovative.

14 The interview data suggested that educators were highly motivated but working in complex,

15 often overwhelming, environments. As we finalised the framework, it was apparent that an

16 individual acting alone cannot change institutional and departmental cultures, but developing

17 innovative assessments within constraints can be satisfying and, for some, fun. We hope our

18 colleagues will be encouraged to draw from their existing creativity and motivation to

19 achieve richer choices for themselves and students.

20 It is also appropriate to reflect on the limitations of the Framework. It may be less relevant to

21 those settings where control over the assessment does not rest with an individual or a small

22 team. Full evaluation was outside the scope of the project and so current evaluation data is

23 limited. We do not currently have a sense of how the academics interact with this resource *in*

24 *situ*. A key research opportunity lies in evaluating whether the Framework fulfils its aims of

1   supporting assessment practice across various disciplinary and national contexts. This

2   research may yield insight both into the strengths and weaknesses of the Framework in

3   specific, and also, the potential for any such resource to develop academic practice. Finally,

4   further study may confirm or refute our insights into how educators make choices about their

5   assessment designs.

Comment [MB2]: Reviewer Comment 2

6   **Reflections on assessment design processes**

7   The process of developing the framework fundamentally changed the way we thought about

8   assessment 'work-as-done'. Similar to others (Price et al. 2011; Macdonald and Joughin 2009;

9   Meyer et al. 2010), we have identified contextual, institutional or individual tensions which

10   come into play when considering assessment. At the conclusion of developing a resource,

11   which has required us to thinking deeply about how to support 'front line' educators, we

12   suggest that supporting assessment practice may be about providing means to reconcile

13   different ways of thinking. These notions may be sometimes conflicting or oppositional, but

14   at other times, they are easily aligned.

15   *Proposition 1: Benefit the learner but support the educator*

16   A learning focus provides a firm basis for the development of assessment practice; however

17   any form of practice development must take into account the educators' individual

18   circumstances. Good assessment practice often leads to good assessment, but it is not a linear

19   or assured outcome.

20   *Proposition 2: Design is individual but also distributed*

21   Assessment design does not solely rest in the hands of an individual at a specific point in time;

22   it is mediated by individuals but distributed in nature. Individuals at any instance look

1 forwards and backwards in time, as well as in consideration of other requirements and in

2 negotiation with a range of colleagues.

3 *Proposition 3: Holistic design processes blend with strategic decisions*

4 The process of assessment design often appears to be holistic, creative and in some ways

5 spontaneous. On the other hand, educators must make strategic choices about how to

6 successfully develop assessments within the constraints of their particular circumstances.

7 *Proposition 4: Think conceptually, relationally and pragmatically*

8 Improving assessment practices requires reconciling issues from different levels of

9 consideration: conceptual, interpersonal and pragmatic. Good assessment practices require

10 clarity of focus and an ability to negotiate with others. Recognising the influence of local

11 leaders may help in this process.

12 *Proposition 5: Think locally but also beyond the square*

13 Assessment as implemented is highly contextualised and influenced by local, disciplinary and

14 institutional cultures. These must be reconciled with the need to transcend these influences in

15 order to innovate. Engagement beyond the local environment is required for this as being

16 'inside' a culture can often preclude seeing alternative perspectives. Inviting an external

17 perspective on assessment practices through formal or informal peer review may provide

18 necessary insights.

19 **Conclusion**

20 The process of developing the Assessment Design Decisions Framework presents various

21 conceptions which assist in understanding how educators think about assessment design. We

22 propose that educators reconcile, align or mitigate some of the factors which influence

1 assessment design in their own circumstances. Educators can use the Assessment Design

2 Decisions Framework to identify the choices they can make in designing assessment, with

3 particular consideration of the nuances of their personal, departmental, disciplinary and

4 institutional environments.

10

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14

1   Box 1: The Assessment Design Decisions Framework (Bearman et al 2014a). Permission to

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Assessment Design Decisions Framework

This Framework helps university teachers make good decisions about assessment design. The six categories draw from existing evidence on good assessment, and data from a study of Australian university assessment practices. The Framework identifies the key considerations in assessment design, including the effects of assessment on learning.

Purposes of assessment
How can assessment: (1) support student learning; (2) generate grades that will form part of subsequent certification; and (3) equip learners for making future judgements?

Context of assessment
Which of the following attributes needs to be considered in assessment design? What specifically about each can be taken into account? How can tensions between different needs be reconciled?

- Characteristics of learners/students
- Institutional assessment principles and policies
- Professional, vocational or employment-related requirements
- Departmental, disciplinary and personal norms, expectations and ideas
- The overall program and the role of the unit/module
- Learning environment e.g. mode (online/face-to-face/blended); class size

Learner outcomes
How does assessment align with, and promote, desired learner outcomes, including: (1) unit/module learning outcomes; (2) overall program learning outcomes; (3) professional requirements; and (4) learners' general professional or intellectual development.

Tasks
Learners need to engage with a range of tasks, to (1) develop and (2) demonstrate their learning.
- What is the rationale for each task?
- How do the tasks drive learning? What do the tasks specifically require learners to do?
- How will successful completion be judged?
- How are tasks best distributed across the semester?
- How will students contribute?
- Which tasks will be graded?

Feedback processes
- How are multiple feedback opportunities achieved through the distribution and relationship of tasks across the unit/module/overall program?
- What types of feedback information will be provided and by whom?
- How will learner performance be used to influence the (re)design of later tasks?

Interactions
- How will resistance or engagement from learners or colleagues influence assessment processes?
- How will learners understand what is required in the assessment task(s)?
- What information will be needed to improve this assessment for subsequent occasions?
- What associated changes in teaching and learning activities will be required?

http://www.asssessmentdecisions.org

1   Box 1: The Assessment Design Decisions Framework (Bearman et al 2014a).