

**THE POLICY ON THE
ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING**

1. POLICY PARTICULARS

DATE OF APPROVAL BY THE TEACHING AND LEARNING COMMITTEE: 13 May 2005

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE:

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL:

COMMENCEMENT

DATE: July 1999

REVISION HISTORY: First approval by Council, 1 July 1999

REVIEW CYCLE: Every three years

REVIEW DATE: May 2005

POLICY LEVEL: All academic staff

RESPONSIBILITY

- IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING: All academic staff, Academic Development Centre, Academic Review Committee, Teaching and Learning Committee
- REVIEW AND REVISION: Teaching and Learning Committee

REPORTING STRUCTURE: Teaching and Learning Committee → Senate → Council

2. POLICY STATEMENT

2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:

The assessment of student learning is key to quality in that it ensures that the standards of qualifications awarded by a university are achieved. In the face of cultural, social and linguistic diversity, however, assessment has the potential both to challenge and maintain social structures. A university therefore has the responsibility to ensure that its assessment is valid and consistent, that its assessment practices are transparent and that its assessors are accountable for the judgements they make. In South Africa, all qualifications are registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by describing the learning outcomes which have been developed for those qualifications. Assessment therefore needs to measure the extent to which learners have achieved those outcomes if the standard of the qualification is to be maintained. The development of assessment criteria associated with those outcomes and the evaluation of students' performance against those criteria is a means of ensuring that assessment is valid and consistent. The publication of those criteria also ensures that assessment is transparent and assessors are accountable. Although the development of learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria are key to valid and reliable assessment practices, it is acknowledged that assessment is a creative process, both in terms of its dialogical nature, and in terms of the assessor's role in responding to unexpected and unstated outcomes. It is to be expected, especially at tertiary level, that learners will respond creatively and unexpectedly in the learning process. Assessors therefore need to have the space to respond to and reward innovative and creative thinking.

Although assessment functions to measure learning, it can also be used to guide and develop that learning. This is especially the case when learning outcomes and their associated assessment criteria are used as organising principles in assessment design. The availability of outcomes and assessment criteria allows students to understand what they have already learned and what they still need to learn. Assessment therefore needs to be perceived as an integral part of teaching and curriculum development.

The University recognises that staff need to be trained and supported as assessors. To this end, all staff appointed from 1st January 2004 need to be accredited and trained against the assessor unit standards for higher education.

2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:

This policy aims to ensure that:

- Assessment procedures determine whether or not students have met the stated learning outcomes of a course or module.

- Assessment is sufficient in that it ensures both that students have met those outcomes and that they have been guided towards them.
- Assessment criteria are openly and clearly communicated to students in the interests of transparency and accountability and also to enable students to use those criteria to monitor and develop their own learning.
- Students are provided with feedback which details the extent to which their work has, or has not, met those criteria
- Departments monitor the consistency and validity of their assessment
- Academic staff are provided with support which will allow them to assess validly and consistently

2.3 DEFINITIONS:

Learning outcome: A learning outcome describes what students should be able to do by the time they have completed a module, course or a programme leading to a qualification. Outcomes are complex and embody knowledge, skills and attitudes

Assessment criteria: Assessment criteria refer to what an assessor needs to be able to see to ensure that students have indeed achieved the outcome.

Valid: This refers to the extent to which assessment measures what it is intended to measure.

3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 THE ACTIONS AND PROCESSES BY WHICH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY WILL BE ACHIEVED:

Individual lecturers are responsible for:

- Developing learning outcomes for the courses and modules they teach
- Developing the assessment criteria associated with those outcomes
- Designing assessment tasks which will allow students to demonstrate that they can meet the criteria
- Providing details of assessment criteria to students
- Providing feedback to students describing how their performance on the task has or has not met those criteria
- Liaising with other members of the department in order to ensure that assessment is consistent
- Recording marks and assessment decisions accurately and timeously

Heads of Departments are responsible for:

- Assuring the overall quality of the assessment conducted in their departments
- Ensuring that marks and assessment decisions are recorded accurately

The Academic Development Centre is responsible for:

- Providing consultation and support to lecturers which will allow them to assess validly and consistently
- Running assessor training courses

3.2 **REVIEW PROCEDURE:**

The policy will next be reviewed at the first meeting of the Teaching and Learning Committee to be held in 2008. Any changes to the policy will be implemented from 1 January 2009 onwards.