Practices to support comprehensive Quality Assurance of Assessment Standards at Griffith.

Dr Duncan D Nulty
Griffith Institute for Higher Education
Outline

1. GGLT:
   - Integrated IT for assessment handling (Kevin Ashford-Rowe)
   - Consensus moderation
     • Time-line of core academic activity
     • Reference practices
     • Possible reporting model

2. Griffith’s new Assessment Policy

3. Assessment Matters! Web-site (Nicola Shapland)
Consensus Moderation: The impossible dream?

Nailing jelly to the ceiling;
Pushing water up hill;
Playing snooker with a rope;
Turning water into wine;
Pleasing everyone all the time;
40:40:20;
Herding cats;
Finding a parking space at the Gold Coast Campus;

Getting a group of academics to agree with each other;

... ... ...
The reality of assessment?

Your ☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺ (students) ➔ (hand in) their ☐ (assignments). ☹ (You) take ☑ (time) to ☁ (look) at them & ☑ x (mark them) depending on if they are ☑ (ok) ☑ (good) or ☑ (poor). ☹ (You) ☑ (start early) but end up ☑ (burning the midnight candle), ☹ (crying) by ☑ (1am) & ☑ ? (hoping) you finish ✅ before you ☣ (die).
Assessment really

I wonder if they learned anything. Let's look inside their heads!

It must be in here somewhere, I've been teaching all semester!

I'd best set a task. Then I can look at it and infer from the answer if the student learned anything.

Teaching all semester? How can s/he say that when I have not been learning?

If only I'd followed the lecturer's advice … lucky for me this so-called “test” relies on all that cramming I did last night … he heh!

A: Because sheep only follow each other.

Q: Discuss why, although there's been avian flu, swine flu, and equine flu, there has been no sheep flu.

Expert professional judgement

Did this student attend even one of my lectures? I bet it was one of those at the back on Facebook the whole time.
Expert judgement ⇔ Academic standards

• Academic standards depend on appropriateness, rigor and consistency in the application of academics’ expert judgement.

• This applies throughout all our academic activities (not just to marking).

• How can we enhance that?
  – Answer: … by ensuring that such judgements are themselves (appropriately) informed.

• I’d like to give you some ideas about how we hope to do that.
How?

• ... by the systematic use of consensus moderation practices throughout our core academic activities.
What is consensus moderation?

Relax!
You’re probably doing it already.


© Duncan D Nulty, 2011
What is consensus moderation?

• Simply put, it’s a process like peer review that has reaching consensus as its aim.

• But, what do we have to reach consensus about?
Time-line of core academic activity

1. **Course-level planning** (to ensure the use of appropriate assessment items + task descriptions + sequence + timing … across the course)

2. Setting appropriate and consistent standards for **marking** individual pieces of students’ work

3. Reviewing the standard of the final course **grades** to ensure they are appropriate and consistent

4. Ensuring appropriate and consistent standards across (cognately similar) courses (**Internal or External**)

5. Ensuring appropriate and consistent assessment standards **over time**.
Reference practices – Level 1 (course design)

Course assessment planning:
- Self-review of the assessment plan (i.e. purpose, timing & sequence of assessment items, content, and instructions to students against good practice principles)
- Internal peer-review of the assessment plan (e.g. by HOS/ Dean/ Discipline head / Colleagues / teaching team members)
- External peer review of the assessment plan (e.g. by a colleague from another university nationally or internationally or from relevant professional body)
- National or international benchmarking of the assessment plan by comparison with similar units and courses elsewhere
- Benchmarking of the assessment plan using an internationally recognised text that includes assessment items

© Duncan D Nulty, 2011
Reference practices – Level 2 (Marking)

Marking:

- Cross marking of samples of students work internally or externally by peers\(^1\) [NB: this can be prior to marking, during marking, after marking]

- Co-development of marking guides/ rubrics in collaboration with peers\(^1\) that are then provided to students and markers

- Review of a sample of students’ marked work by peers\(^1\) [NB: this can be prior to marking, during marking, after marking]

- Benchmarking of standards through the use of an internationally recognised text with exemplar marking guides

© Duncan D Nulty, 2011
Reference practices – Level 3 (Grading)

Grading:
- Internal or external peer-review of all the assessed work that was completed by several students selected from across different grades.
- Internal or external peer-review of marks for all students graded at all grade boundaries.
- Internal or external peer-review of marks for all students awarded failing grades and ‘High Distinction’.
- Final course grades are determined by judging students’ performance against criteria, rather than grade distributions.

© Duncan D Nulty, 2011
Reference practices – Level 4

Consistency across courses:

☐ Peer-review of samples of students’ work by other (related) Local course convenors, discipline convenor, program convenor, or head of school [NB: this can be prior to, during or after marking/grading]

☐ Peer-review of samples of students’ work by a Local subject area interest group, assessment panel or board [NB: this can be prior to, during or after marking/grading]

☐ External peer review of marks from samples of students’ work, or final grades, by (for example) convenors of related courses from other institutions; industry liaison groups; or through professional accreditation processes

© Duncan D Nulty, 2011
Reference practices – Level 5

Consistency over time:

- Individual or peer\(^1\) review comparing marks with (annotated) exemplars of students’ work marked in previous course offerings

\(^1\)Peers may include appropriately qualified colleagues in related courses locally, nationally or internationally; HOS; Discipline Head, and/or other teaching team members

© Duncan D Nulty, 2011
Recognise anything you already do?

• Yes … I thought so.

• And, there’s certainly a range of other practices too, this is not a definitive list.
So what next?

• First, we need a data collection strategy.
• Second, we need to report on that data.
  – At Griffith we have added a new section to our on-line course profile system.
  – It presents course convenors with screens like the slides I’ve shown you today listing the “reference practices” and asks them to tick each of the ones they use.
  – It’s quick & simple, and, since it lists practices we know people are already using, it’s also likely to be fairly well accepted.
Immediate benefits

• We get data about what convenors are doing
  – We can report on this. (More on that in a moment.)

• Simply collecting these data works as a educative strategy
  – Convenors get to see the kinds of things they ‘should’ be doing.

• An implicit developmental imperative is apparent
  – Convenors get to realise there is more that they could do.

• Over time, if you have a positive view of the professionalism of academics as I do, these people will engage in making improvements as ‘suggested/ implied’.
  – Which, of course, is something we can help with through provision of professional development opportunities and materials.
Reporting:
Structure out of chaos.

- Two related ‘suites’ of reports
  - Report at the ‘core academic activity level’ (Fig 1)
  - Report at the ‘reference practices’ level’ (Fig 2)
- Simple, ‘at a glance’ shows how we’re tracking.
- Convincing, yet easy.
Accuracy?

• Well, we are confident of this.
• The approach mirrors how we collect data on other curriculum initiatives (like say “internationalisation”)
• … and besides, it will be a lot better than anything anyone else has got at the moment.
Two more positives:

1. This approach leaves the authority and responsibility for determining and maintaining academic standards where it belongs – with the academics. It affirms that.

2. There is no epistemological compromise implicit in this approach: using the expert judgements of those appropriately qualified to make them - academics - remains the mechanism by which learning achievements of students are systematically and progressively evaluated – not a generic post-hoc test which (potentially at least) risks creating a ‘teach to the test’ culture that could negate a fundamental quality of higher education.
Griffith’s new assessment policy

• Coming to you … any day now!
  – Principles based
  – Endorses *expert judgement* and *consensus moderation* as central features of the way we ensure appropriate and consistent academic standards.
Summary

- Academic standards ⇔ expert judgement
- Time-line of core academic activity
- Reference practices
- Possible reporting model
- Forthcoming: Griffith’s new Assessment Policy
Me in my other shirt.

You can contact me.

📞 Phone: (+61-7) 3735 6813
✉️ e.mail: d.nulty@griffith.edu.au
😊 In person: M10, Room 4.15a, Mt Gravatt
🌐 http://www.griffith.edu.au/gihe/staff/duncan-nulty