

Exploring the Assessment Terrain in Higher Education: Possibilities and Threats: A Concept Paper

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ABSTRACT The process of teaching and learning involves the assessment of students in order to monitor the extent to which the intended outcomes and objectives are achieved. Assessment ascertains the extent to which educational learning outcomes are achieved and how students master the concepts taught. In this paper the researchers interrogate the issue of assessment. The researchers begin by exploring literature on assessment as it relates to higher education. Key concepts and principles of assessment are discussed and a distinction between assessment of learning and assessment for learning is clarified. This is followed by a contextual discussion on the national assessment policy frameworks in the South African higher education system including how these influence decisions on assessment practices in the universities. The researchers conclude that academics and educational developers should embrace a broad understanding of the issues of curriculum development and implementation and policies governing assessment so that various approaches and strategies in assessment for the good of educational programmes and student attainment. The researchers further conclude by conceptualising an ideal role for the educational or curriculum developer in promoting principled assessment practices within the university.

INTRODUCTION

Assessment of learners' work is a significant component of effective teaching and learning (Webber and Tschepikow 2012). This is seen against the realisation that assessment is integrated in teaching and learning. Teachers require a broad understanding of assessment in order to desist from merely focusing solely on summative assessment. In this concept paper the discussion of assessment places a lot of emphasis on assessment for learning as means of enhancing learning by ensuring that learners' strengths and weaknesses in learning are timeliness identified and necessary interventions implemented. Such a view is in line with William et al.'s (2010) assertion that assessment for learning leads to high quality learning.

The Nature of Assessment

Assessment involves the gathering of evidence of students' achievement of learning,

through assignments, tests, and examinations. It is understood by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) ITL Resource Number 5 (2003) to mean the practice of designing formal tasks for students to complete and then of making inferences from and estimating the worth of their performances on these tasks. According to the Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee on Improving Teaching and Learning Resource No. 5 (2003: 121), "Assessment can also be understood to be a form of research that aims to find out what students know, understand and can do." Assessment is indeed a powerful tool for determining what students learn (Gibbs 1999). It has a critical influence on the quality of teaching and learning. The nature of assessment tasks given to students will determine whether students engage in deep or surface learning.

Ramsden (1988) cited by Morgan (1993) argues that taking a particular approach to learning (whether deep, surface or strategic) derives from how they view the nature of learning and/or the nature of a particular learning or assessment task. He has summarised the aspects evident in the learner, according to each approach. Firstly, the deep approach correlates with an intention to understand. Specifically there is a focus on what is signified, for example the author's arguments; there is the occurrence of relation and distinction between new ideas and

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previous knowledge; the relation of concepts to everyday experience; the organisation and structuring of content and an internal emphasis on learning, including the idea that learning helps the learner construct their view of reality.

The surface approach to learning or assessment is marked by an intention to complete the task (or learning) requirements with little attention to the learning that takes place. Specifically there is a focus on the signs such as the text itself and on discrete elements, along with the memorisation of information and procedures for assessment. Also evident is the unreflective association of concepts and facts; a failure to distinguish principles from evidence or new from old; the treatment of the task as an external imposition and finally external emphasis, such as the demands of the assessment and knowledge remaining separate to everyday reality (Ramsden 1988). The aspects related to the surface approach suggest learning which is task focused and more commonly having extrinsic value, for example the value associated to the grade achieved through a particular instance of learning.

If the lecturer gives students questions that require them to simply reproduce learnt facts, in our view students will adopt the surface approach to learning. However, if assessment tasks set require thinking on the part of the student then the deep approach will be developed. The use of such terms as 'why', that require students to justify their responses lead to deep approaches to learning. Biggs (2003a) terms this the backwash effect and says it occurs when the assessment determines what and how students learn more than the curriculum does. Students learn what they think they will be tested on. Gibbs (1999: 42) cites a study of students' orientation to the assessment system at Edinburgh University where researchers distinguished between students who sought out information about what counted in assessment ('cue seekers'), those who were aware of these cues and responded to them ('cue conscious'), and those who missed the cues no matter how often they were told and sometimes disoriented their efforts ('cue deaf'). The extent to which students were cued in to assessment demands was found to be a strong predictor of their overall performance. The assessment system was found to be the dominant influence on the way students learnt: on how much effort they put in and what they allocated this effort to.

Why Educators Assess Learners

Different stakeholders require different things of the assessment process. Some of the stakeholders in higher education include the following: educational managers, parents, employers, governments, students and lecturers. As lecturers, the researchers have used assessment to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses, and to determine whether a student is ready to be admitted to a particular learning programme and what academic support may be required to enable a student to progress. Students also need feedback on their performance. Formative assessment, to be discussed in a subsequent section, may be used to provide feedback to students about their progress in order to motivate students, help students improve their learning and consolidate their work to date.

Assessment, therefore, serves social as well as educational purposes, and according to Luckett and Sutherland (2000) students want to know what is expected of them, how they will be judged, how they are progressing and they will want recognition of their achievements. Lecturers want to know whether their students are mastering key concepts and skills, whether their teaching is effective and whether their assessments are comparable to that of their peers.

Other stakeholders as indicated before are government and employers. There is an increasing call for accountability in Higher Education as justification for the funds that government ploughs into the sector. Government wants to know whether educational institutions are producing graduates of high standards, how efficient their system is in terms of throughput rates and whether or not institutions are providing value for the funding they receive. As Luckett and Sutherland (2000) show; given the critical relationship between assessment and student learning and the changing context in which lecturers teach, in which governments, employers, communities and, not least, students, are concerned to make institutions of higher education more accountable for the services they provide, lecturers are obliged to take their assessment practices seriously and responsibly. When lecturers are called upon by various stakeholders to account for their teaching, the assessment of students is likely to be a critical area for scrutiny, judgment and reflection.

Looking at the various roles of assessment, in the researchers' view, great emphasis seems to be placed on efficiency in the system and throughput rates. The end product seems to be the goal. The process towards the goal is overlooked. The researchers feel greater emphasis should be placed on the improvement of the lecturers' practices. There is need to transform assessment practices in higher education so that they become more responsive to students' needs. Outcomes based Education (OBE) is one approach that has attempted to transform assessment practices in South Africa.

OBE AS A MEANS OF ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATION IN ASSESSMENT

The new dispensation in South Africa in 1994 ushered in a new education system. In 1995 the White Paper on Education was produced to set the pace and parameters for areas of and extent of envisioned changes within the educational context. Following the White Paper on Education a number of discussion documents were produced by the National Department of Education. The most notable one that began to moot 'outcomes' in education emerged in 1996 and was entitled Outcomes Based Education (Chisholm 2003: 2). A learner centered pedagogy or problem posing education (Freire 1996) was introduced. Freire (1970) believed that learners should not be lectured into sleepy silence, but should rather be actively involved in the teaching and learning process.

The essence of OBE is to start with the end in mind, that is, the outcomes. Curriculum design starts with the abilities, skills, knowledge, attitudes that one ultimately wants students to demonstrate and ensures that the assessment is focused on what the learner has achieved in relation to these learning outcomes rather than focused on what was presented in the course of delivery. In other words, the designing-down process starts with what learners should be able to do at the end of their official learning experience and then works backwards. This principle represents the demonstration of the shift from emphasis on content to emphasis on outcomes. This is what Gibbs (1999) terms constructive alignment which we discuss later in the paper.

The advent of OBE has had significant implications for the process of assessment in the South African education system. Learners are

now assessed in terms of whether or not they are able to an outcome rather than the mere reproduction of facts, that is, within the OBE system, the emphasis is on the demonstration of knowledge rather than the reproduction of knowledge. Thus OBE has also enabled a greater focus on processes of assessment in relation to learning. OBE has meant that assessment must be criterion-based. This means that learners are assessed against criteria that indicate if and the extent to which an outcome has been attained. Criterion-based assessment is different from the old form of assessment in which learners were tested against other learners' performances or against a customary norm. Instead specific assessment criteria are written down against which each student performance will be measured. A synopsis of norm-referenced and criterion referenced assessment is necessary to buttress the foregoing argument.

In norm-referenced assessment as shown by Knight (2001) the idea is that assessments do not compare student achievement directly to statements of learning outcomes but give data that allow us to rank achievements, comparing one student to another. "Norm-referencing is comparative, telling us that *this* student is better than another, similar to a third and not as good as a fourth" (Knight 2001: 17). In contrast to norm-referenced measurement, in criterion-referenced assessment the score an individual obtains reflects how well the individual meets preset criteria, those being the objectives that the lecturer set out to achieve. According to the Rhodes Brief Guide to OBA (undated p.1), "criterion referenced assessment is a form of assessment in which judgments are made about learners by measuring their work against set criteria that are independent of the work of other learners. Even if grades are given, learners' achievements are graded in terms of whether they have satisfied the criteria for assessment." The advantages of Criterion Referenced Assessment (CRA) as summarised by Carlson et al. (2000) include:

- ♦ students having a clearer understanding of what the assessment task entails, how it will be judged, and what the mark/level of achievement means;
- ♦ the lecturer (and students) consistently referring to the pre-stated criteria;
- ♦ the provision of clear goals to which the students might aim;

In order for criterion referenced assessment to achieve the desired results, there is need for constructive alignment in the design of the whole curriculum.

Constructive Alignment

According to Biggs (2003b: 2), constructive alignment has two aspects. The 'constructive' aspect refers to what the learner does, which is to construct meaning through relevant learning activities. The 'alignment' aspect refers to what the teacher does, which is to set up a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that the components in the teaching system, especially the teaching methods used and the assessment tasks, are aligned to the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes. The learner is in a sense 'trapped', and finds it difficult to escape without learning what is intended should be learned.

Clear and realistic outcomes provide students with a good guide to what has to be learnt and lecturers with a guide on how to teach and what learning opportunities to provide. In constructive alignment, the initial step is to define the intended outcomes or objectives. These outcomes clearly specify the level of understanding required teaching and learning activities likely to lead to attaining the objectives are then chosen. Students are engaged in those activities which enable the attainment of the objectives. Ultimately the assessment of students' learning outcomes is undertaken to see how well they match what was intended. The assessment tasks address the objectives, seeking to find out if students have learnt what the curriculum intended them to learn. There is a need for lecturers to seek to achieve alignment.

Validity in Assessment

The issue of validity also deserves attention in criterion referenced assessment. Validity refers to whether assessment measures what it purports to measure. It refers to measuring what it says it is measuring, be it knowledge, understanding, subject content, skill, information or behaviours. As Lockett and Sutherland (2000) show, validity is concerned with the accuracy and appropriateness of our methods of truth-seeking in assessment. Validity in assessment

would constitute: Assessment procedures, methods, instruments and materials being appropriate to what is being assessed. In order to achieve validity in the assessment, assessors should:

- ♦ State clearly what outcome(s) is/are being assessed;
- ♦ use an appropriate type or source of evidence;
- ♦ use an appropriate method of assessment. The assessment must assess the learner's ability to perform designated tasks.
- ♦ select an appropriate instrument of assessment.

Reliability in Assessment

Reliability is concerned with consistency of marking against the criteria provided. It ensures that students are marked fairly. Explicitly stated criteria can also help establish agreement amongst different assessors, which improves the reliability (consistency) of the assessment. According to Lockett and Sutherland (2000: 122), "In less extreme responses to inter-marker inconsistency, assessors often devise analytical marking schemes (sometimes referred to as a *rubric* or *matrix*), in order to have more control of the marking process." In order for assessment to be transparent the criterion referenced assessment marking guide must be made available to the students and its meaning explained. Lockett and Sutherland (2000) conclude that criterion-referencing tends to be more transparent because of its explicit statement of criteria.

USING ASSESSMENT TO DEVELOP STUDENT LEARNING

As already alluded to, assessment plays a crucial role in determining how students learn and what they choose to learn. It is, therefore, important to use assessment to develop student learning during the teaching and learning process. Two forms of assessment can be identified, assessment for learning and assessment of learning. As Ramsden (1992), shows, assessment in practice has two functions: to tell us whether or not the learning has been successful (assessment of learning) and in conveying to students what we want them to learn (assessment for learning). Generally, assessment for learning can also be referred to as formative assessment while

assessment of learning would be associated with summative assessment.

Assessment for Learning

Formative assessment also known as assessment for learning provides feedback to students during the course of their learning so they have opportunities to improve. Of significance in formative assessment is the provision of timely feedback. According to Luckett and Sutherland (2000), formative assessment is used to provide feedback to students about their progress in order to motivate students and to help students improve their learning. In order for feedback to take place, the learner who is receiving it is required to be an active participant and use the information to alter the identified gap. Taras (2002) shows that formative feedback implies and necessitates a partnership and a symbiotic relationship which works in a two-way system since it does not count as formative feedback unless the student has understood what the purpose of the assessment was, how it was assessed or judged, and how they can use their shortfalls in the future. "Formative feedback is not complete until the students have produced an equivalent piece of work where the issues have been addressed and remedied, that is to say, until true learning has taken place and has been shown to have" (Taras 2002: 505).

Assessment of Learning

Summative assessment also known as assessment of learning is usually administered at the end of the learning programme and is used to provide judgment on students' achievements in order to: establish a student's level of achievement at the end of a programme, grade, rank or certify students to proceed or exit from the system, select students for further learning, employment, predict future performance in further study or in employment and underwrite a 'license to practise' (Luckett and Sutherland 2000: 101). The purpose of formative assessment is to assist students to learn so that when they are eventually summatively assessed, they can demonstrate the attainment of the preset criteria or objectives.

DIVERSIFYING ASSESSMENT

An alternative to lecturer driven assessment would be to diversify assessment in response

to the diversity of students in higher education. One of the trends that has had a significant impact on assessment in higher education is massification, which has seen large numbers of students from diverse backgrounds entering the higher education scene. Student population groups have diversified in terms of such factors as age, gender, race, ethnicity, ability, and religion, as well as education, professional background, and marital and parental status. The fact that there are higher numbers of students participating in higher education requires lecturers to respond to diversity in teaching as well as in assessment. Different ways of assessing learners have to be found in order to cope with the larger numbers. Instead of the traditional pen and paper tests, alternative forms of assessment are now being used. Examples include: open-book and take-away examinations, projects and investigations, varied writing tasks, multiple choice and other objective tests, oral assessment, problem-solving tasks, assessment based on simulations or role play and portfolios and profiles. Instead of individual assessment by the lecturer, self-assessment, peer assessment, group assessment and computer assisted assessment can be used as alternatives. It should however be noted that these innovative assessment methods are not without constraints. Sometimes lecturers are not comfortable with trying out new things and classes have grown too large to allow for huge amounts of formative feedback that they involve. Students accustomed to traditional methods sometimes accuse the lecturers of abrogating their responsibilities if, for example, a lecturer introduces peer or self-assessment.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment is a process where students are involved in and are responsible for assessing their own piece of work. It involves students taking responsibility for monitoring and making judgments about aspects of their own learning. It encourages students to become independent learners and can be extremely valuable in helping students to critique their own work, and form judgements about its strengths and weaknesses. Assessment decisions can be made by students on their own essays, reports, projects, presentations, performances and dissertations. One student cited in Loacker (2003: 4) had this to say on self-assessment,

The whole goal is to become a self-directed learner, to become responsible for your own education because we are not always going to have the opportunity to be here and to be guided by a teacher and to lean on a teacher. You have to be able to have an accurate idea of where you are and how you are doing, especially when you take in new information or new areas and you don't have these people as resources anymore.

Peer Assessment

Peer assessment is different from self-assessment in that students make assessment decisions on other students' work. This can include almost any aspect of student performance, including essays, reports and presentations. Student peer-assessment can be anonymous or otherwise, with assessors randomly chosen so that friendship factors are less likely to distort the results (Queen's University 2005). Peer-assessment helps students to gain feedback from each other, and thus improve the quality of their work. According to Queen's University (2005) peer assessment may

- ♦ be used to develop in students the ability to work cooperatively, to be critical of others' work and receive critical appraisals of, and feedback on, their own work.
- ♦ provide students with some insight into the criteria to be used for marking a piece of assessable work.

Group Assessment

Group assessment refers to assessment of students within a group, either by other students within the group, or by students outside the group. It can include assessment of the group as a whole, and of individual student's contributions to the group. Group assessment may therefore involve at least some elements of peer-assessment and self-assessment (Roberts and McInnerney 2007).

Group work encourages peer learning and peer support. Studying collaboratively can enhance learning; Students learn from each other and benefit from activities that require them to articulate and test their knowledge. Group work also provides an opportunity for students to clarify and refine their understanding of concepts through discussion and rehearsal with peers.

There are however concerns related to the use of group work. One example of group work is where the group submits one product and all group members receive the same mark from the lecturer regardless of individual contribution. In such an instance stronger students may be unfairly disadvantaged by weaker ones. According to James et al. (2002), one of the strongest concerns that students have about group work is the possibility that group assessment practices may not fairly assess individual contributions. Students are keen for grading practices that properly reflect the levels of performance of each student and that where necessary, grade adjustments can occur to better reflect these levels. Such arrangements can also reward individual group members who carry a proportionally heavier load or who contributed more significantly to the final product. Group assessment should not be used by lecturers to reduce marking load with large classes and then allocate a blanket score to whole group, which may be unfair to some students.

One way to avert the unfairness in group mark allocation is to award a set number of marks and let the group decide how to distribute them. For example, the group assignment is awarded 70%. If there are five members of the group this would add up to 350 marks. If members decide that they all contributed equally to the product then each member would receive a mark of 70. If they decided that some of the group members had made a bigger contribution, then those members might get more than 70 and those who contributed less would get a lesser mark. This is, however, open to subjective evaluation by friends.

NATIONAL STRUCTURES AROUND ASSESSMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

A major structure established at national level to promote quality in higher education through the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 is the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training on Higher Education, for ensuring and promoting quality in Higher Education and for supporting the development of Higher Education. The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 provided for the establishment in the CHE of the Higher Education Quality Committee

(HEQC) as a permanent committee to perform the quality promotion and quality assurance functions of the CHE. According to the Higher Education Act 101 (1997: 11) The CHE would be responsible through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee to:

- ♦ promote quality assurance in higher education;
- ♦ audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions; and
- ♦ accredit programmes of higher education;

To fulfill its mandate in terms of the Act, the CHE established the HEQC in 2001 as a sub-committee; responsible for building capacity in Teaching and Learning; building and enhancing capacity of Quality Assurance systems and improving the quality of Higher Education provision at systemic, institutional, programme and individual levels. According to CHE (2003), the mandate of the HEQC includes quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation.

The HEQC subsequently established the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development directorate to develop and implement initiatives to build and strengthen the capacity of high quality provision at institutional, programme and individual levels.

Despite the establishment of the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate, a scanning of the policy framework in higher education reveals that most of the documents do not make reference to teaching, learning and quality assurance in general and do not specifically isolate assessment. Only a few documents could be found that deal specifically with assessment namely Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resource No. 5, the Assessment of Student Learning (2003) the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Framework for Delegated Functions document (2008) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Institutional Audits Manual (2007).

ITL Resource No. 5, the Assessment of Student Learning (2003) defines assessment as the practice of designing formal tasks for students to complete and then of making inferences from and estimating the worth of their performances on these tasks. The resource (ITL Resource No. 5, the Assessment of Student Learning 2003: 121) urges smaller institutions such as private higher education institutions to pay particular attention to planning and resource allocation in rela-

tion to the quality management of assessment and observes that, “for all institutions, the development of appropriate assessment policies and systems has significant implications in respect of planning for the efficient and effective use of resources”.

The ITL Resource No. 5, the Assessment of Student Learning (2003: 122) isolates three reasons why assuring the quality of the assessment of student learning is important namely:

Assessment has the potential to determine whether more equitable access (student input) is being realised in the form of more equitable achievement (student output). Historically, assessment practices have often acted as barriers to student progress. In order to strengthen public confidence and promote the credibility of assessment in HE, its principles, methods and procedures need to be both robust and transparent and its assessors accountable.

Although the curriculum may target disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills, appropriate to the goals of individual, social and economic transformation, if assessment procedures fail to prioritise and test for these competences, students are unlikely to achieve these intended learning

It is well documented that assessment has a critical influence on the quality of teaching and learning and so can be used as a powerful point of leverage for change and improvement in education. Thus measures to assure high quality assessment of student learning and that also activates its potential to improve teaching and learning should be a priority in the face of the challenges currently posed to higher education.

According to ITL Resource No. 5, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has assigned to the HEQC as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for higher education and training (HET) formal functions with respect to the quality assurance (QA) of assessment in the Higher Education system. In terms of the ETQA Regulations (1998), the HEQC is responsible for ensuring the integrity, validity and reliability of assessment in the HET system.

The HEQC, according to ITL resource No.5 (2003) recognises the right of the Senates of public HEIs to retain operational responsibility for the assessment of their students in terms of the Higher Education Act of 1997. The HEQC therefore delegates responsibility for assuring and maintaining the integrity, validity and reli-

ability of assessment to its constituent HEIs, both public and private, under certain conditions. For example, the HEQC devolves responsibility for the Quality Assurance of assessor training to HEIs, provided that they periodically provide sufficient evidence of having established effective quality management systems in that area.

The ITL Resource No.5 argues that the development of fair, valid and efficient assessment provision in higher education requires a more comprehensive role for assessment than has traditionally been the norm. The purposes for which assessment is used, the CHE advises, need to extend beyond the summative (the measuring, recording and reporting of end-point achievement) and the diagnostic (indicating aptitude and preparedness for a course of study). Assessment should also be used for developmental or formative purposes, namely to inform and guide learning and teaching. It is the role of educational developers to drive this paradigm shift with academics.

The CHE resource (*ibid*) concludes by noting that assessment should therefore be recognised as an essential and integral part of teaching and learning and that the realisation of such a role for assessment in HE is dependent on a concerted effort to professionalise the assessment practices of academic staff, which includes encouraging theoretically informed discussion and research.

Two other documents that touch on the quality assurance of assessment in Higher Education are the Higher Education Quality Committee HEQC Framework for Delegated Functions (2008) and the Higher Education Quality Committee HEQC Institutional Audits Manual (2007). The two documents are treated together as they are closely related and sometimes duplicate each other. The purpose of HEQC Framework for Delegated Functions (2008) is to provide a framework to guide the delegation of specified quality assurance functions to higher education institutions. It also guides the institutions in the development of evidence required to demonstrate that it has effective systems and internal capacity for the quality assurance of these functions. While several functions are given in the framework, we look only at aspects related to assessment, that is, training and development in assessment and moderation of assessment.

The criteria and minimum requirements for the functions to be delegated in terms of the

Framework for Delegated Functions are extrapolated from the HEQC Institutional Audits Manual (2007). The delegation presupposes that higher education institutions have an overall assessment policy in place within which the specific procedures for the delegated functions have been developed. According to the Framework (2007), higher education institutions will have to demonstrate and provide evidence of the quality management systems that they have in place, in particular, the policies, strategies, procedures and resources to quality assure, support, develop and monitor the implementation of the delegated functions in line with the criteria and requirements of the HEQC.

Contrary to the basic education system where all assessors have to be certified and accredited, the HEQC, as shown in the Framework, does not subscribe to the notion of accrediting assessors or maintaining a national database or register of trained 'competent' assessors. The HEQC is of the view that this is a responsibility of higher education institutions and that institutions should demonstrate their strategy/mechanisms for capacitating both new and experienced academics regarding progressive assessment practices, while the HEQC does not want to impose on the type of training to be conducted on assessment, the Framework warns that it is important that institutions put in place systems to ensure that the quality of training accords respect to the academic standing of its academic staff and is consistent with the depth and breadth of conducting assessment in higher education.

The Higher Education Quality Committee HEQC Institutional Audits Manual (2007) presents a range of suggestions and guidelines on what the HEQC audits would look for in relation to assessment. Two main criteria are given in the manual on assessment, namely criterion 12 and 13. According to criterion 12, the HEQC will seek to establish if the institution has effective procedures that facilitate the quality of the internal external moderation of its assessment procedures and results, in order to ensure their reliability, as well as the integrity of the qualifications it awards (HEQC Institutional Audits Manual (2007: 20).

In order to meet the criterion, the following are examples of what would be expected by the HEQC of higher education institutions:

- Procedures which regulate internal moderation in order to provide a reliability check

on the marking process, and to provide developmental feedback to students, and to staff on their assessment practices

- ♦ Procedures, which regulate external moderation, which include criteria for the appointment of moderators, information provided to moderators on the curriculum, assessment procedures, and related aspects of the programme, guidelines on the standards of achievement required of students in the programme, format for and handling of moderator reports, adjustment of marks by moderators and approval of final mark lists.
- ♦ Regular review of the effectiveness of internal and external moderation procedures and practices.

Criterion 13 seeks to ascertain if the principles, procedures and practices of assessment are explicit, fair and consistently applied throughout the institution. Security arrangements for recording and documenting assessment data are in place to ensure the credibility of outcomes. In order to meet the criterion, the following are examples of what would be expected:

- ♦ Institutional/faculty/professional regulations and rules to ensure the explicitness, rigour, fairness and consistency of assessment procedures and practices
- ♦ Regulations and rules governing assessment which are clearly communicated to students, staff and other relevant stakeholders; this includes information and guidance to students on their rights and responsibilities regarding assessment processes
- ♦ Student appeals procedures which are fair, effective and timeous
- ♦ Adequate security measures for the recording, documenting and storing of assessment data to ensure the credibility of outcomes
- ♦ Regular review of the explicitness, fairness and consistency of application of the principles, procedures and practices of assessment and security arrangements for recording and documenting assessment data.

From the three documents discussed in this section, it can be concluded that the establishment of the Council on Higher Education has resulted in some strides towards the quality assurance of assessment. What remains is for educational developers to actualize these efforts in universities.

CONCLUSION

This presentation attempted to broaden the understanding of the concept of assessment. Assessment has to be understood holistically and not narrowly as only summative assessment where every assignment given has to be scored and used to contribute to the student final mark. As shown in the presentation there are numerous and various alternative uses of assessment. There are also plethora of assessment methods and techniques from which lecturers can draw from as and when they see necessary. Perusal of South African national documents revealed assessment purposes and processes from a broader perspective. All this shows the need for principled assessment in which educational developers work diligently with lecturers in the domain of culture in effecting a paradigm shift from traditional assessment practices to more innovative methods of assessment. In the researchers' view assessment for learning should be given emphasis as the quality of summative assessment stems from the quality of teaching and learning transactions. Teaching and learning should be enhanced by well planned and implemented formative assessment strategies properly aligned to intended learning outcomes and learning activities. This becomes a sure way of ensuring that summative assessment is linked to learning outcomes and learning activities as well.

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