Scoping of Assessment Policies
26 April 2021

Overview
This document provides details of a scoping exercise that involves assessment policies from eight South African universities and one international university. The document is divided into three parts.

Scope
The scoping exercise involves the assessment policies from the following universities:

National:
University of Cape Town (UCT) - 2015
Stellenbosch University (SU) - 2012
Durban University of Technology (DUT) - 2019
North West University (NWU) - 2019
Rhodes University (RU) - 2019
University of the Free State (UFS) - 2016
University of Johannesburg (UJ) - 2019
Walter Sisulu University (WSU) - 2015

International:

Part 1: Review of procedures involved in updating policies

Three of the scoped universities made mention of the review procedures: UNSW, RU and the UFS. The UNSW's review procedure is the most comprehensive of the three as it is a policy framework procedure for all policies within the universities. This is presented as a separate policy to the assessment policy. The other two review procedures are mentioned as sections within the assessment policy.

i) UNSW (Sydney) - Policy Framework Procedure

According to the UNSW Policy Framework, the framework is a structure for managing and maintaining the University-wide Documents and describes the processes that apply to developing, reviewing and revising University-wide Code of Conduct, Policies, Standards, Procedures and Guidelines.

Five steps are outlined in the review process (see Figure 1). The steps may occur in a chronological order or actions embedded in each step may occur simultaneously. Some steps may be depended upon the completion of actions in earlier steps of the cycle.

Figure 1: UNSW's Document Development Cycle (UNSW, 2019, p. 1).

1 Identify & Scope
2 Draft, Consult & Finalise
3 Approve
4 Communicate, Implement and Monitor
5 Review

Step 5, the Review, highlights the period and reasons for review. It is noted that documents are reviewed three years after the original effective date to ensure the content remains current and relevant. Reasons for review outlined include:
- Change in legislation or Government policy
- New strategic direction of the university that: 1) is not reflected in the document or 2) conflicts with the content of the document
- Change or gap in the subject area that: 1) is not reflected in the document or 2) conflicts with the content of the document
- Need to align content with another new or amended document

Review outcomes can be one of the following:
- No change
- Minor amendment
- Full revision of document
- Retire

ii) [Rhodes University - Policy Review Procedure](#)

RU's policy review procedure is outlined on page 4 of the assessment policy document. It is noted that the review period is five years and the approval and review takes the following route:

1) Teaching and Learning Committee
2) Faculty Boards
3) Senate
4) Council

iii) [University of the Free State - Policy Review Procedure](#)

The UFS's policy review procedure is mentioned on page 11 of the UFS assessment policy. The procedure highlights the period of review (every five years), the body responsible for review (Centre for Teaching and Learning) and who the policy needs to be presented to for review (appropriate UFS decision making structures).

14.1. The policy will be **reviewed and updated every five years**, with an option to review it more frequently if required by significant shifts in assessment strategy at faculty level.

14.2. **CTL is responsible** to ensure that the policy is reviewed and will follow a consultative process that includes gathering inputs from representatives of all faculties, students, and other relevant stakeholders.

14.3. The policy will be **presented to appropriate UFS decision making structures**.

(UFS, 2016, p. 11, bold added).

Part 2: Assessment Policies - Analysis

1. Policy Particulars

The particulars outlined in Table 1 below highlight that review periods for many of the policies range tend to be either three or five years. Most policies have a policy owner and policy curator (a body responsible for the implementation).

Table 1: Policy particulars

Institution	Date	Next Review	Policy Owner	Policy Curator (responsible for implementation)
UCT	2015	Not Specified	Not Specified	Not Specified
Stellenbosch	2012	Supposed to be every 5 yrs	Vice Rector: Learning and Teaching	1) Senior Director: Student Academic Support 2) Director: CTL
DUT	2019	2024	DVC: Teaching and Learning	Director: CELT
NWU	2019	2022	DVC: Teaching and Learning	Teaching and Learning (responsible division)
Rhodes	2019	2024	DVC Academic and Student Affairs	Teaching and Learning (responsible division)
UFS	2016	Supposed to be every 5 yrs	Vice Rector Academic (Custodian)	Faculty Assessment Rules and Regulations
UJ	2019	2023	DVC Academic (custodian)	Academic Development and Support (Responsible Division)
WSU	2015	Not Specified	Not Specified	DVC (Academic Affairs & Research) [Responsible Division]
UNSW-Sydney	2017	2020	Not Specified	Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education (responsible officer)

2. Policy Purposes

Table 2 highlights the purpose of the policies as stated in the policies. The key phrases in the purpose statements include:

- to provide a set of criteria
- to provide a regulatory framework
- to give strategic direction
- to specify the principles that govern

to issues that concern:
- quality (standards/certification, valid, reliable, just/fair)
- development
- improving teaching and learning

Table 2: Policy Purposes

Institution	Purpose
UCT	"...the intention of this policy is to provide faculties with a **set of criteria** for critical self-evaluation of their own assessment systems" (UCT, 2015, p.1)

Stellenbosch	"...to provide a framework within which assessment practices at the University
	    ● can be **valid, reliable and justifiable**
	    ● can be directed and evaluated within faculties on the basis of **clear criteria**" (SU, 2012, p. 1/Cover Page)

DUT	"This policy provides a **regulatory framework** for assessment at DUT" (DUT, 2019, p. 2)
NWU	"...to give **strategic direction** to the development, transformation and implementation of high quality teaching and learning"(NWU, 2019, p.1)

Rhodes	"This policy aims **to ensure that assessment is used validly, reliably and fairly** to:
	    ● Ensure that the standards of qualifications awarded by the University are achieved.
	    ● Develop students' learning through the provision of feedback.
	
	In the face of cultural, social and linguistic diversity, assessment has the potential both to challenge and maintain social structures. This policy therefore also aims to ensure that assessment is valid and consistent, that assessment practices are transparent and that assessors are accountable for the judgements they make." (RU, 2019, p.1/Cover page)

UFS	"...the overarching purpose of this policy is to establish a framework within which coursework assessment practices at the UFS will: • Support the development of students; • Ensure effective learning within context; • Improve teaching and learning practices; and • Effectively measure student performance and guide certification" (UFS, 2016, p.4)
UJ	"2.1. establish a clear framework of principles, regulations, guidelines and procedures for integrated, coherent, constructive assessment strategies that

	effectively support the achievement of intended learning outcomes in all academic programmes in the University; 2.2. ensure the alignment of assessment practices for subsidised and continuing education programmes across all faculties, campuses and departments with national guidelines and the requirements of professional bodies; 2.3. inform the alignment of faculty-specific assessment policy rules and regulations as well as the assessment of learning outside the faculties; 2.4. provide a framework for the management of the quality of all assessment related procedures and practices in the University." (UJ, 2019, p. 1-2)
WSU	See Section 3: Policy Aims and Objectives (p.5) in policy document. In summary, they highlight: 1) Quality "ensure the development of valid, reliable and transparent assessment practices in keeping with academic and professional standards" 2) Professionalisation/demystification of assessment practices "...to professionalise the assessment practices of academic staff. Assessment practice at WSU shall be de-mystified and made more explicit, accountable and transparent" 3) Adopt of outcomes-based approach to assessment - make explicit learning outcomes 4) Contextually sensitive assessments "encourages educators to interpret the meaning of specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria in their classrooms in contextually sensitive ways [...] It shall therefore be important to make provision for and to reward learnings who perform unexpectedly and creatively, as well as to provide a guide to expected performance by means of pre-specified assessment criteria"
UNSW-Sydney	"To **specify the principles that govern** the UNSW approach to the assessment of student learning and **provide a framework for the design and implementation of** assessment." (UNSW, 2017, p. 1/Cover page)

3. Policy Structures

Seven of the nine universities have cover pages (see Figure 2) that indicate the particulars of the policies such as the purpose, date of approval and review date. UCT and UFS are the only two institutions that do not have a cover page.

Figure 2. Assessment Policy Cover Pages

DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
ASSESSMENT POLICY

Document number:	
Document name:	Assessment Policy
Coordinating Exec Manager/Document owner:	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning)
Operational Manager/s:	Executive Deans, Heads of Department and the Registrar
Contact & tel. no. for support:	(031) 373 2284
Status:	Approved
Approved by:	Senate
Date approved:	13 March 2019
Date last amended:	27 August 2014
Date for review/next review:	2024
Title of manager responsible for monitoring policy implementation:	Director: CELT
Title of manager responsible for policy review:	Director: CELT
Related Policies, Guidelines and Procedures: • DUT Quality Assurance Policy • DUT Teaching and Learning Strategy	

Assessment Policy and Practices at SU

Type of Document:	Policy
Purpose:	To provide a framework within which assessment practices at the University can be valid, reliable and justifiable, and can be directed and evaluated within faculties on the basis of clear criteria
Approved by:	SU Council
Date of Approval:	2012
Date of Implementation:	2012
Date of Next Revision:	Every five years
Date of Previous Revision(s):	
Policy Owner[1]:	Vice-Rector: Learning and Teaching
Policy Curator[2]:	Senior Director: Student and Academic Support; Director: CTL
Keywords:	Assessment; Formative Assessment; Summative Assessment; Assessment Practices; Program design; Program development; Program implementation
Validity:	In case of differences in interpretation the English version of this policy will be regarded as the valid version.

3.1) Cover pages

The cover pages vary in information. Below is a list of information particulars from across the various cover pages:

- Type of document
- Document name
- Purpose
- Approved by
- Date of approval
- Date of implementation
- Date of next revision
- Date of previous revisions
- Review cycle (e.g. every 2/5/7 years)
- Amendments / dates of amendments
- Policy owner / coordinating executive manager / Custodian
- Policy curator / operational managers / responsible committee/unit/division/faculty
- Manager responsible for monitoring policy implementation / responsible division
- Manager responsible for policy review
- Stakeholders affected / Scope
- Keywords
- Validity
- Contact no. for support
- Related policies, guidelines and procedures
- Weblink to policy

3.2) Sections within the body

The bullet points below highlight some sections within the body that are not present in the UCT policy framework.

- Five of the institutions have a section indicating policy 'Scope/Who the policy applies to'.
- Five of the institutions have a section on policy 'Definitions/Abbreviations'
- Six of the institutions have a section detailing policy 'Purpose/Aim/Objective/Statement'
- Six of the institutions have a section detailing policy 'Implementation'
- Four of the institutions have a section on 'Related documents'

Table 3: Policy Structure

Institution	Structure
UCT (no cover page)	Introduction followed by: 1) Functions of assessment 2) Assessment which promotes learning: Key principles 3) Key Criteria for Validating Assessment 4) Specific Assessment Policies

Stellenbosch	Introduction followed by: 1) Assessment as teaching practice (conceivies assessment as a process) 2) Assessment system at SU 3) Scope of the policy 4) Implementation of the policy 5) Other relevant documents
DUT	Preamble followed by: 1) Purpose of the policy 2) Aims 3) Policy (details related to the implementation) 4) Applicability 5) Definitions 6) Contact for support 7) Policy authority/document owner 8) Related policies 9) Implementation procedures 10) Monitoring (institutional level, faculty level, departmental level, The Centre for Quality Promotion and Assurance (CQPA))
NWU	An introduction under the heading 'Teaching, learning and assessment policy' followed by: 1) Interpretation and application 2) Policy statement 3) Principles, guidelines and strategies 4) Scope of application (who the assessment applies to) 5) Teaching and learning context 6) Implementation, monitory and review of Policy
Rhodes	1) Policy particulars (e.g. policy statement, reason for policy, people affected by the policy, who should read the policy) 2) Related documents forms and tools (e.g. relevant legislation, related policies, related protocols etc) 3) Policy Definitions 4) Principles governing this policy 5) Directives for implementing this policy 6) Roles and responsibilities (e.g. roles of academic teachers, course coordinators, HODs, Deans, Faculties, CHERTL, Human Resources Division)
UFS (no cover page)	1) Definitions and Abbreviations 2) Background and Purpose of the Policy 3) Scope of Policy (all staff members, whether part-time or permanent) 4) Guiding Principles 5) General Minimum Assessment Requirements 6) E-assessment 7) Use of Markers 8) Assessment Moderation 9) Staff Capacity 10) Roles and Responsibilities 11) Faculty assessment rules and regulations

	12) Implementation of the policy 13) Resource consequences of the policy 14) Review procedure Annexure A = code of conduct for assessors and moderators
UJ	1. Preamble 2. Purpose 3. Definitions/clarifications of concepts 4. Principles 5. Good practice descriptors 6. Assessment approaches 7. Types of assessment 8. Special and supplementary summative assessment opportunities 9. Assessment methods 10.Communication with students 11.Assessments relating to specific circumstances 12.Examination centres 13.The assessor 14.Moderation 15.Verification 16.Copyright, dishonesty and plagiarism 17.Application for review of summative assessments 18.Faculty assessment policies 19.Quality management of assessment 20.Dissemination and implementation 21.Review of the policy Appendix 1: Procedural guidelines for assessment at faculty level Appendix 2: Management of assessment results Appendix 3: Rules of assessment and invigilation Appendix 4: Transgressions during written, practical and electronic summative assessment opportunities
WSU	Preamble followed by Statutory Framework (Acts and policy documents that were taken into consideration) 1) Definitions 2) Rationale (borrows from HEQC assessment guidelines) 3) Policy aim and objectives 4) Guiding principles 5) Policy statement 6) Policy Scope 7) Continuous assessment *Procedure* manual Preamble Guidelines for implementation
UNSW-Sydney	1) Definition and purpose of assessment 2) Assessment principles

	Back cover page Accountabilities Supporting information (mentions legislative compliance) Definitions and Acronyms Revision History

4. Discourses

Below are some discourses that can be found in the various policies:
- Quality/certification/standards (UCT, Stellenbosch, Rhodes, UNSW - Sydney)
- Assessment for learning (UCT, Stellenosch, DUT, Rhodes, WSU)
- Student-centeredness (DUT)
- Self/autonomous learning (DUT, UNSW - Sydney)
- Social responsiveness, ethics of care, development, transformation (NWU, WSU)
- Social justice (NWU)
- National policies (NWU)
- Equity / social and economic transformation (WSU)
- Outcome-based assessment (WSU)
- Graduate Capabilities (UNSW)

Table 4: Policy Discourses

Institution	Discourses
UCT	<u>Quality</u> "There are, however, a number of current national and institutional imperatives which necessitate a review of our assessment practices, with a particular focus on strengthening our **validating systems**, that is, the mechanisms which exist at institutional, faculty and departmental level to ensure the **validity** of our assessment interpretations" (p.1) "The central requirement of the policy is that departments and faculties have validating mechanisms which are appropriate and effective in ensuring on-going critical self-evaluation based on these criteria" (p.1) <u>Assessment for learning</u> "Part two argues for the crucial role that assessment plays in shaping learning and provides some key principles for promoting 'assessment for learning'" (p.1)
Stellenbosch	<u>Quality</u> "In the spirit of "excellent scientific practice", as stated in the University's mission, an attempt is made to bring the assessment practices of the University in line with current, research-based views and standards regarding assessment" (p.1) "The policy focuses on the criteria for excellent practice in assessment, of which the detailed regulations, rules, and practices are subject to the policy" (p.1)

	<u>Assessment for learning</u> "...the design of assessment to promote student learning is of the utmost importance" (p.2)
DUT	<u>Student centredness/assessment for learning</u> "Student-centredness as a pedagogical approach and an all-embracing institutional philosophy is a defining feature of the organisational culture of the Durban University of Technology (DUT)" (p.2) "All assessments should be formative in nature" (p.2, para.5) "The aims listed below seek to foster changes in practice in support of institutional initiatives such as a student-centred philosophy, reflective practice on the part of the staff, and self-directed learning on the part of students" (p.3) <u>Self/autonomous learning</u> |In this policy, various forms, strategies and modes of student assessment are seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching process (including Work integrated learning), which is underpinned by the notions of self-directed learning, student autonomy and critical self reflection" (p.1)
NWU	<u>Social responsiveness, ethics of care, development, transformation</u> "Against the background of the university's dream to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, academic excellence, social responsiveness, and an ethic of care the Council of the North-West University (NWU) has adopted this policy on 18 March 2019 to give strategic direction to the development, transformation and implementation of high quality teaching and learning" (p.1) <u>Social justice</u> "to be committed to transform and position itself as a unitary institution of superior academic excellence with a commitment to academic freedom and social justice" <u>National policies</u> "to offer innovative quality teaching and learning with a view to produce graduates endowed with the knowledge, skills and competences that will help address national human resource, economic and development needs and contribute towards the building of a skilled and capable workforce and sustainable communities" (p.1-2). "...improve student access, retention and academic success" (p.2)
Rhodes	<u>Quality</u> "This policy aims to ensure that assessment is used validly, reliably and fairly to: ● Ensure that the standards of qualifications awarded by the University are achieved.

	Assessment for learning ● Develop students' learning through the provision of feedback. Links reasons for validity and transparency to diversity In the face of cultural, social and linguistic diversity, assessment has the potential both to challenge and maintain social structures. This policy therefore also aims to ensure that assessment is valid and consistent, that assessment practices are transparent and that assessors are accountable for the judgements they make" (p.1)
UFS	Quality and excellence, standards and certification "Assessment is a cornerstone of quality and excellence in higher education. It entails making judgements about how students' work meets appropriate standards. Assessment plays a key role in both fostering learning and the certification of students" Assessment for learning "Support the development of students; • Ensure effective learning within context; • Improve teaching and learning practices" (p.4) "Assessment should be holistic and criterion referenced (where student performance is judged against pre-specified criteria or standards), rather than norm referenced (where student performance is compared with that of peers in the same class or cohort)" (p.5)
UJ	University's Strategic Objectives "This Assessment Policy reflects and underpins the University's strong commitment to excellence in assessment as an integral part of teaching and learning which is implicit in the UJ Strategic Objectives 2014 - 2025" (p.1) Assessment for learning ""Assessment is coherently designed as an integral part of the teaching and learning process (assessment for learning) and should be fully aligned with the purpose, learning content and learning outcomes of the programme and its modules" (p.3-4) Best practice / Quality/ National Qualification frameworks "Assessment practices are based on established best practice and contemporary research (see the Good Practice Descriptors, Point 5 below), and are aligned with the assessment practices and procedures and SAQA level descriptors required by the NQF" (p.4)
WSU	Echoes HEQC guideline where there are discourses on: ● *Equity / social and economic transformation* "...assessment has the potential to determine whether more equitable access is realised as more equitable achievement" (p.5) "...although the curriculum may target skills, knowledge (and attitudes) appropriate to the goals of social and economic transformation…" (p.5)

	● *Assessment for learning* "...critical influence on the quality of teaching and learning and can be used as a powerful point of leverage for change and improvement in education" (p.5) Outcome-based assessment "Assessment for student learning shall be oriented towards an outcome-based assessment that encourages educators to interpret the meaning of specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria…" (p.6)
UNSW-Sydney	Qualification, certification, standards, Graduate Capabilities "The purpose of assessment is both to facilitate and certify the achievement of specified learning outcomes including UNSW's Graduate Capabilities" (p.1) "Student learning is assessed against learning outcomes and expected standards of performance" (p.1) Autonomy of learning "It is through engagement with the assessment process that students develop peer and self-assessment skills and take responsibility for their learning as they progress through a program" (p.2) Assessment for learning "Assessment is designed to guide and enhance student learning" (p.1)

5. Assessment systems

Table 5 outlines institutions that explicitly indicated the assessment systems being employed in the institution.

Table 5. Assessment systems employed

Institution	System
Stellenboch	* Moving towards a flexible system * Two other formal systems: end and continuous assessment
DUT	* Continuous
UFS	* multiple - formative, summative, continuous * Should be holistic and criterion referenced
UJ	* Traditional or continuous
WSU	* Outcome-based

6. Staff Training

Staff training is required/will be required in three institutions: Stellenbosch, UFS and WSU.

Table 6. Statements about staff training

Institution	Comments
Stellenbosch	**See p.9 Section 5.3.** ● Training required of staff from newly appointed, permanent, external or contact, and students involved in assessment ● SU has a short course on assessment of student learning for staff
UFS	**Compulsory Assessment Induction sessions ran by CTL at least 2 times a year** "All newly appointed academic staff and markers will be expected to attend a compulsory induction session on Effective Assessment Practices at the UFS. These sessions will be hosted at least twice annually by CTL. Departmental chairpersons/heads of departments/heads of schools will be responsible for ensuring that newly appointed staff undergo appropriate training." (p.8, Section 9).
WSU	**Training shall become a requirement** "Traditionally, academic staff have been considered competent to assess students by virtue of their academic qualifies, but in the future, professional training in assessment shall become a requirement e.g. the conformation of a permanent post for new staff could be conditional on acquiring assessment expertise. The institution shall make provision for staff development in assessment, especially for new staff members…" (p.8, Section 6.2.1.4).

7. Other points of interest

Institution	Comments
Stellenbosch	**Students as Assessors** SU is the only university where the assessor also encompasses students (e.g. tutors). Training is also provided for student assessors.
UJ	**A cap on use of multiple choice** "Multiple-choice summative assessments are conducted as approved by the Faculty Board concerned, but the weight of the multiple-choice assessment, in any one module, may not exceed a maximum of twenty per cent (20%) of the final mark for exit-level modules, and not more than 50% for other modules" (p.7).

	Assessment related to certain circumstances Working integrated learning and service learning, Recognition of prior learning **Language** "All assessments must be of high quality, with attention paid to language clarity, appearance (technical layout) and tally of marks" (p.4) ● States that assessment policy needs to be read in conjunction with the language policy
WSU	**Use of Continuous Assessment needs motivation** "Motivation must be provided for using continuous assessment, stating reasons why this is educationally more acceptable than traditional assessment techniques" (p.10, Section 7).
NWU and others	Highlights all the national policy/Acts and university rules that the policy must correspond to (e.g. the Constitution of RSA, the Higher Education Act, National Qualifications Framework etc)

Part 3: Policy and Procedures: Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Higher Education Quality Committee:
(p. 127 or 9 on Pdf)

1) There is an institutional policy on assessment which **makes explicit the values, theories or philosophies of assessment** on which it is based.

2) The policy aims to ensure **the development of valid, reliable and transparent assessment** practices in keeping with academic and professional standards.

3) The policy also provides for the **effective validation of assessment practices**.

4) There are **procedures through which faculties and departments/schools are accountable for** the implementation of the institutional policy.

5) The policy includes guidelines or regulations for the following:

   ● Formative assessment
   ● The provision of feedback to students
   ● The weighting of class marks (continuous assessment) and examinations
   ● Security procedures

- Disciplinary and appeals procedures
- Regulations for
  - Marking
  - Grading
  - Aegrotats
  - Supplementary examinations
  - Condoned passes
  - Duly performed (DP) requirements
  - Plagiarism

6) There are structures at institutional, faculty and department/school level to **implement, monitor and review the assessment policy.** Assessment decisions made by the committees/board at these levels are validated by external expert peers.

7) Academic managers are committed to the implementation of the institutional assessment policy, and **teaching staff and students are aware of the responsibility and rights** that it accords them.