CHAPTER 5 : COURSE AND UNIT DESIGN AND QUALITY

All Curtin Courses are designed to ensure graduates are skilled in; leadership, research, Australian Indigenous knowledges and perspectives; and work-integrated learning.

Course Quality

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia’s regulatory and quality agency for higher education. TEQSA regulates quality assurance arrangements in Australian higher education and its primary aim is to ensure all students studying at an Australian higher education institution receive a high quality education. It is responsible for accrediting providers, evaluating the performance of institutions and programs, ensuring best practice, and providing greater national consistency. Institutions are required to demonstrate that their graduates have the capabilities required for successful engagement in today’s complex world. Under the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011, a higher education provider must be registered by TEQSA in order to operate as a higher education provider in Australia. For more information see http://www.teqsa.gov.au/about/legislation.

TEQSA has developed a Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards). Higher education standards have been developed, including Provider Registration Standards, Provider Category Standards, Provider Course Accreditation Standards, and Qualification Standards. The Higher Education Standards (http://www.teqsa.gov.au/higher-education-standards-framework) and for some courses, Discipline Standards (http://www.olt.gov.au/system/files/altc_standards.finalreport.pdf) and Professional Competencies (e.g. Accreditation Standards) influence course learning outcomes, design and curriculum.

In order to provide current and future students with information to inform them of the quality of higher education, performance measures of the student experience are made publically available on a government website called MyUniversity (http://myuniversity.gov.au/).

The following seven performance indicators are reported on this website:

Student satisfaction (Course Experience Questionnaire)
- satisfaction with generic skills
- satisfaction with good teaching
- overall satisfaction

Outcome indicators (Graduate Destination Survey)
- full-time employment
- further full-time and part-time study

Success indicators
- all Bachelor students’ progress rates
- commencing Bachelor students’ retention rate.
At Curtin, a new **Framework for Quality and Excellence in Teaching and Learning** has been developed (see [https://blogs.curtin.edu.au/odvce/2013/06/new-quality-framework-for-curtin/](https://blogs.curtin.edu.au/odvce/2013/06/new-quality-framework-for-curtin/)). This framework (Figure 1) provides a structure for the governance and quality assurance approaches to teaching and learning that facilitate an excellent student experience. The relevant Higher Education Standards are identified within the framework. Focused teaching and learning dimensions are highlighted, along with quality indicators and targets aligned with the ART 2015 outcomes and the Curtin Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Plan 2013–2017.

**Figure 1: Framework for Quality and Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

Course quality is evaluated and monitored:

- by external parties (e.g. through school reviews, accreditation bodies) and may include benchmarking activities
- through the annual and comprehensive course review processes.

**Annual Course Review**

Annual Course Review monitors and analyses key indicators related to student profile, demand and the quality of teaching and learning. The major focus is to analyse course performance and identify initiatives for improvement.
Comprehensive Course Review Through ART 2015

A Comprehensive Course Review is usually conducted every five years and analyses the entire academic program for an award: its regulations, structure (units, major and minor sequences), currency of the curriculum, quality of teaching and learning, relevance of assessment tasks, fieldwork, projects and work experience, and any other aspects that comprise the award course.

The Course Review process through ART 2015 will provide the vehicle for transforming the curriculum. This process will review all Curtin courses by the end of 2015. A key approach to ART 2015 is that of a partnership model, with CTL teams working collaboratively with course teams to support their contexts within the transformation strategy. It is recognised that different areas will have different needs, interests and aspirations, and the approach of ART 2015 is designed to be sensitive to local contexts.

In 2013, a Rapid Review of all courses was conducted to establish:

- the quality of the program with emphasis on assessment
  - the need or possibilities for incorporating work-integrated learning, leadership, research, and Australian Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into the course
  - the development of English language proficiency within the course
  - AQF compliance to ensure TEQSA-provider standards are met
  - the scope for developing highly engaging, personal and relevant experiences for students in the Curtin Converged model, and
  - the scope for new markets and delivery partnerships.

**ART indicators to transform Teaching and Learning @ Curtin**

Courses will be remodelled and transformed to ensure Curtin delivers education to students that is informed, responsive to the needs of industry globally, and equips Curtin students to succeed. The strategy will provide prospective and current students with personalised interactions with Curtin so that they feel valued. The ART indicators (Figure 2) will be applied to transform teaching and learning at Curtin.

![Figure 2: The ART indicators](image-url)
Tools for Course Review Through ART 2015

Course transformation profile
The Course Profile captures current course information on:

- **(A)ssessment** – course assessment profile, moderation, academic integrity, balance/volume, authenticity, summative feedback, sustainability and affordability.
- **(R)eview and design** – course structure, course text (information published in various publications and reports), evidence of Australian Qualifications Framework level, support of student retention, student experience related to work-integrated learning, development of English language proficiency, research, leadership, Indigenous perspectives, and information and technology literacy.
- **(T)ransformed learning** – the degree of learning engagement in relation to support and personalisation, activity, resources, collaboration, and feedback
- course demographics
- student performance
- graduate outcomes (including benchmarking of data)
- the student experience (feedback on units via eVALUate)
- graduate employability indicators (where requested).

The Course Profile will focus the transformation priorities for ART 2015. The course priorities will inform the professional learning and training required by the course teaching teams.

Unit Quality
Quality course experiences are created by a combination of excellent curriculum and learning experiences, and services and facilities that meet reasonable student expectations. Strategies for creating excellent curricula in units of study and making expectations very clear through unit outlines are outlined below.

Unit Outlines
The unit outline is a binding document between the University and the student. It must contain the official unit information that is recorded in the Student One database, and additional learning information. What is to be learnt and assessed in units must be communicated very clearly in language easily understood by students who are not experts in the discipline. The Unit Outline Builder (UOB) is a system designed for the creation, revision, review, and publication of unit outlines. The UOB system extracts authoritative unit information from existing corporate applications, such as Student One, and enables authorised Curtin staff to produce and publish approved unit outlines. The UOB is currently being phased in across the University.
The online Unit Outline Builder (UOB), a system designed to assist teaching staff to produce and publish unit outlines, is available at https://uob.curtin.edu.au. A word template, which replicates the fields in the UOB system, is available for download at http://otl.curtin.edu.au/local/downloads/course_quality/unit_outline_builder/Unit%20Outline%20Template_2Sept2013_EM.docm.

Unit coordinators are responsible for preparing accurate unit outlines, which must be available to students online no later than two weeks prior to the commencement of the study period. The information in this section is from the University’s policy on Unit Outlines – for the full text, see the relevant chapter of the Assessment and Student Progression Manual http://policies.curtin.edu.au/findapolicy.

Unit outlines must contain the following information:

1. **Administrative information**
   - unit title
   - syllabus (or unit description)
   - study package code
   - area responsible for teaching the unit (school, dept., centre)
   - credit value of the unit
   - modes of study (on campus, blended, fully online)
   - all co-requisite, pre-requisite, and anti-requisite units
   - any additional requirements to be completed prior to commencing the unit (such as completion of a first aid certificate)
   - result type (Pass/Fail or Grade/Mark)
   - a link to information outlining any approved ancillary charge(s) required to be paid by the student to undertake the unit
   - contact details for the Unit Coordinator.

2. **Learning information**
   - unit learning outcomes
   - learning activities (e.g. lectures, tutorials, workshops, seminars, labs and individual and collaborative online learning activities)
   - essential and recommended textbooks and other reading, including online resources
   - learning resources available for the unit and details of how to access them
   - details of assessment tasks including – criteria for successful completion of the unit; number, type and purpose of assessment tasks and the distribution of marks between them; how unit learning outcomes are assessed in each assessment task; due dates for all scheduled assessment tasks; dates students can expect their assignments to be marked and/or returned
   - details of any penalties for late submission of assessment tasks (where late submission is accepted...
• dates of field work, clinical or practical placements and, where applicable, guest lectures and other special activities (where known)
• referencing style to be used and access to guidance on how to use it
• contact details for teaching staff, including the Unit Coordinator
• recent unit changes as a result of student and stakeholder feedback
• program calendar

3. A reference to student rights and responsibilities

It is important to refer to students’ rights and responsibilities (http://www.students.curtin.edu.au/rights) by incorporating the following text in the unit outline:

It is the responsibility of every student to be aware of all relevant legislation and policies and procedures relating to their rights and responsibilities as a student. These include: the Student Charter; the University’s Guiding Ethical Principles; the University’s policy and statements on plagiarism and academic integrity; copyright principles and responsibilities; the University’s policies on appropriate use of software and computer facilities; students’ responsibility to check enrolment; deadlines, appeals and grievance resolution; and electronic communication with students.

Additional information: The unit outline may also include references to Faculty or school guidelines and other relevant information, and University policy on academic integrity, including plagiarism and copyright.

Updating and Reviewing Units of Study

Official records for every course, major, stream and unit are held on the Student One database. To make any changes to this official information consult the University’s Course Approval and Quality Manual at http://www.policies.curtin.edu.au/policies/viewpolicy.cfm

Course learning outcomes

Course learning outcomes are what graduates of a course are expected to have achieved on completion of the course. Derived from Curtin’s graduate capabilities, course learning outcomes are discipline-specific and provide an overarching course framework. Every undergraduate course at Curtin has course learning outcomes, which are embedded and assessed in units throughout the course. Postgraduate courses may be designed to place emphasis on selected graduate capabilities.

How to create good unit learning outcomes

Unit learning outcomes are what students are expected to know and do in order to be successful in a unit. Unit learning outcomes begin with a strong action verb and describe an intellectually challenging, observable and measurable achievement, see Table 1. They must be easily understood by students and clearly related to the course learning outcomes.
Table 1: Characteristics of good unit learning outcomes

| Clearly stated tasks | Descriptions of learning outcomes are free from jargon and complex vocabulary, and they describe specific and achievable tasks (using verbs such as describe, analyse or evaluate, rather than vague task verbs such as appreciate, understand or explore). |
| Essential learning | They describe the essential learning in the unit, which a student must achieve. |
| Achievable | They can be achieved within the study period and there are sufficient resources available. |
| Demonstrable | They can be demonstrated in a tangible way. |
| Measurable | They are assessable (and the quality of achievement can be observed). |
| Fair and equitable | All students, including those with disabilities or constraints, have a fair chance of achieving them. |

Unit learning outcomes can be pitched at various levels of thinking: assessments that require lower-order thinking skills only ask students to demonstrate their knowledge and comprehension (often through tests of memory, for example). More demanding tasks – and those more appropriate in university study – require students to demonstrate application, analysis, evaluation and creation. Table 2, gives examples of tasks at different levels of thinking, and includes a guide to unit learning outcome and assessment verbs, which correlate with each level of thinking.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of thinking</th>
<th>Skills Demonstrated and Assessment Verbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remembering</strong></td>
<td>Observation and recall of information; knowledge of dates, events, places, materials, objects; knowledge of major processes; mastery of subject matter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit learning outcome and assessment verbs</strong>: arrange, cite, collect, define, describe, duplicate, enumerate, examine, find, identify, indicate, label, list, locate, match, memorise, name, order, outline, quote, recall, recite, recognise, record, relate, repeat, reproduce, retrieve, select, show, state, tabulate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehending</strong></td>
<td>Understand information, grasp meaning; translate knowledge into new contexts; compare and contrast; order, group, infer causes, predict consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit learning outcome and assessment verbs</strong>: arrange, articulate, associate, classify, compare, contrast, describe, differentiate, discuss, distinguish, exemplify, expand, explain, express, extend, identify, illustrate, indicate, interpret, locate, match, outline, paraphrase, recognise, relate, report, restate, review, select, summarise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applying</strong></td>
<td>Use information; use methods, concepts, theories in new situations; solve problems using required skills or knowledge; use equipment, tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit learning outcome and assessment verbs</strong>: administer, apply, calculate, chart, classify, collect, compute, control, convert, demonstrate, determine, develop, dramatise, draw, employ, estimate, execute, exhibit, illustrate, implement, manipulate, model, modify, operate, practice, prepare, relate, report, select, show, sketch, transfer, use, utilise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysing</strong></td>
<td>Discern patterns; organise parts; recognise hidden meanings; identify components, simplify complex information; metacognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit learning outcome and assessment verbs</strong>: analyse, calculate, categorise, classify, compare, contrast, correlate, deconstruct, detect, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, explain, interpret, organise, quantify, research, scrutinise, separate, sequence, subdivide, survey, test, translate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluating</strong></td>
<td>Compare and discriminate between ideas; think critically, make judgments about worth (based on stated premises); assess the value of theories, make choices based on reasoned argument; verify or question the value of evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit learning outcome and assessment verbs</strong>: appraise, argue, assess, categorise, choose, compare, conclude, contrast, critique, debate, decide, deduce, defend, discriminate, dispute, establish, estimate, evaluate, gauge, generalise, hypothesise, infer, interpret, judge, justify, measure, monitor, negotiate, predict, prioritise, propose, prove, rank, rate, recommend, relate, select, support, validate, verify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creating</strong></td>
<td>Combining ideas to develop an original idea or product, engage in creative thinking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit learning outcome and assessment verbs</strong>: adapt, anticipate, assemble, change, communicate, compare, compile, compose, construct, create, derive, design, develop, devise, formulate, generate, hypothesise, improve, incorporate, infer, initiate, integrate, interpret, invent, make, modify, originate, plan, produce, reconstruct, revise, synthesise, transform, visualise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adapted from Bloom’s Revised Teaching Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) with unit learning outcome and assessment verbs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A simple process for creating unit learning outcomes

The process described here is one method for unit coordinators to create clear unit learning outcomes, ensuring they are statements that students can understand. Students must be absolutely clear about what they are expected to be able to do.

Step 1: Imagine that a prospective student comes to see you about enrolling in a unit you coordinate. The student wants to know exactly what they will be able to know or do if they are successful in the unit. Use everyday language to tell the student clearly what he or she will be able to do if they are successful in the unit. Make sure the student understands; they do not have your discipline expertise yet.

Step 2: Drawing on your dialogue, write down three or four statements that explain exactly what students will be able to do when they have successfully completed the unit. Rework the statements until they are clear and concise, and readily understandable by a person who has not yet studied the unit. Avoid all educational jargon and complex discipline-specific terms.

Step 3: Craft the statements into written learning outcomes, still avoiding educational jargon. Make sure each one begins with a verb that clearly describes what students will be able to do. Be specific (say – students will be able to describe or analyse or evaluate) rather than vague (avoid appreciate, understand, explore or be familiar with. How will you test whether students appreciate something? Change such verbs to actions that can be observed and measured). Check your verbs against the “Levels of thinking” (or cognitive demand) table (Table 2 above), which is based on Bloom’s Revised Teaching Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002), to see what level of thinking you are expecting. Ensure outcomes require higher order thinking skills (“star ratings” of four and above).

Step 4: Ensure the outcomes are intellectually challenging and measure achievement of essential learning outcomes. Consider whether students can realistically achieve all the outcomes within the study period. If not, cull them until you are satisfied that they are achievable.

Step 5: Consider how you will assess the outcomes. It is difficult to assess “attitudes” but relatively easy to assess behaviours that are consistent with a desired attitude. Will you be able to assess and provide suggestions for improvement within a reasonable time frame? Will the task show you when a learning outcome has not been achieved? Will it be clear when a student has achieved an outcome at a very high level? Are the assessment tasks fair and equitable? For more information on assessments, see Chapter 9.

Step 6: When you are satisfied with the unit learning outcomes, check that they are easily understood and that the assessments measure them directly. In your unit outline, make sure students can see the learning outcomes and the assessment tasks, and how they are linked.

Embedding and assessing the course learning outcomes (derived from the capabilities) as unit learning outcomes

Curtin has graduate capabilities for every course. In the comprehensive course review process, unit coordinators identify which graduate capabilities are embedded and assessed in relation to each unit learning outcome. Because the graduate capabilities have a high degree of overlap, unit learning outcomes frequently map to more than one graduate capability.
Recommended further reading on creating learning outcomes:


Chapter 5 References:
