Assurance of learning is an ongoing process for the continual improvement of the quality of teaching and learning. By undertaking assurance of learning, the University:

- Will be able to evaluate whether students have attained the graduate attributes the University claims;
- Can use the measures to improve learning as well as evaluate the efficacy of improvements; and
- Provide feedback to stakeholders (eg students, staff & prospective employers) on progress toward learning goals.

Arguably assurance of learning is also a legal obligation.1 Certainly, regulatory requirements have been cited in recent literature2 and in interviews with key players3 as the principal

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1 Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011, Provider Registration Standards, 5.6; Provider Course Accreditation Standards, 1.2, 5.5, 5.6
driver for the development of assurance of learning policies and procedures in the Australian higher education sector. However, as is apparent from these interviews no Australian university yet has a fully functioning institution-wide assurance of learning system. Rather there are examples of faculty or discipline-specific assurance of learning systems, typically in engineering, health or AACSB accredited business schools, and while all Australian institutions would claim to be working towards a comprehensive assurance of learning system, it is clear that progress is quite varied. Assuming that UniSA also wishes to work toward implementation of assurance of learning, the purpose of this Discussion Paper is to outline some of the questions and issues that will need to be considered. Various options for addressing these questions and issues will also be discussed. A draft set of principles governing assurance of learning at UniSA together with suggested processes to support assurance of learning are appended.

The AACSB has described the process of assurance of learning as a composite of four key steps:

“1. What will our students learn in our program? What are our expectations?

2. How will they learn it?

3. How will we know they have learned it or not?

4. What will we do if they have not learned it?”

1. WHAT WILL OUR STUDENTS LEARN IN OUR PROGRAMS?

As a result of its early adoption of graduate qualities as the foundation for curriculum development, UniSA is well advanced in demonstrating how graduate qualities are promoted at course and program level. All program proposal and program review

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2 See Appendix B: Literature Review for Project. However Peter Ewell et al, Down and In: Assessment Practices at the Program Level [Urbana, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2011] report that at the program level the primary driver for assurance of learning is faculty’s interest in improving their programs, followed by accreditation.

3 See Appendix C: Summary of Interviews

4 Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, Assurance of Learning Standards: An Interpretation (2007)
documentation requires alignment of discipline focused program objectives with graduate qualities. In turn, all course documentation requires alignment with graduate qualities.

However, one major difference between the approach to assurance of learning taken by AASCB\(^5\) and the approach mandated under the *Australian Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards)* is the requirement that by January 1, 2015 UniSA awards comply with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). The *Threshold Standards* also require UniSA to compare its performance on graduate outcomes with other higher education providers. Thus, although UniSA remains free to fix its own graduate qualities it must ensure that its internal assessments regarding graduate outcomes align with the external AQF benchmark, and that its performance is compared (against those benchmarks and others it prescribes for itself) with other Universities.

UniSA graduate qualities and program objectives are generally expressed as bodies of knowledge, skills and the application of knowledge and skills. Consequently, it should not be difficult to align a number of UniSA graduate qualities and discipline specific program objectives with the AQF (as the *Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency* currently requires in applications to accredit new courses of higher education study)\(^6\). An example is provided overleaf. Further information supporting the development of program level learning outcomes at the discipline level is available from the *ALTC Learning and Teaching Academic Standards* project.

The DVC:A and Deans Teaching and Learning are currently leading a working party at UniSA to develop an AQF Implementation Plan that will result in, among other things, the amendment of program and course documentation to articulate AQF learning outcomes and other terminology and ensure that current and future offerings dovetail with the AQF structure.

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\(^5\) The AASCB only requires an institution to demonstrate that graduate outcomes align with the institution’s mission and values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQF Level 7 Criteria</th>
<th>UniSA Graduate Quality</th>
<th>Examples of program objectives from a UniSA program – Bachelor of Management (Marketing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduates at this level will have broad and coherent</td>
<td>GQ1 – UniSA graduates operate effectively with a body of knowledge of sufficient depth</td>
<td>• Graduates have a broad and integrated knowledge of the marketing discipline, and will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theoretical and technical knowledge with depth in one</td>
<td>to begin professional practice</td>
<td>be able to apply that knowledge in business practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or more disciplines or areas of practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduates at this level will have well developed</td>
<td>GQ2 – UniSA graduates are prepared for lifelong learning in pursuit of personal</td>
<td>• Graduates have a solid grounding in marketing and will be able to extend their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cognitive, technical and communication skills to select</td>
<td>development and excellence in professional practice</td>
<td>understanding through analysis of business experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and apply methods and technologies to:</td>
<td>GQ3 – UniSA graduates are effective problem solvers</td>
<td>• Graduates have analytical and critical thinking skills, a sound understanding of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• analyse and evaluate information to complete a range</td>
<td>GQ 6 – UniSA graduates communicate effectively</td>
<td>marketing concepts and an ability to apply those concepts to enable effective problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>solving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• analyse, generate and transmit solutions to</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Graduates have effective communication skills including the ability to prepare and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unpredictable and sometimes complex problems</td>
<td></td>
<td>deliver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• transfer knowledge, skills and ideas to others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Graduates at this level will apply knowledge and skills to demonstrate autonomy, well developed judgement and responsibility: | GQ2 – UniSA graduates are prepared for lifelong learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice  
GQ4 – UniSA graduates can work both autonomously and collaboratively as professionals  
GQ6 – UniSA graduates communicate effectively | professional presentations to individuals and groups. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| • in contexts that require self-directed work and learning  
• within broad parameters to provide specialist advice and functions | | • Graduates have a solid grounding in marketing and will be able to extend their understanding through analysis of business experiences.  
• Graduates are able to work on marketing and marketing-related projects or tasks independently or within groups.  
• Graduates have effective communication skills including the ability to prepare and deliver professional presentations to individuals and groups. |
However, one area of difficulty posed by the shift in regulatory focus to verification of program level learning outcomes is the lack of articulation within UniSA systems of the link between course objectives and program level outcomes. Currently, at UniSA attainment of program level objectives is assumed as a result of successful program progression through a series of courses. The basic unit of measurement of learning at UniSA is thus the course and not the program. Consequently, very few programs demonstrate progressive development of program level objectives incorporating AQF criteria/graduate qualities. A number of older programs have no program level objectives.

To ensure compliance with the AQF and to support assurance of learning on an institution wide basis, all programs will require documented program objectives. As indicated above, program objectives differ from Graduate Qualities in that they are discipline and degree level specific.

**Recommended:** UniSA should ensure that program objectives for all programs are entered into its Program and Course Management System (PCMS), including by making this a requirement of the A – 35A Review process.

Another significant area of difficulty that will have to be faced is the requirement set out in s 5.6 Provider Course Accreditation Standards, *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards)* 2011 that UniSA substantiate student attainment of an appropriate level of English language proficiency. English language proficiency has not been explicitly incorporated within UniSA’s graduate qualities framework previously although implicitly it could be regarded as an indicator for Graduate Quality 6 – ie effective communication within a professional context. At this stage it is difficult to determine whether this new legal requirement will require more explicit referencing as a graduate outcome which will in turn (as discussed further below) require more explicit articulation of the relevant standard applicable for each program, how that standard will be assessed, and how its assessment will be validated. Although it provides that English language Proficiency is an important graduate attribute, currently the *Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities* (2008) focuses largely on inputs such as

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7 The Good Practice Principles are currently reflected in UniSA’s English Language Proficiency Framework.
curriculum design and student support rather than verification of outputs. However, other Universities are already tackling this issue. For example, the University of Western Australia requires that:

“University staff members who develop curricula and co-ordinate academic programs are normally expected to:

• ensure curricula, teaching and assessment practices develop English language communication skills as part of the normal academic program

• ensure that each level of a major requires students to demonstrate English language communication skills

• apply increasing standards of satisfactory communication in English progressively during the course, and

• include in all unit outlines the following statement or similar: Assistance with study skills, including English language skills, is available free of charge to all enrolled students from Student Services.”

Similarly the University of Canberra, English Language Policy provides:

“On graduation students will reach a level of academic and professional language competence consistent with the University’s generic skills and graduate attributes policies.”

UniSA already distinguishes between academic literacy, professional communication and English language proficiency through its 3L - Learning/Language/ Literacies strategy. However, when undertaking its review of its Graduate Qualities and Graduate Quality policy, UniSA will need to consider whether it wishes to make demonstration of English language skills more explicit in its graduate qualities framework and if it does how that will be substantiated in light of discussion below.

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Recommended: When UniSA reviews its Graduate Quality Framework that it considers whether the demonstration of English Language Skills should be made more explicit within that Framework.

2. HOW WILL THEY LEARN IT?

Constructive alignment of pedagogy and learning outcomes is promoted at UniSA through means such as the Professional Certificate in Academic Practice and the Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan 2012 – 2015. The intention is that staff will develop and implement teaching and learning activities designed to promote learning outcomes. Currently, the primary means to ascertain whether teaching methods do or do not lead to intended learning outcomes is a process of reverse inference using indirect measures such as student evaluation instruments and internal assessment of learning outcomes. Given that there is very little assurance of learning, this may leave UniSA vulnerable to the accusation that its choice of pedagogy remains unconnected to independent forms of evidence. This weakness is compounded by the lack of oversight provided to School and Division Boards when undertaking approval of new courses and programs or amendments to courses and programs. There is simply not enough information in course templates to indicate whether teaching methods are sound since the focus is upon delivery format (predominated by lecture/tutorial/seminar packages) rather than upon the types of learning activities that students are expected to undertake during the course of their studies. In other words, existing quality assurance documentation does not focus upon or even indicate how students are expected to learn. Moreover, there is no evidence that can be drawn from this documentation that will assist in determining whether adopting one form of pedagogy rather than another leads to better levels of student attainment. Rather, pedagogy remains largely hidden within course coordinator prerogative.

This may well be appropriate given the reasonable assumptions of expertise that can be made about teaching staff quality. It is expected that academic understanding about student learning, motivation, diversity, and curriculum design will determine the way teaching staff carry out their responsibilities and that there will be a variety of views about pedagogy within different program contexts. Nonetheless, UniSA may wish to consider whether existing approval mechanisms within its Program and Course Management System
(PCMS) are an effective means to monitor pedagogy. Division Boards are too attenuated from the learning activity that occurs in the classroom and are provided with insufficient information to fulfill their role as gatekeepers and evaluate whether learning activities have been well designed. University level approval boards are even less well informed. Rather than gatekeepers they may be better placed to act as monitors of progress against action plans for improvement informed by internal reflection and external assurance of learning processes at more devolved levels ie at the program or course levels (see discussion further below on feedback and improvement). In other words, arguably the higher levels of oversight should shift away from pre-approval of course and program format to monitoring of performance and performance improvement.

**Recommended:** That UniSA considers devolving approval of teaching methodology to the lowest possible level, and that it pursue more robust review of its academic standards and monitoring of progress toward improvement in student learning.

### 3. HOW WILL WE KNOW IF THEY HAVE LEARNED IT?

To determine whether students have successfully attained prescribed learning outcomes it will be necessary to:

1. Ascertain the standards which distinguish between successful versus unsuccessful achievement of learning outcomes
2. Ascertain whether the assessment tools applied in courses and across programs are capable of discriminating between successful versus unsuccessful achievement of learning outcomes
3. Ascertain the legitimacy and consistency of assessment decision making
4. Ascertain how the achievement of learning outcomes can be verified for accountability and improvement purposes

#### 3.1 ARTICULATION OF PROGRAM LEVEL ACADEMIC STANDARDS

To ascertain whether program outcomes have been met, it will be necessary to articulate the academic standards that will demarcate their successful versus unsuccessful demonstration, and, if relative performance measures are required, how well they have
been met. Of most importance is the determination of what constitutes the minimal or threshold level of attainment, and the manner in which this will be demonstrated at program level. At UniSA academic standards are formulated by individual course coordinators and applied at course level. A course pass requires overall satisfactory performance across a range of course objectives. No record is kept of whether any particular course objective has been met or how well each may have been met. Furthermore, as noted above the link between course objectives and program outcomes is not articulated. PCMS course documentation currently only requires that course objectives link to generic graduate qualities (outlined in the extract from the course template below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Qualities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GQ1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of assurance of learning it would be more useful for course objectives to be aligned with program objectives, and where possible in a manner which demonstrates progressive development across programs. The latter is already possible through the allocation of alphanumerical course codes denoting particular levels in the program where courses are expected to sit. In terms of the former, once program objectives that align with UniSA graduate qualities have been allocated to the program in PCMS, it should be feasible to cross-reference these in course documentation too. This may require an additional column for each of the Graduate Qualities above, for example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate Qualities &amp; Program Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GQ 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 The former ALTC supported the development of a number of Threshold Learning Statements in specific disciplines. But these are more in the nature of program learning outcomes rather than standards that determine whether the outcomes have been met or how well they have been met, see: ALTC Learning and Teaching Standards Overview (LTAS).
Recommended: UniSA should review its course documentation template to ensure that the measurement and development of program objectives can be mapped across the program.

In the future, it may also be possible to track students’ progressive development of program objectives. Although this function is currently deactivated in Learnonline’s Gradebook, learning outcomes measurement can be embedded within course assessment that in turn feeds into program level outcomes. Student progression against program level outcomes can thus be measured on a course by course basis and on an individual student basis. The Outcomes report below illustrates how this might be measured.\(^{11}\)

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### Outcomes report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome name</th>
<th>Course average</th>
<th>Site-wide Activities</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Number of grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and Evaluation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation &amp; Presentation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Universities have successfully implemented such systems to support their assurance of learning frameworks. These include the ReView system\(^{12}\) used by UTS, UNSW, QUT and

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\(^{11}\) The outcomes feature was successfully trialled as an ancillary activity to this project on a Development Site for Moodle 2.0 (to be installed in 2013). The results of the trial are available on the project website: [http://resource.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=5213](http://resource.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=5213)

\(^{12}\) See [http://www.review-edu.com/](http://www.review-edu.com/)
the University of Sydney, and ALEC (Assurance of Learning Embedded in Courses), the system that Griffith has developed for its own use.

**Recommended:** That UniSA considers trialling the Outcomes reporting feature in a small number of programs.

Currently at UniSA, standards at course level are embedded within assessment criteria that remain largely unmonitored except for School board review (almost wholly based upon entrenched grade distribution patterns) and sporadic instances of external moderation. The lack of articulation and validation of program and course academic standards is a considerable weakness in a regulatory environment that emphasizes verification of program outcomes. More importantly the failure to articulate and link academic standards with program outcomes means that there are scant objective measures of teaching efficacy.\(^\text{13}\)

Consequently, teaching staff are deprived of useful information they need to drive quality improvement.

However, academic standards within the higher education sector are notoriously difficult to articulate.\(^\text{14}\) What might be characterized as excellent writing in chemistry or engineering, for instance, because of its direct, explanatory and succinct language, may be quite different from the standards for analytical narrative or policy discourse in communication studies. Consequently, some opine that assessment in higher education is a highly contextualized and localized form of judgment rather than a measure of student achievement against common program level standards.\(^\text{15}\)

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13. Currently teaching efficacy appears to be solely measured by student perception eg MyCourseExperience & CEQ/UES surveys.


Based on work in the United States, an ALTC project led by Professor Beverley Oliver is supporting the development of discipline focused rubrics for common program learning outcomes or graduate qualities/attributes. The idea underlying the development of discipline based rubrics is to make the evaluation of student performance more systematic and to improve the reliability of academic standards. The Australian Business Deans Achievement Matters Project is another example where academic and industry communities of practice have been established for the explication of the LTAS standards relevant to business. The work of that project focuses upon the identification of valid authentic tasks that enable students to demonstrate a learning standard, calibrating standards to discipline and task, and establishing a body of experienced peer reviewers.

This type of work can inform the articulation of similar standards for UniSA programs and for courses within particular levels of programs. When placed online it can also be used to support internal and external peer review.

**Recommended: That UniSA teaching staff be encouraged to engage with communities of practice involved in articulating discipline based academic standards and how those standards may be demonstrated.**

### 3.2 VALIDATION OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Validation ensures that assessment tools are capable of assessing whether, and the level at which, learning outcomes have been met. Pursuant to the AQF, validation should encompass ‘predictive validity,’ ie assessment should inform as to what students are able to do in future contexts that fit the outcomes prescribed by the AQF and UniSA in its program and course documentation.

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16 Association of American Colleges and Universities, VALUE: Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education.


18 Australian Business Deans, Teaching and Learning Network.


To determine what learning the assessment will measure and how it will measure learning, it will first be necessary to determine whether the assessment relates to designated learning outcomes. Currently this judgment is made by individual course coordinators and monitored by School and Division Boards. However, it is unclear what evidence is provided to School and Division Boards to support claimed alignment of assessment and learning outcomes – other than an assumption that the reference books listed in the PCMS template have been used to support that link. Categories in the PCMS system such as “Assignment” and “Exam” do not assist to determine assessment content-validity. Ordinarily content-validity requires:

a. A determination of what the assessment will and will not measure – ie what content topics, cognitive skills, task capability, perspectives, attitudes etc are being examined. For example, if the sole purpose of an assessment is to measure mathematical proficiency that purpose may be undermined if the assessment contains a lot of text, as performance will be confounded by individual students’ reading proficiency.

There should be a clear link between the assessment and the tasks that students are expected to perform that reflects program level/AQF standards. This will necessitate a discipline based analysis of the AQF outcomes similar to that undertaken by the LTAS project, as well as a rigorous analysis of the capacity of the assessment to measure the relevant outcomes. Such an analysis will require articulation of the relative distribution of discipline knowledge, cognitive skills, competencies, and values proposed to be measured by the assessment. For example, if analysis and application are the major cognitive skills that the assessment seeks to measure, their relative weighting should reflect that importance. In performance related assessment there may also need to be some pre-testing to ensure that the assigned tasks are actually eliciting the intended cognitive skills.

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Student reasoning applied to a particular problem may not reflect intended assessment domain(s). Post-assessment comparisons between practice-based performance and assessment outcome are also recommended. Currently, there is limited evidence that rigour is applied in evaluating the strength of assessment alignment with standards.

b. A determination that what the assessment measures is representative of curriculum content i.e. whether the assessment constructively aligned with the learning outcomes promoted by the course. For example, if one of the learning outcomes taught in the course is the ability to elicit instructions from a client, the assessment must be able to discriminate between candidates who do and do not possess that competency.

c. Articulation of the measures used to determine the level to which knowledge has been attained, the degree to which cognitive skills have been acquired and applied; and the likelihood of performance of similar tasks in future settings (see discussion above re: academic standards).

d. A determination that the assessment will operate neutrally re: the examinee population which compromises international, NESB, disabled students etc. Currently there is no evidence that the validity of assessment for diverse types of student is collected continuously and systematically while the assessment is developed or during delivery. Indeed there appears to be little evidence at all of whether intended or unintended consequences of assessment are evaluated.

The Assessment Futures project provides a useful checklist for course co-ordinators to undertake pre-implementation examination of (a) – (d) above. Ideally once (a) – (d) have been determined, the course coordinator should subject the assessment to internal review and external benchmarking. If the focus of assurance of learning is to shift to the program level as this Discussion Paper advocates, then the course coordinator must consult with other staff in the program and with other academics practicing in that program’s discipline

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23 A post implementation review is an evaluation of how the assessment works in practice – it involves the collection and utilisation of knowledge gained throughout the administration of a particular form of assessment to inform improvement and optimise assessment in future course iterations.

24 University of Technology Sydney, Assessment Futures, Checklist for those involved with units/subjects/modules (2012)
preferably using criteria commonly accepted to evaluate alignment and to ensure that 
assessment of expected student outcomes at course level is appropriately integrated at 
program level.\textsuperscript{25}

**Recommended:** That UniSA’s Assessment Policies and Procedure Manual (APPM) is 
amended so that UniSA course co-ordinators are required to analyse assessment both pre 
and post implementation for content validity as well as alignment with program level 
objectives.

At present, UniSA course co-ordinators cannot set assessment unless there is claimed 
alignment with course objectives in the PCMS:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Assessment</th>
<th>Offering</th>
<th>Assmt No</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Pct %</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INT, CWE</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tutorial work</td>
<td>1250 words</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Test</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>1250 words</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Examination</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As already outlined, it is not clear whether attainment of the course objectives is explicitly 
measured. To the extent that course objectives are not clearly aligned with program 
objectives, it is also not clear how the program objectives are being developed or measured 
at the course level. Neither do any of the exemplar feedback forms available through 
UniSA’s teaching and learning website relate assessments with program objectives, where 
even the degree to which marking criteria are aligned with Graduate Qualities varies among 
the samples.

Use of the Outcome reporting feature referred to earlier would support such integration. 
Alternately, feedback form exemplars should be developed which more clearly integrate 
assessment criteria, program objectives and graduate qualities.

As outlined, the pre-implementation approval process for assessment in courses at UniSA is 
poorly placed to effectively determine (a) – (d) above. For reasons similar to those 
outlined in Section 2, this Discussion Paper therefore advocates a shift in focus at the higher

\textsuperscript{25} Gavin Fulmer ‘Estimating Critical Values for Strength of Alignment Among Curriculum, Assessments, 
and Instruction’ (2011) 36 (3) Journal of Educational and Behavioral Statistics 381.
echelons (i.e., Division Board and Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) levels) from pre-implementation approval to post-implementation monitoring.

Another matter that needs to be considered in terms of the validity of program level assessment is the issue of atomization. As outlined, currently it is assumed that successful progression through a number of courses undertaking a variety of assessments will yield program level outcomes. This paper has already argued that this assumption needs to be supported by greater evidence of progression toward those outcomes. However, a related question is whether there also needs to be evidence of synthesis of learning across the program and whether current atomized forms of assessment sufficiently capture more holistic graduate capabilities. Others have argued that course level assessment, which in many cases is heavily weighted toward traditional examinations, is insufficient to demonstrate mastery of program attributes, and have advocated more integrated forms of assessment such as eportfolios, assessment centres and capstone projects, or combinations thereof such as capstone portfolios. Since questions have also been raised about the quality and psychometric validity of these instruments it is important to stress that they also require validation and ongoing post implementation monitoring. If used as a means to demonstrate program level attainment, as the discussion below outlines, external verification will need to be incorporated into post implementation monitoring.

3.3 MODERATION OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Moderation of the assessment process examines the legitimacy and consistency of marking decisions and thus directly addresses the application of academic standards. Theoretically shared understanding of standards between examiners will generate similar grades, across time, across examiners and across modes of assessment. Yet, despite Division and UniSA


27 However the assumption that such a shared understanding exists has been brought into serious question: Sue Bloxham ‘Marking and moderation in the UK: false assumptions and wasted resources’ (2009) 34 (2) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education 209.
wide moderation policies and guidelines designed to promote this shared understanding, there appears to be little evidence available at the institutional level that assessment decisions are evaluated for accuracy\textsuperscript{28} and consistency. Institutional indices of the degree to which there is inter-examiner agreement, accuracy of grading relative to pre-graded papers, and consistency of individual examiners over time are lacking. Even though this is mandated by UniSA’s \textit{Assessment Policies and Procedures Manual} (APPM) 3.1.3, it is unclear whether these exist at the School level and whether such evidence could be produced if required.\textsuperscript{29} Indeed what evidence is available, suggests significant variations in grading practice between Divisions and disciplines, and between iterations of courses.

\textbf{Recommended:} That Schools maintain records of the systematic moderation of their courses and the outcomes that the moderation has produced; and that they report regularly on moderation to Division Boards.

The above comments apply equally to external benchmarking of courses which is also mandated by 3.1.2 APPM.

\textbf{Recommended:} That Schools maintain records of the systematic external benchmarking of courses and the outcomes that the benchmarking has produced; and that they report regularly on external benchmarking to Division Boards.

More importantly, the \textit{Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011, Provider Course Accreditation Standard 5.5} requires that “the academic standards intended to be achieved by students and the standards actually achieved by students in the course of study are benchmarked against similar accredited courses of study offered by other higher education providers.” At this stage the only external benchmarking that occurs at UniSA appears to occur at the course point, and as noted above, although each Division has adopted guidelines which implement that requirement, there is little evidence at the institutional level as to how this informs curriculum development or the articulation of

\textsuperscript{28} For example, Stewart and Grobe report a relationship between length of response and an assigned holistic grade: Murray F Stewart & Cary H Grobe ‘Syntactic Maturity, Mechanics and Vocabulary and Teachers’ Quality Ratings’ (1979) 13 \textit{Research in the Teaching of English} 207. Other studies show variation according to whether an assignment is handwritten or typed.

\textsuperscript{29} See \textit{Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011, Provider Course Accreditation Standard 5.3}. 
academic standards. Therefore, unless external moderation of courses is equated with program benchmarking, benchmarking of academic standards at the program level does not occur on a systematic basis at UniSA.

A number of Australian Universities build externality into their periodic program reviews, and like UniSA require evidence of external stakeholder consultation and, in many cases, external representation on review panels. Queensland University is an example that builds benchmarking into its reviews against key indicators such as student satisfaction and student retention. However, none appear to explicitly incorporate the benchmarking of intended versus actual achievement of program learning outcomes, although Deakin University requires that major course review panels consider:

- “the academic standards of the course in relation to the Australian Qualifications Framework and discipline-specific standards
- the quality of the course in relation to the requirements prescribed by the Academic Board and in relation to external academic standards …”

Similar policy provision occurs at the University of Melbourne, which appears to be more closely aligned with current regulatory requirements than some other Australian universities. The University of Melbourne requires program reviews to indicate how program managers “monitor, benchmark and sustain excellent outcomes in teaching, learning and assessment in the course,” and to “monitor how other higher education institutions in the sector perform in and set new standards for the sector.”

The lack of benchmarking against other institutions on achievement of program learning outcomes in Australia is, nonetheless, hardly surprising since there is no publicly available common measure for, nor systematic collection of data, apropos learning achievement. At this stage, the most UniSA could do would be to ensure that its program learning outcomes align with the AQF Framework and other relevant internal and external benchmarks as its working group of the DVC: A and Deans Learning and Teaching is currently doing, and

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30 Queensland University, Curriculum and Teaching Quality Appraisal and Academic Program Review.
31 Deakin University, Reviews and Revisions of Higher Education Courses.
32 Melbourne University, Evaluation questions for course self-assessment
ensure that achievement of these objectives is measured through a system of verification of learning (discussed below). As benchmarking against other institutions is mandated, the academic standards applied and achieved should also be compared at the program level during program review (also discussed below).

Some review of UniSA’s Quality Assurance and Improvement: Programs, courses and teaching arrangements (A35A) policy would be required to accommodate the recommended changes. As mentioned above, the pro forma could be expanded to require re-accreditating programs to be compliant with assurance of learning aspects of new program approval, in particular that program objectives be stated. Additionally, a requirement that the development and measurement of these program objectives be mapped across the program would also contribute greatly to the efficacy of assurance of learning. In addition, as assurance of learning data comes online, it would be expected that it could contribute to the review process, e.g. in section 2, the ‘extent to which the program is meeting its stated aims and objectives’, and section 6, ‘Graduate satisfaction and outcomes’. It should be noted that, as the interviews for this project highlighted, direct measures for assurance of learning should not replace but rather complement the existing indirect measures, such as results of student surveys. Section 7, ‘External stakeholder satisfaction’ would need to be modified to include the external benchmarking that is likely to become a feature of the regulatory environment. Section 8.1 already requires ‘Congruence between program objectives and Graduate Qualities’; this could be expanded to include alignment between course and program objectives in a progressive way, as discussed above.

The definition of ‘Evaluation of quality’ (p. 2) would in time need to be expanded to include the consideration of assurance of learning data. Similarly for item 2.1. assurance of learning data could also be used for the annual view of the performance of the University’s programs pursuant to item 5. Section 10.4 makes references to external stakeholders and national benchmarks. These will be affected by the external validation requirements of the emerging regulatory environment.
Recommended: That UniSA reviews its Quality assurance and improvement: Programs, courses and teaching arrangements (A35A) Policy and in particular its Program Evaluation and Re-accreditation Review proforma to incorporate a requirement that student learning achievement is measured against AQF specifications and benchmarked against other institutions’ performance.

Policies and procedures for approval of new programs would also need to be addressed and the Program Coursework Approval Manual reviewed. Some suggestions appear below.

**Coursework Program Approval Manual**

**7.4 Program objectives**

The role of program objectives could be expanded upon here.

**7.5 Graduate Qualities**

The importance of the program-specific interpretation of the Graduate Qualities should be emphasised, e.g. by adding (italicized):

The content, teaching strategies, and assessment of courses should be expressed in ways that embody the Graduate Qualities *in their program-specific interpretation, the program objectives*.

**7.11 Assessment tasks and development of graduate qualities**

Graduate Quality should be replaced by its program specific interpretation, i.e. program objective.

**8 Courses**

The statement:

To ensure that graduates form a program have the required graduate qualities to begin professional practice, programs at UniSA are planned such that opportunities to develop graduate qualities are embedded within specific courses - could be adapted to reflect the importance of the program specific interpretation of the Graduate Qualities, i.e. the program objectives.


**8.3.3 Course objectives**

There could be a requirement that course objectives are aligned with program objectives in a transparent way, i.e. reflecting the level of progression towards proficiency.

Graduate Quality should be replaced by its program specific interpretation, i.e. program objective.

**8.5.4 Aligning assessment to course objectives**

A mechanism needs to be developed for aligning assessment to program objectives, either by aligning course objectives to program objectives in a transparent way that reflects whether the particular measurement of a program objective is a formative or summative measurement, or by linking assessments to program objectives directly, for example via the program mapping process mentioned above.

**8.6 Teaching and learning arrangements**

Graduate Quality should be replaced by its program specific interpretation, i.e. program objective.

**General comments**

External stakeholder consultation is usually mentioned in the context of pre-program consultation. Moderation is usually mentioned in the context of offshore courses. As mentioned below, it is to be expected that external validation will become a key component of assurance of learning.

**New course approval report**

Course approval documentation could be accompanied by assessment marking guides which explicitly assign marks to the program objectives (or to the course objectives, if they are aligned to the program objectives in a transparent way).

The alignment of course and program objectives in a way which reflects the progressive achievement of program objectives throughout the program could be a requirement here.
**New program approval report**

The mapping of the development and measurement of program objectives across the program in such a way as to reflect the difference between formative and summative instances could be a requirement here.

The alignment of course and program objectives in a way which reflects the progressive achievement of program objectives throughout the program could also be a requirement here.

**Recommended:** That UniSA review the Program Coursework Approval Manual to incorporate assurance of learning including better explication of program objectives and their integration into program design.

### 3.4 VERIFICATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

Verification of learning outcomes requires the collection of convincing evidence that students are achieving key program outcomes and, as a result of regulation, that these align with the generic outcomes prescribed by the AQF.

Verification of learning practice varies internationally. In the United Kingdom, external examination is the principal means for assuring learning outcomes. Under the Quality Code, universities are required to appoint external examiners drawn from other universities or relevant professions and industries. The role of the external examiners is to provide advice on whether prescribed academic standards found in Part A of the Quality Code (analogous to the AQF Framework) have been maintained by the university. The examiners must also report as to whether the assessment process implemented by the university rigorously and fairly measures student achievement, and whether the university’s academic standards and its students’ achievements are comparable with those of other universities. Several Australian universities are currently involved in trials of similar external moderation schemes. The Go8 Quality Verification System is perhaps the best known. The University

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**34** *GO8 Quality Verification System.* Compared with the UK system, the QVS is a “light touch” review of a selection of final year courses among GO8 institutions.
of Western Sydney is also leading an 11-university trial. Nevertheless, doubts have been raised as to whether external moderation of individual pieces of student work at the course level is practically feasible or effective for determining more holistic program level competencies. Others have argued that the UK system of external assessment entrenches orthodoxies as to what constitutes quality teaching and learning with little evidence that it contributes to improvement in student learning.

In the United States, most accrediting bodies require “systematic, sustained, and thorough use of multiple qualitative and/or quantitative measures” of student learning. The strategies used include:

a. Standardised testing/Professional licensure testing

b. Locally produced tests

c. Portfolios

d. Final projects

e. Capstone experiences

f. Rubrics

g. Performance assessments

h. Employer surveys

i. Interview/focus groups

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35 A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation.


The US penchant for multiple measures of achievement stems from the realization that there is no single “best” method for assurance of learning.\(^{39}\) Even so, external moderation of student assessment of the kind implemented in the United Kingdom and piloted in Australia is not widely practiced,\(^{40}\) although some accrediting bodies are considering its implementation.\(^{41}\) According to the National Institute of Learning Outcomes Assessment, at the program level, the majority of US institutions use capstone experiences and rubrics, or performance assessments/final projects as their assurance of learning tools.\(^{42}\) Capstone experiences are also being considered as a tool for assurance of learning in a small number of Australian universities, and DEEWR has raised external review of capstone courses as a potential objective measure of student learning across a program.\(^{43}\)

Unlike the United Kingdom, in the US there is minimal regulatory involvement in assurance of learning. Rather, US assurance of learning is largely mission based with little reference to externally fixed common standards like the AQF.\(^{44}\) Furthermore, as already noted, there is


\(^{40}\) Suskie’s seminar work, Assessing Student Learning: A Common Sense Guide 2\(^{nd}\) ed, does not even mention external moderation in its list of examples of direct evidence of student learning: Table 2.1, p 21. But see George Kuh & Stanley Ikenberry, More than You Think: Less than You Need: Learning Outcomes Assessment in American Higher Education [Champaign, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2009] indicating that at least one department of approximately 70% of US institutions was using external judgments of student performance to verify learning outcomes. This may however have been confined to the examination of doctoral theses.

\(^{41}\) Interestingly the WASC is currently redesigning its accreditation process to ensure a greater focus upon validation of common learning outcomes. However, as a result of institutional resistance, implementation of external validation has been suspended pending further consultation: Commission Update on Accreditation Redesign - February 23, 2012.

\(^{42}\) Peter Ewell et al, Down and In: Assessment Practices at the Program Level [Urbana, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2011]

\(^{43}\) Australia, DEEWR, Developing a framework for teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education and the role of TEQSA (2011) .

\(^{44}\) Nonetheless efforts are being undertaken to draft common standards through initiatives such as Tuning USA.
limited external substantiation of learning outcomes.\textsuperscript{45} The approach aims to advance diversity, but has also been negatively characterized as ‘accomodationalist.’\textsuperscript{46}

In an effort to counter such accusations, the Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) heavily promote standardized testing through their Voluntary System of Accountability as the chief method for assuring learning.\textsuperscript{47} However, a damning report published by the National Institute for Outcomes Assessment, has found that such standardized testing lacks broad credibility and acceptance in the higher education community, primarily because the information from the standardized tests is not sufficiently disaggregated to determine what programs or parts of program require improvement or how they might be improved.\textsuperscript{48} There are also concerns that the tests tend to be discipline biased and that they fail to measure the full range of learning outcomes.\textsuperscript{49}

Despite doubts that standardized testing will produce information capable of driving quality improvement at the program level, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development is pushing ahead with its Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) Feasibility Study.\textsuperscript{50} The principal drivers in this instance are institutional accountability and international comparability. Apart from generic testing of the kind applied in the Voluntary System of Accountability in the US, the AHELO project is also

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Transp\textsuperscript{45}er\textsuperscript{45}ancy by Design which accredits a small number of online learning programs is one of the few accountability initiatives which involve substantiation of learning by third party quality assurance review.
\item See Voluntary System of Accountability.
\item Natasha Jankowski et al, Transparency and Accountability: an Evaluation of the VSA College Portrait Pilot [Champaign, IL; National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2012]. Other negative views related to the validity of the data (arguing it is sample dependent) and its interpretation. See further, John Aubrey Douglass et al ‘The Holy Grail of Learning Outcomes’ University World News 04 March 2012 Issue No. 211.
\item Testing student and university performance globally: OECD’s AHELO
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endeavouring to develop discipline specific skills testing. At this stage learning outcomes and assessment instruments have been developed for Economics and Engineering. However, while some ground has been made in establishing feasibility, progress toward the development of both generic and discipline specific assessments that are widely embraced as valid in diverse institutional, cultural and linguistic contexts has been slow.

The divergent approaches to assurance of learning in the United Kingdom and the United States pose certain tensions between (a) compliance with minimum learning outcome thresholds for the purpose of institutional accountability and (b) more aspirational achievement of program goals underpinned by continuous improvement cycles at the program level.51 As currently drafted, Australian legislative requirements appear to require that both purposes are fulfilled. On the one hand, institutions are exhorted to ensure that their key graduate attributes are attained (aspirational). On the other, institutions must also ensure that their academic standards are benchmarked at the program level with other institutions, and that their awards meet AQF specifications (accountability/compliance). A similar blended approach has been adopted in Ontario, Canada,52 which combines internal review of program efficacy as well as external program review using the institution’s own goals and externally fixed Degree Level Expectations as the relevant benchmarks. Both reviews must be synthesised into a final assessment report incorporating an implementation plan that identifies actions for improvement, as well as responsibilities for, and the resourcing of improvements.

Apart from navigating between accountability and aspiration, UniSA faces some difficulty in predicting the unfolding regulatory environment. As a result of the lack of consensus across the higher education sector on how to assure learning,53 and particularly the lack of common measures and systematic data collection for learning achievement, like all other


53 Richard Shavelson Measuring College Learning Responsibly: Accountability in a New Era [Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009] at 77 stating that there is ‘no consensus as to the “best way” to assess learning in higher education.’
Australian Universities, UniSA confronts a collective action problem that will probably need Australian Higher Education Standards Panel guidance to fully resolve. If it is determined that assurance of learning at the program level should be conducted through standardized testing, then investment by UniSA in a system of external review of program outcomes may be redundant. Alternately, if external review of courses and programs in the manner conducted in the UK is adopted, development of program level forms of assessment such as capstones and e-portfolios may be unnecessary.

At this stage, despite its capacity to produce easily comparable data, it is unlikely that standardized testing will be adopted as the uniform method for assuring learning.54 Similarly, given the emphasis on program level attainment/graduate outcomes in existing regulation it seems unlikely that external moderation of assessment across courses will be required. Nonetheless, because it is already foreshadowed by the Threshold Standards and in DEEWR’s Discussion Paper, Developing a Framework for Teaching and Learning Standards in Australian Higher Education and the Role of TEQSA (2011), external validation of AQF and graduate outcome achievement of some form is required. Given that program level attainment must be verified, currently the most feasible forms of external verification are:

- External peer review of capstone course assessment; or
- Eportfolio assessment comprising a selection of key student artefacts that in aggregate evidence attainment of program level objectives; or
- A selection of assessment from key courses or majors that in aggregate demonstrate program outcomes.

The requirement of external verification will in turn necessitate the development of bodies/groups/communities to undertake benchmarking and comparisons. Some of these already exist in particular disciplines such as engineering and nursing. As mentioned earlier, business academics and industry professionals are beginning to form a discipline based peer review group under the Achievement Matters project. Accreditting bodies like the AASCB and Engineers Australia that have adopted assurance of learning principles as part of their accreditation processes could also be characterised as vehicles of external verification.

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54 Australia, Report of the Advancing Quality in Higher Education Reference Group, Development of Performance Measures (June 2012), 34.
Where no such peer review bodies or groups pre-exist, it may be necessary to form a group of peer institutions like the GO8 Quality Verification System.

In the longer term, other verification methods may emerge. For example, from the informal learning environment, a system of “Educational Badges for Lifelong Learning” is evolving as a possible system of networked third party verification of learner achievement. For example, Mozilla is currently promoting its Open Badges platform as a means of enabling distributed learners to collect and verify their learning. The Open Badge system is basically an open eportfolio that allows multiple parties to verify various elements of learning.

The developing science of learning analytics may also provide a future means to verify learning. As the US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology notes, increasing use of online and blended learning offers “opportunities to integrate assessment and learning so that information useful for improving future instruction can be gathered in nearly real time.” Learning analytics facilitates the capture of data about learning and the learning process by mining and analysing activity in learning management systems as well as informal learning environments. Currently, learning analytics are primarily used to implement adaptive learning methods and to identify students at risk for the purpose of intervention, but as the US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology outlines there is increasing interest from higher education institutions in the use learning analytics tools for assurance of learning. Although it sits outside of formal US tertiary education, the Khan Academy, a provider of free teaching and learning multimedia resources is a good example. As students undertake lessons built around the resources on the Khan Academy website, the Khan Academy collects data about their activity and provides teachers with visual interactive tools that display student progress toward learning goals.

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56 See for example: Carnegie Mellon, Open Learning Initiative
57 See for example: Purdue University Course Signals
58 The Khan Academy. The site delivers over 140 million video lessons.
59 The Khan Academy, Teaching Toolkit, Using Data
Interest in this field is also building in Australia.\textsuperscript{60} For instance, learning analytics have been used to provide evidence of appropriate curriculum coverage and student engagement and equity during clinical placements over the course of a medical program at the University of Wollongong.\textsuperscript{61} The Horizon Report predicts that learning analytics will become mainstream in 2 – 3 years.\textsuperscript{62} More widespread use of the Outcomes feature in Gradebook, Learnonline, would ensure that UniSA is better placed to take advantage of that momentum.

4. WHAT WILL WE DO IF THEY HAVE NOT LEARNED IT?

The use of evaluation data to stimulate improvements in curricular and extra-curricular programs is the most important aspect of any assurance of learning framework. There is no point measuring learning if the information provided is not applied to instigate changes in teaching and to improve student performance.\textsuperscript{63} Otherwise, the assurance of learning system will simply produce excessive paperwork and “tick the box” behavior.\textsuperscript{64} This requires effective staff participation and a strong feedback loop between program evaluation, action planning, action implementation, and evaluation of change implementation against agreed benchmarks.

Currently at UniSA evaluation of program performance occurs on a 6 yearly cycle. An Annual Review of Program Performance is conducted by Planning and Institutional Performance (PIP) using indicators approved by Academic Board. Where courses fall below benchmarks set by Academic Board, the 6 year cycle can be escalated. The indicators include student load, student retention and student perceptions of their course experience.

\textsuperscript{60} Beverley Oliver & Barbara Whelan ‘Designing an e-portfolio for assurance of learning focusing on adoptability and learning analytics’ (2011) 27 (6) Australasian Journal of Educational Technology 1026.

\textsuperscript{61} Martin Olmos & Linda Corrin, Academic analytics in a medical curriculum: enabling educational excellence [Hobart: ASCILITE, 2011].


Although indicative of the learning environment, these indicators are not direct measures of learning. While some studies support a connection between student perceptions of their course experience and actual learning, others have found typically less than 0.15 correlation between student self-reporting of learning and direct learning measures. Moreover, the indicators may be difficult to relate to specific teaching or assessment methods as they comprise data aggregated across programs and across time (currently 4 years). Accordingly, whether the indicators are sufficient to trigger a review of the links between pedagogy and attainment of program and graduate outcomes is open to question. There is also an issue of whether monitoring learning should occur reactively, in other words, whether it is appropriate to wait until problems manifest themselves in lagged data before seeking A35A review.

Others may counter that, notwithstanding the above limitations, the GDS rates and more particularly the Educating Professionals results which are also incorporated as indicators in UniSA’s program performance report ought to be characterized as proxies for assurance of learning. From a stakeholder perspective, they appear to affirm program efficacy. However, it is difficult to reconcile such results with reports of employers’ lack of satisfaction with Australian graduate skills.

Other universities such as the University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology review all programs annually. These annual reviews led by the UniSA equivalents of program directors are “light touch reviews” that require Faculties/Divisions to

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66 Richard Shavelson, Measuring College Learning Responsibly: Accountability in a New Era [Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009] at 9, defined in terms of observable and measurable behavioural change. See further Ashley Finley, Making Progress? What we Know about the Achievement of Liberal Education Outcomes [Washington: AACU, 2012] at Ch 3 documenting that the majority of US College students are not proficient in mathematics, critical thinking, writing or reading despite student self reporting of high levels of achievement.


68 QUT, Course Quality Cycle
examine data relevant to program viability, quality and outcomes against national benchmark data and internal kpis. At QUT, for example, program directors are required to report on: low and high performing elements in the program; issues arising from curriculum change; the results of benchmarking activities; outcomes from actions of previous reports; planned actions; and strategies for sharing of good practice. If programs are identified as high or low performing then they are subject to more intensive review. Individual program reports are consolidated at the Divisional level and submitted to Academic Board. According to the QUT protocol, external review of programs is an integral part of its periodic quality assurance cycle.

At the University of Melbourne, which claims that its quality assurance framework serves both developmental and accountability purposes, programs are internally reviewed by a course assessment panel comprised of staff appointed by the Dean. The questions that the course assessment panel must address include:

- In what ways do you ensure the quality and coherence of your course design? (this incorporates commentary around AQF alignment and identification of a capstone experience and how it exemplifies graduate attributes).
- In what ways do you ensure the quality of your course management?
- In what ways does your approach to student engagement encourage strong learning outcomes?
- In what ways is a culture of teaching excellence being developed and supported?
- .......
- In what ways are student learning and graduate outcomes monitored, and postcourse student pathways developed? (this incorporates how staff monitor student acquisition of graduate attributes and program objectives)
- What mechanisms do you employ for making adjustments to the course based on stakeholder feedback….and national and international benchmarks?

The Melbourne and QUT approaches which emphasize the monitoring of learning goals and progress toward learning goals is an approach which is advocated by this Discussion Paper. One other advantage of these approaches is that they place responsibility for ongoing

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69 University of Melbourne, Guidelines for evaluation of teaching and learning in coursework programs
monitoring and improvement more directly upon program directors and teaching staff than is currently the case at UniSA, where annual planning occurs at the School and Divisional levels but not at the program level. If teaching staff are required to be directly responsible for the efficacy of their programs and “own” the means by which that is demonstrated as well as the formulation and implementation of program improvements, it is more likely that the assurance of learning process will yield sustainable quality gains. Staff may be further encouraged to participate meaningfully in program review by incorporating improvements on learning outcome measures as part of the annual performance management and promotion processes.

Nonetheless, the quality assurance framework adopted by UniSA needs to be appropriately embedded in School and Divisional governance structure. While this Discussion Paper advocates devolving of responsibility for annual reporting to program directors, like QUT, it will be necessary to ensure that such reporting is reviewed by Divisional Committees and that they in turn report to the ASQC/Academic Board. A suggested reporting hierarchy is set out below.

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To some extent, the proposed system depends on how the role of program director may be reconfigured from its current focus on student administration to an academic leadership focus. If the program director is reconfigured then it may not be necessary for them to report to School Boards and then for School Boards to report to Division Boards. The School Board reporting step could be deleted.

4.1 DATA & DATA INTERPRETATION

As well as student satisfaction, retention, progression and success data, UniSA will need to devise a better means of capturing and tracking student learning outcomes and the manner in which it assesses those outcomes across programs. Use of the outcomes tool and more sophisticated application of learning analytics will assist. However, for the purpose of external verification, it would be useful to develop measures that are comparable or at least analogous with those used in peer institutions.

Recommendation: That UniSA seeks out and joins other institutions engaged in developing measures of learning and progress toward learning so that it is able to meaningfully benchmark its activities with those institutions.
The data will then have to be turned into information so that program directors and course co-ordinators can use it to inform their monitoring and action planning. For example, at the moment, all program assessment is currently found in course documents. The information can be aggregated across programs to provide a “snapshot” of the type of objective that is assessed and the manner of assessment. An example from the Division of Business Core Course Review appears below:
However this information is not currently readily available to program directors/schools/divisions. It has to be obtained by request. If it were available this would automate the mapping process and relieve program directors/teaching staff from having to compose and fill in the type of time consuming pro formas that currently dominate assurance of learning in many business schools.\textsuperscript{72} It would be helpful if all program directors were aware of and could readily access such material (including in the future, aggregated reports from the Outcomes tool and other learning analytics developed in conjunction with peer institutions).

**Recommended:** That UniSA provides program directors with aggregated data that displays course learning objectives and assessment across programs. In the future, that program directors have access to reports generated by the Outcomes tool and other learning analytics.

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**4.2 ACTION PLANNING & ACTION IMPLEMENTATION**

The information obtained from the analysis above should be used to inform the development of an action plan for improvement. The action plan should be drafted by the person/committee leading the review and then discussed and agreed to by all teaching staff in the program. The action plan should address matters such as:

a. The actions to be taken

b. Timelines for completion

c. Responsibility for action

d. Reporting and monitoring

e. Evaluation

Diagrammatically the above process is represented at the University of Melbourne as:

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\textsuperscript{72} See, for example, Assurance of Learning Documentation Template at the [University of Sydney, Business School](https://www.unis.edu.au).
Stakeholder involvement will be critical to success. At the very least, students should be represented in the planning, development and implementation of action plans and as is outlined below the way in which their feedback has been incorporated needs to be communicated back to them.

Other stakeholders such as employers/professional bodies/ etc should also be consulted, especially for major/intensive reviews.
According to Suskie, program review will only yield improvement if the results of the review are put to good use.\(^73\) This will require consideration and discussion by teaching staff and so sufficient time and administrative assistance must be made available for this to occur effectively. Communication of results will be a necessary pre-condition of that discussion. Suskie recommends: only presenting aggregated results; presenting results accurately and fairly; tailoring communication according to audience need; and being precise and concise. She favours the use of visual aids such as tables and graphs and recommends that results be communicated widely and transparently. She also recommends ensuring that good results are celebrated.

Recommended: That UniSA develops processes for program review and a proforma for program review action plans that feed into Divisional and institutional planning processes.

### SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. UniSA should ensure that program objectives for all programs are entered into its Program and Course Management System (PCMS), including by making this a requirement of the A – 35A Review process.

2. When UniSA reviews its Graduate Quality Framework that it considers whether the demonstration of English Language Skills should be made more explicit within that Framework.

3. That UniSA considers devolving approval of teaching methodology to the lowest possible level, and that it pursue more robust review of its academic standards and the monitoring of progress toward improvement in student learning.

4. That UniSA should review its course documentation template to ensure that the measurement and development of program objectives can be mapped across the program.

5. That UniSA considers trialling the Outcomes reporting feature in a small number of programs.

6. That UniSA teaching staff be encouraged to engage with communities of practice involved in articulating discipline based academic standards and how those standards may be demonstrated.

7. That the APPM be amended so that UniSA course co-ordinators are required to analyse assessment both pre and post implementation for content validity as well as alignment with program level objectives.

8. That Schools maintain records of the systematic moderation of their courses and the outcomes that the moderation has produced; and that they report regularly on moderation to Division Boards.

9. That Schools maintain records of the systematic external benchmarking of courses and the outcomes that the benchmarking has produced; and that they report regularly on external benchmarking to Division Boards.

10. That UniSA reviews its Quality assurance and improvement: Programs, courses and teaching arrangements (A35A) Policy and in particular its Program Evaluation and Re-accreditation Review proforma to incorporate a requirement that student learning achievement is measured against AQF specifications and benchmarked against other institutions’ performance.

11. Recommended: That UniSA review the Program Coursework Approval Manual to incorporate assurance of learning including better explication of program objectives and their integration into program design.

12. That UniSA seeks out and joins other institutions engaged in developing measures of learning and progress toward learning so that it is able to meaningfully benchmark its activities with those institutions.

13. That UniSA provides program directors with aggregated data that displays course learning objectives and assessment across programs. In the future, that program directors have access to reports generated by the Outcomes tool and other learning analytics.

14. That UniSA develops processes for program review and a proforma for program review action plans that feed into Divisional and institutional planning processes.