



The University of Sydney

Academic Board Agenda

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Enclosure for the agenda

for the meeting of the Academic Board on 13 June 2001

Item 11. Report of the Teaching and Learning Committee

11.2 Second report of the meeting held on 26 April 2001

11.2.2 Quality Assurance and On-line Learning Policy

Quality Assurance and On-line learning Policy

Approved by the Academic Board on [.....]

Date of effect: [.....]

1. Policy

The University recognises that greater flexibility and a more student-centred approach to teaching is likely to improve learning outcomes. It also recognises the urgent need to further increase the richness of students' experiences of information technologies in their University studies. To help promote these changes in an efficient way, the University has adopted a centrally supported learning and teaching software (WebCT).

The purpose of this policy is to:

- (1) set out the principles underpinning the University's approach to quality assurance of on-line learning and learning resources;
- (2) identify responsibilities for ensuring that the principles are implemented;
- (3) be a resource document containing all Academic Board policies relating to quality assurance of on-line learning processes and learning resources using the centrally provided teaching and learning software; and
- (4) be a resource document containing the procedures used for quality assurance of on-line learning and learning resources, pursuant to the policy and to the requirements of the relevant administrative systems.

2. Background

When the University agreed on a common platform for web-based learning the Information Technology Committee convened a working party to consider issues of quality assurance for on-line learning and learning resources.

The provision of a centrally supported teaching and learning software raises many issues concerning the quality of on-line learning packages, their integration into existing Units of Study (UoS), the nature of the student experience and the means of evaluating the student experience and learning outcomes. Web-based on-line learning packages depart significantly from face-to-face teaching in a number of respects. Among them are that the learning outcomes, teaching and learning processes and resources for the support of this learning need to be much more explicit. The quality of the on-line learning package in regard to its contribution to student learning is dependent on its integration into the learning outcomes of the UoS and its technical robustness.

In December 2000, the Academic Board adopted an interim policy covering the use of the centrally provided teaching and learning software (WebCT) in Unit of Study curricula design. At that time some areas of quality assurance were mandatory while others were recommended.

Further development of the policy was undertaken and resulted in minor changes and the adoption of this policy.

3. Coverage

This policy is to apply to any staff member, academic, general, permanent or casual, who wishes to use the centrally-supported teaching and learning software located on the appropriate server belonging to the University Information Technology Service (ITS).

4. Procedures

(1) Cohesive approach to on-line learning

- (a) The University has adopted an integrated and cohesive approach to on-line learning. This approach focuses on training and supporting staff in the production of quality on-line learning environments. It also distributes the responsibility for quality assurance and on-line learning into three sets of issues in a collaborative approach to the development, delivery and evaluation of on-line learning: pedagogical curriculum issues, pedagogical management issues and technical issues.¹
- (b) A cohesive and integrated University approach to on-line learning and quality is one in which on-line learning resource support is reflected in all the important strategic plans of the University: faculty and University teaching and learning plans, faculty and University staffing plans, faculty and University policy and procedures, and faculty and University resource plans.
- (c) In outlining an integrated and cohesive approach to quality assurance three modes (A,B,C) have been identified for the use of on-line learning. They are:
 - (i) Mode A - Web Supplemented (participation on-line is optional for the student)

Enrolled students can access information on units of study that is additional to that available in the University *Calendar* or handbook. The information may include course descriptions and study guides, examination information, assessment overview, reading lists and other on-line learning resources. The information is used to supplement traditional forms of delivery.
 - (ii) Mode B - Web Dependent (participation on-line for each activity described in (a), (b) or (c) below is a compulsory requirement of participation although some face-to-face component is retained)
 - (a) students must use the web to interact with the education content necessary for study
 - (b) students must use the web to communicate with staff and/or other students
 - (c) students must use the web both to interact with content and to communicate with staff and/or other students

¹ Pedagogical curriculum issues include learning objectives, outcomes, assessment and evaluation. Pedagogical management issues focus on such questions as responsibility for the continued development and maintenance of on-line materials, standards and procedures for the maintenance of on-line learning packages, staff training requirements, and levels of on-line student learning support. Technical issues include sustainability, technical quality, robustness, scalability and the degree of technical assistance provided to students once the on-line component of the UoS is live.

(iii) Mode C – Fully On-line

All interactions with staff and students, education content, learning activities, assessment and support services are integrated and delivered on line.

(2) Procedures and instruments for quality assurance

(a) To ensure that on-line learning procedures do not lead to a reduction in the quality of student learning experiences, the University has identified the need for the following quality assurance mechanisms:

- (i) staff training and development in the pedagogical and technical aspects of on-line teaching and learning;
- (ii) the design and development processes for going “live” with the on-line learning package;
- (iii) the evaluation of student experience and learning outcomes.

(b) The following process and instrument is mandatory for quality assurance:

- (i) **Application to Activate a Unit of Study Website**
This application contains an approval by the Unit of Study (UoS) co-ordinator (and Head of Department/School) in particular circumstances) and an approval by the WebCT Co-ordinator for the website to go “live” as part of a UoS curriculum. In giving an approval for activation, the UoS Co-ordinator is assuring the pedagogical quality of the material and the WebCT Co-ordinator is assuring the technical quality of the website along with the provision of technical support to students.

(c) The following processes and instruments are recommended for quality assurance:

- (i) **Workshops**
The workshop program in the Flexible On-line Learning project offers staff an introduction to both pedagogical and technical issues which are relevant to on-line teaching and learning.
- (ii) **Peer Discussion/Review Checklist**
Using the on-line environment to publish components of curricula produces a tangible product which is different to the ephemeral nature of face-to-face teaching. For this reason, the publication of such material needs to be more along the lines of the processes used by researchers when publishing, notably feedback. Therefore, discussion and review of website materials by peers is an invaluable quality assurance process.
- (iii) **Online Unit of Study Outline Template**
The provision of on-line resources as part of a UoS curriculum raises potentially serious threat to the cohesion of the curriculum and the quality of learning. The purpose of the On-line Unit of Study Outline Template is to reveal how the on-line resources are integrated into the UoS curriculum.

(3) Timeframe for development of quality assurance processes

(a) Short term, medium term and long term goals associated with the development of quality assurance processes for on-line learning were developed and identified (as set out in Appendix 5) as:

- (i) staff training and development in the pedagogical and technical aspects of on-line teaching and learning;
- (ii) the design and development processes for going “live” with the on-line learning packages;
- (iii) the evaluation of student experience and learning outcomes.

5. Authority

(1) Development/consultation

In response to a request from the chair of Academic Board, the PVC (IT) convened a working party which included a PVC representative from the College of Health Sciences, a PVC representative from the College of Sciences and Technology, a PVC representative from the College of Humanities and Social Science, a representative from the Department of Computer Science, a representative from the University Teaching and Learning Committee, a representative from the University Information Technology Committee, the WebCT Coordinator, and a convener from the Institute of Teaching and Learning. This working party produced the framework for this policy which was then reviewed by the University Information Technology Committee, the University Teaching and Learning Committee, and the Academic Board.

(2) Management responsibility

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Professor Paul Ramsden and Assistant Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Information Technology), Associate Professor Simon Carlile, have the overall management responsibility for the policy.

(3) Implementation and monitoring

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Professor Paul Ramsden and Assistant Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Information Technology), Associate Professor Simon Carlile, have the responsibility for the implementation and monitoring of this policy.

(4) Review

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Professor Paul Ramsden and Assistant Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Information Technology), Associate Professor Simon Carlile have the responsibility for conducting reviews of the policy. This is the first publication of this policy.

(5) Communication

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Professor Paul Ramsden has the responsibility for communicating the policy and authorised updates.

(6) Contact

Inquiries about this policy can be sent to Robert Ellis, Senior Lecturer, Institute for Teaching and Learning, X13781, r.ellis@itl.usyd.edu.

6. Related information

- (1) Related University legislation, resolutions, policies and procedures include:
 - (a) Academic Board Resolution: *Creation, Variation and Deletion of Award Courses and Units of Study* at http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/planning/policy/acad/Creat_Var_Del.pdf
 - (b) Academic Board Resolution: *Management and Evaluation of Teaching* at http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/planning/policy/acad/Mgmt_Eval_Teach.pdf
- (2) University policies superseded or replaced by this policy:
 - (a) Quality Assurance and On-line Learning Interim Policy
- (3) References and additional information include:
 - (a) Flexible Learning At the University of Sydney, website, at <http://itl.usyd.edu.au/flexlearn/Default.htm>
 - (b) Flexible Online Learning Project, website, at <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/intranet/webct/>

Appendix 1 – Supporting Quality Assurance Processes

Examples Of Workshops Offered To Support Staff Using WebCT In Curricula Design.

The Flexible Online Learning Project and the Institute for Teaching and Learning will develop and conduct workshops as follows:

Beginners WebCT V3.0 - This series of workshops provides staff with the necessary skills and initial functional understanding of the main teaching and learning areas in WebCT.

1. Introduction to On-line Teaching
2. Using WebCT's On-line Communications Tools
3. Designing Communication Activities
4. Using WebCT for On-line Assessment
5. Building On-line Content Material
6. Integrating the On-line Learning Resources with the UoS Curriculum

Course Writers Workshop:

These workshops are for those who would like assistance and advice with their on-line course design and development.

Appendix 2 – Application To Activate Unit Of Study Website As Part Of A Curriculum For Enrolled University Of Sydney Students

Staff Details

Surname	Title	First Name	Initial
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Unit of Study (UoS) Information

UoS name	UoS Code	Date for UoS to be activated on-line (eg Sem 1 2001)
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UoS Website Pedagogical Design and Development

1.	Has the website been discussed/reviewed with a peer?	yes	no
2.	Does the website contain an On-line Unit Outline consistent with the template?	yes	no
3.	Have you prepared a process to distribute information to students on how to access the site?	yes	no
4.	Is the on-line learning help available to students identified on the UoS homepage?	yes	no
5.	Is there a date of publication and copyright notice on the UoS home page?	yes	no

6. Unit of Study Coordinator

I have viewed the on-line resources and approve their delivery to students on-line in the following modes (*circle one letter only*): A B C²

NameSignatureDate.....

7. Head of department/school's signature (or nominee) for modes B and C only

NameSignatureDate.....

Unit of Study Website Technical Check

In order for students using the on-line UoS component to be supported by the ITS help desk, the site is required to be technically robust. To ensure that the site is technically robust, the WebCT group checks the site using the following questions as a guide.

8.	Do all internal links function properly?	yes	no
9.	Do all external links function properly and not breach copyright?	yes	no
10.	Is the text readable?	yes	no
11.	Are navigation processes clear?	yes	no
12.	Is the hierarchical structure of the website at an appropriate depth?	yes	no
13.	Are download times on a variety of machines acceptable?	yes	no
14.	Is there on-line technical help identified on the homepage?	yes	no
15.	Are the appropriate resources linked to the website (library, user's guide, computer access information)?	yes	no

16. WebCT Coordinator (or nominee)

I authorize hosting of the on-line resources for the UoS on the ITS server and the provision of the appropriate on-line technical help to students.

NameSignatureDate.....

² There are three modes of on-line resource development for Unit of Studies at the University of Sydney: (i) Mode A - Web Supplemented (student online participation is optional) (ii) Mode B - Web Dependent (student online participation for some percentage of the curriculum is mandatory) (iii) Mode C – Fully On-line.

Explanation of Points in the Application To Activate Unit Of Study Website As Part Of A Curriculum For Enrolled University Of Sydney Students.

1. The responsibility for the peer review lies in the hands of the UoS Coordinator. The peer review process can take any form that satisfies the UoS coordinator. A suggested framework is available (appendix 3).
2. A suggested On-line Unit of Study Outline format is in Appendix 4. The provision of on-line resources as part of a UoS curriculum raises serious threat to the cohesion of the curriculum and the quality of learning. The purpose of an On-line Unit of Study Outline is to reveal how the on-line resources are integrated into the UoS curriculum to students.
3. Before students can access a website to gain any information about its contents, they require written instructions about how to access the site. E.g. password, user ID, access centre information. Generic instructions are mailed to WebCT designers but they need to adapt them to their learning context and arrange for their distribution to students.
4. Online learning requires learning support for students. UoS curricula, that include on-line components, nominate who students should contact about learning on-line issues.
5. The date of publication indicates how recently materials have been reviewed and the copyright notice protects intellectual property.
6. The UoS Coordinator holds the power for pedagogical approval for mode A³.
7. Both the UoS Coordinator and the Head of Department/School share the approval for on-line learning resources that fall into categories B and C.
8. This question addresses the functionality of the internal links, i.e. that they work.
9. This question addresses the functionality of the external links, i.e. that they work and that they do not contravene copyright.
10. This question deals with issues such as font size and font colour.
11. This question deals with the useability of the site, i.e. that students have sufficient and clearly structured instructions about how to navigate throughout the site.
12. This question also deals with the useability of the site, i.e. that students do not have to click too many times before they get to various resources.
13. This question deals with how long students will have to wait before the on-line learning resources appear on their computers as they download.
14. This question identifies the necessity of having the on-line technical help for students, which is provided by the WebCT coordinator's team.
15. This question identifies the necessity of having the various appropriate resources available to students.
16. This signature is a technical sign off that allows the materials to exist on the ITS server and that the WebCT team will ensure that students will be provided with on-line technical help.

³ There are three modes of on-line resource development for Unit of Studies at the University of Sydney: (i) Mode A - Web Supplemented (student online participation is optional) (ii) Mode B - Web Dependent (student online participation for some percentage of the curriculum is mandatory) (iii) Mode C - Fully On-line

Appendix 3 – Suggested Peer Review Process for Unit of Study Websites

This proforma should be read in conjunction with the On-line Units of Study Outline Template and is designed to assist Staff who wish to ask a peer to engage in a review process of a Website that accompanies one of their Unit of Studies.

No	Curriculum Review Questions	Notes from Reviewer
1	How does the website support student learning? ie How does it relate to the Unit of Study learning outcomes?	It should be possible to clearly express how a website will support student learning in one sentence. A well-designed educational website displays a clear relationship between its purpose and the learning outcomes of the UoS.
2	In which mode of online UoS publication does the UoS website appear to fall? Category A B or C? <i>(This should be clear by looking at the Unit Outline and the Website)</i>	There are three modes of on-line resource development for Unit of Studies at the University of Sydney: (i) Mode A - Web Supplemented (student online participation is optional) (ii) Mode B - Web Dependent (student online participation for some percentage of the curriculum is mandatory) (iii) Mode C – Fully On-line
3	If the online materials fall into one of the replacement categories, ie B or C, do equivalent but not equal learning processes exist in case a student experiences technical difficulties?	Equivalent but not equal learning processes refers to the preparation of alternatives should enrolled students experience any technical difficulties that prevent them from fulfilling the requirements of the UoS. For example, if a student is unable to complete a bulletin board discussion posting because of technical difficulties, is there an alternative written task that a student could submit in hard copy? If the materials fall into category A, ie supplementary materials, then any technical difficulties would not stop students from completing all the requirements of the UoS.
4	If the online materials fall into one of the replacement categories, how well are they related to other aspects of teaching and learning in the Unit of Study?	Online learning processes should be integrated into the whole curriculum. This is especially important for materials which students use as their main curriculum components.
5	If an assessment component is dependent on online materials, is this clarified in the assessment framework?	Any assessment components that rely on students engaging with online learning processes should be drawn to students attention so that students can identify the learning strategies and resources which are necessary to engage with the assessment as successfully, and as early in the semester, as possible.
No	Student-Focussed Review Questions	Notes from Reviewer
6	What student learning commitments and contacts do the online materials require? Are they in keeping with normal requirements for class preparation?	Online learning materials have implicit learning commitments. It would be unreasonable to expect students to complete online class preparation in excess of the normal preparation time expected for UoSs. Online learning materials also assume access to appropriate technology. Will students have the technology at home or are they expected to access the website primarily from campus computer laboratories? If it is the latter, which computer laboratory will then use and when can they do this?
7	Are there print-based instructions that explain to students their access to computers and how to log onto	Students using the USyd online learning network for the first time will be unsure how to access it. They will need detailed printed instructions of where and how to log on.

	the UoS website?	
8	Is it clear to students how they are to engage with and work through the online materials?	Online learning may be a new experience for many students. Clear instructions, modelled learning processes and other strategies are useful to help reveal the purpose of online materials.
9	What is the online educational help available? How? (FAQ, email, site map, discussion list).	When UoS have online learning components in the curriculum, students will require some sort of online educational assistance in completing online learning processes. The frequency of student enquiries can be reduced by a FAQ (frequently-asked-questions) list which can deal with educational issues and/or technical issues.
10	If additional software other than WebCT is integrated into the website, what sort of technical support do lecturers expect the ITS to provide to students? (eg does the website expect students to download Microsoft Word documents or Adobe Acrobat Reader documents?)	Some UoS websites require learners to download materials into other software for various purposes, eg. word-processors so that they can edit them. To do this, as long as the scope of the technical issues related to such software is simple, then the online technical help can suffice. Lecturers should be aware of the scope of technical assistance they expect to be given to their students, so that any student requests for help can be met.
11	Are the online materials functional? For example, do all links work and make sense?	One of the technical issues of UoS websites is the functionality of the website. An important functional issue is the operation of links. All links should work, and the purpose of the link in the context of the learning process should be clear to the student user.
12	Are the online materials useable? For example, is it easy to understand the relationship amongst the learning tasks? Are they easy to read?	Another of the technical issues of UoS websites is the useability of the website. This refers to design issues, such as font size, page backgrounds, colours chosen, relationships between the purposes of the materials on websites.
13	What access do students have to have in order to engage with the online learning processes. Is their adequate access available?	Issues of equity require all students to have equal opportunities to learn. If successful engagement with curriculum requires students to use online learning resources, departments have a responsibility to ensure there is sufficient access. Access to computer resources can be a combination of campus-based and home computers, but when students do not have private access, campus computers should be available.
14	Other points specific to the Unit of Study...	Units of Study using on-line materials will reflect their own learning context which have specific needs that the materials are designed to fulfil
15	Other points	

Appendix 4 –On-line Units of Study Outline Template

Note: It is recommended that outlines for On-line Units of Study follow this template

[Unit of Study code]: [Unit of Study title]

Welcome & Unit of Study Description

[This description should be the same as the one in the handbook]

Unit of Study Aims/Goals

[Use the following points to help you situate the Unit of Study in relation to the course as a whole]

The relationship of this Unit to previous UoS

The key focus of this UoS

The relationship to subsequent UoS

Relationship between this UoS and University generic attributes

Learning Commitments and Contact

[If you intend to use a variety of learning situations, what expectations do you have of your students in terms of their minimum learning commitments to the face-to-face learning, on-line learning and other components of your unit of study?]

Daytime attendance – (How many hours and where?)

Nighttime attendance – (How many hours and where?)

Weekend workshops/residentials – (How many days and where?)

On-line commitments – (How many hours and where?)

Other

Learning Situations

[What learning situations are you likely to use in your unit of study? What will you expect students to do?]

Lecturers/seminars

Tutorials/workshops/practicals

Laboratories

On-line learning

Field Trips

Work placement

Independent Study

Other

Learning Preparation

[What preparation do you expect learners to do or have completed before they begin your unit of study?]

Advice about Computer Access (if appropriate)

Particular skills

Pre-Reading

Other

Student Learning Outcomes

[What are the student learning outcomes of your unit of study? These are normally written from a student perspective.]

“ By the end of this UoS, students will be able to ……………”

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Assessment

[What are the grade descriptors, assessment components, due dates and weight of the assessment components ?]

A description of the grade descriptors.

No.	Component(eg essay, exam, etc)	Due Date	Weight
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Unit of Study Program

[ie. This is usually organized in milestones which could be weeks, modules, knowledge groupings, concepts]

Week/Module/other	Topic	Description
1		
2		
3		
cont'd		

Unit of Study References

[List of core texts and textbook/s, and other broad/generic learning resources: Essential, Recommended, and/or Additional Reading, web links and university policies can be included at this point]

Essential Publications

Recommended Publications

Web Links

University Policies – Referencing, Assignment Extensions, Deadlines, Academic Honesty

Staff Contact Information

[Who do students contact for the duration of the unit of study?

-for administrative help

-for learning help

-for technical help.

This information should be visible on the homepage of the Unit of Study]

END OF TEMPLATE

Appendix 5 –Timeframe for development of quality assurance processes

The scope covered by each of these dimensions should be tempered by the time frames considered as outlined below.

QA mechanisms On-line mode	Time Frame	Staff training and development in the pedagogical and technical aspects of on-line teaching and learning	The design and development processes for going “live” with the on-line learning package	The evaluation of student experience and learning outcomes	QA I n s t r u c t i o n s
Supplementary/ Replacement and wholly on-line UoS learning resources	Short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - workshops (appendix 1) - consultation and advice for staff building sites - development of coherent support network, including: ITL, Library, Printery, Flexible Learning Project, Student Services etc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -an application to activate a website as part of a UoS curriculum (appendix 2) - peer review (appendix 3) -useability and functionality review prior to release (appendix 2) -templates (UoS Outlines for on-line curriculum components; Style Guides) (appendix 4) - quality checklists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - trialling on-line materials with students - peer review prior to release (appendix 3) 	
	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - websites designed for on-line staff training etc - development of local expertise by specific individuals within faculties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a quality assurance manual - exemplar sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UoS level feedback from students 	
	Long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - faculty and University strategic plans - dissemination of expertise throughout the University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - faculty and University strategic plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - aggregate feedback from students 	