

## **Expanding staff repertoires of ‘fit-for-purpose’ assessment practices in first year subjects**

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### ***Abstract***

This Nuts and Bolts session will present a project that addresses the design and review of ‘fit-for-purpose’ assessment tasks and practices to support the development of new and revised James Cook University courses and in particular, first year subjects. The session shares with the sector a good practice initiative that enhances the experience of commencing students. Participants in this session will explore a set of guidelines to assist development of ‘fit-for-purpose’ assessment tasks. Further they will take part in a peer review process of a (re)designed first year task.

### ***Session overview***

James Cook University (JCU) will soon launch a refreshed suite of courses that reflect the newly developed Strategic Intent and University Plan. This Nuts and Bolts session will present a project that addresses the design and review of ‘fit-for-purpose’ assessment tasks and practices to support the development of these new courses and in particular, first year subjects. The project is part of a National Australian Teaching and Learning Project: ‘Sustaining Distributive Leadership in Learning and Teaching: Cascade and Perpetual Effectiveness of the Faculty Scholar Model Project’. This session shares with the sector a good practice initiative that enhances the experience of commencing students. It also aligns with the conference theme in providing quality assessment in first year that provides foundation to future studies in the ‘refreshed courses’.

The first year assessment project is located in the Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences (including the School of Indigenous Australian Studies). The faculty incorporates a broad range of disciplines (social work, psychology, languages and education to name a few) and serves students enrolled in several campuses and many modes. Hence leading cross-discipline collaborations within and across campuses, a common goal for James Cook University’s ‘curriculum refresh’, has been an integral (and challenging) component of this project.

The notion of ‘fit-for-purpose’ assessment tasks is based on Phil Race’s (2005, 2006) developments in higher education teaching and learning. He proposes that for tasks to be ‘fit-for-purpose’ we are to consider the following principles to guide design and review: valid assessment, reliable assessment, authentic assessment and transparent assessment. These principles are to align with first year experience literature that suggests small tasks and quick feedback (or assessment for transition); formative tasks and intervention strategies (or assessment for development); and building

towards a culminating or summative task (or assessment for achievement) (Kift, 2005; Taylor, 2008; Wilson and Lizzio, 2009).

Faculty workshops, conducted in April on the Cairns and Townsville campus, have provided a platform for staff development on first year experience principles and 'fit-for-purpose' assessment principles. Staff were invited to bring one assessment task for (re)design in light of principles. They were provided with a set of guidelines to assist in the design and review of the assessment task. These guidelines, in the form of a booklet, will provide a platform for discussion in the Nuts and Bolts session. The booklet was adopted from the University of Melbourne's (Harris, 2005) 'Guide for Reviewing Assessment: prompts and guidelines for monitoring and enhancing assessment practices'.

Further, the (re)designed assessment tasks were submitted in early June for peer review. Following review and discussion, assessment tasks are to be uploaded into a Faculty Assessment Bank on the Faculty Intranet in September/October 2009. One or two assessment task examples will be shared in the Nuts and Bolts session for further peer review.

This 'Nuts and Bolts' session will share and discuss the outcomes of the project to date and provide input into the follow up workshops and presentation at James Cook University and the Distributed Leadership Project National Roundtable.

### ***References:***

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