IIUM ASSESSMENT POLICY

1. Introduction

The International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) recognises that assessment is an integral component of effective teaching and learning. The quality of assessment is vital to the University's claim about the quality of its graduates, which defines the trust and confidence of stakeholders and the general public. It is undisputable that assessment determines the quality of student outcomes. Assessment shapes the learning that will take place; it molds what students will learn and how they will learn it. In a nutshell, assessment is a catalyst for progress and reform in educational practices.

To conduct quality assessment there is a need to develop, document, and establish an Assessment Policy. This policy should aim to inform instructors, students, and stakeholders about the IIUM's approaches to assessment. The policy needs to spell out how the University develops and uses tests, examinations, and other assessment tasks in making decisions about student learning and capabilities. The policy, hence, will enable the University to strategise, benchmark and set standards for the performance, monitoring, recognition, and evaluation of its assessment methods and approaches. This write-up proposes a set of statements for the Assessment Policy, which will guide all faculty members who are engaged in the assessment processes.

2. Statement of Assessment Policy

The International Islamic University Malaysia takes the responsibility for the degrees and other academic qualifications that are awarded in its name. This responsibility inevitably positions assessment as a means for students to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes that have been specified for the programmes and courses. Assessment also serves as a means for instructors to substantiate their professional obligation to satisfy content and performance standards. This position is consistent with the IIUM's vision and mission, in which assessment has been identified as an important thrust of the University's 10-year plan in Teaching and Learning Strategy.

The Assessment Policy applies broadly to all kinds of assessment in the University's undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Underscored by a set of guiding principles, the policy covers multidimensional learning processes, accounting for the commonality, diversity, and distinctiveness of learning outcomes across programmes. Regardless of the method of assessment, the policy is applicable in the development and use of the conventional paper and pencil tests, high-stakes written examinations, computer-based tests, and performance (a.k.a., alternative) assessment. It is designed primarily for tests, examinations and performances that instructors construct and use in measuring, evaluating, and grading their students.

The Assessment Policy, however, is not intended for university-wide standardized testing, namely the English Placement Test (EPT) and Arabic Placement Test (APT). These tests, in fact, should closely observe the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (AERA, APA, NCME, 1999) and the revised Code of Fair Testing Practices in Education (JCTP, 2004). In addition, the policy does not cover professional licensure and certifications; nor does it cover the psychometric assessment of students' personalities, attitudes, and aptitudes.

The Assessment Policy addresses the responsibilities of the key players. For the Assessment Policy to be implemented effectively, formal roles and responsibilities are distributed across the University, through the Deputy Rector (Academic and Internationalisation), the University's Quality Assurance Unit, the Centre of Studiess' (including Institutes' and Centres') Deans, Boards of Examiners, Course Coordinators, and individual instructors. Last but not least, students have their part to play in the assessment process; they have rights, which correspond to the University's responsibilities. Students also hold the responsibility of ensuring that they are aware of, and comply with, the assessment requirements that apply to them, and of reporting any anomalies and problems.

3.   **Definition**

The following items are in addition to the terms that have been interpreted in the Student Academic Performance Evaluation Rules (Part I, provisions 4, pp. 8-11).

Assessment is the process by which the University is able to certify that a student has achieved the learning outcomes and academic standards for the

programme. Assessment can take a range of forms, both invigilated and noninvigilated.

Formative Assessment occurs during instruction, and its primary aim is to determine whether or not a student has achieved sufficient mastery of specific concepts or skills.

Learning Outcome is set of predetermined learning targets of what a student will know and be able to do at the end of a course or programme. The targets, which would involve the learning of complex, real life behaviours, tasks, and performance, should include the aspects of knowledge and understanding, intellectual abilities, practical skills, attitudes, and generic competencies, which are applicable across domains of learning.

Performance Assessment is the measurement and evaluation of targeted learning behaviours / outcomes, which cannot be directly assessed using time-constrained written tests or examinations.

Summative Assessment takes place at the conclusion of instruction. It has been used primarily in the form of a written test / examination to certify student achievement in particular courses. Summative assessment is least useful in helping students to perform error correction and make progressive improvement.

4. Purpose of Assessment

The primary purpose of assessment at the International Islamic University Malaysia is to attain higher quality in student learning. In this respect, this policy aims to enable a balanced practice of the assessment of and assessment for learning in the University.

While the assessment of learning offers evidence of student achievement, which is crucial for institutional accountability and public consumption, assessment for learning provides opportunities to trigger students to achieve more (Stiggins, 2002), including the desired generic competency. In other words, assessment should enable the University to audit and certify that a student has achieved the learning outcomes and academic standards for the grades and qualifications. More importantly, assessment should serve as a powerful tool to enhance teaching and learning.

On the basis of the preceding statement of purpose, the University specifically expects assessment to:

- provide a fair, reliable and valid basis for the assignment of grades or awards for students' work and performance;

- promote students' mastery of concepts and skills by providing adequate modelling, practice, monitoring, and feedback on students' performance;

- direct progressive development of complex learning outcomes, which include the attainment of generic competency, i.e., language competencies, communication, information literacy, research and inquiry, personal and intellectual autonomy, and the understanding of professional, social, moral, and Islamic values through the use of meaningful and authentic assessment tasks;

- record and aggregate student achievements against the predetermined learning outcomes;

- assist instructors in evaluating the effectiveness of their teaching;

- facilitate the review and improve the quality of the curriculum, courses, and programmes; and

- define and protect academic standards deemed necessary for the purpose of accountability.

5. Guiding Principles

This section presents the general principles that will steer all assessment processes in the University. The principles are derived from the published literature and guidelines on best practices of assessment in higher education (e.g., IIUM Strategic Planning, 2003; Malaysian National Qualification Framework, 2003; Mutch and Brown, 2001; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Stiggins, 2002; University of Plymouth, 2002; University of New South Wales, 2003). A detailed description and discussion of the principles, content and performance standards, and processes and procedures are to be proposed in the subsequent workshops and documentation.

i. Assessment is valid

Validity is the extent to which a test, examination, or other assessment task measures what it is supposed to measure, namely the targeted learning outcomes. Valid assessment is standard-based and aligned with learning outcomes. It is based on predetermined and clearly articulated criteria and associated with specifically formulated standards of knowledge, skills, and competencies. Only when the test has been validated can justifiable interpretations and inferences be made about student achievement on the test. It is the responsibility of the test developer (i.e. course coordinator, instructors, and / or examiners) to establish and demonstrate evidence of validity, in particular the content-related validity of a specific examination, test, and other assessment tasks. Therefore, published validation mechanisms, standards, and procedures are to be instituted in each Centre of Studies / centre / department to uphold this principle.

ii. Assessment is reliable

Reliability refers to the degree to which scores that students have obtained from a test are free from errors. Measurement errors are likely to originate from poorly constructed questions (items), overly difficult and/or easy items, and lack of clear and consistent processes and procedures for the setting, scoring, grading, and moderation of students' responses, answers, and work. Therefore, documented standards, processes, and procedures are to be instituted in each Centre of Studies/centre/department to minimise measurement errors.

iii. Assessment is fair

Fairness is the degree to which the assessment method meets students' rights, responsibilities, and expectations, which have been communicated to (and agreed upon by) them at the onset of the academic session. In the case of assessment other than written tests / examinations, the following criteria are applicable in order to observe this principles:

• Communication about assessment is made explicit, regular, and accessible.

• Reasonable workload, in terms of time on task and proportion of final grade accounted for, is applied.

• Opportunities are given to students to play a part in the selection of the assessment tasks.

• Concrete, immediate, constructive, and informative feedback is used to enhance the fairness of assessment.

• Students' efforts to correct their errors are recognized and graded accordingly.

• In non-routine novel problem-solving situations there may be more than one single correct answer; instructors should be willing and committed to accommodate divergent, yet acceptable solutions to the problem.

• Scoring rubric is used for students to monitor and self-evaluate their performance, and thereby, authenticate the fairness of the assessment.

iv. Assessment is supported by professional collaboration

Quality assessment only develops and progresses in an environment of professional collegiality. It demands the involvement of peers to review the test specification, test questions, measuring instruments (the test paper), scoring key, and setting standards and cut-scores. Similar rigorous engagement of "experts," i.e. those who are wellversed in the subject matter, are needed in practising the other assessment tasks. In addition, regular, but not necessarily frequent, review by external experts will support the practice of quality assessment.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The quality assessment process requires substantial contributions from many parties. In the context of the IIUM, the following list proposes the distribution of roles and responsibilities. [Note. The proposal should be read in light of the revised provisions as specified in the IIUM's Student Academic Performance Evaluation Rules (2005, Part III, provisions 22-44)].

i. The University

The IIUM, through the Deputy Rector (Academic and Internationalistion), supported by the office of the Director of the Quality Assurance Unit, has the responsibility to ensure that:

a. assessment practices are valid, consistent, and fair across University programmes;

b. assessment processes and procedures are monitored at the level of courses so that the assessment principles and standards are observed;

c. resources are available to provide staff with access to information and expertise on the theory and practices of assessment;

d. related documents and provisions, in particular the Student Academic Performance Evaluation Rules (2005), recommendations of Boards of Studies, Boards of Academic Review, and the periodic reports on Balanced Score Cards are made available, and observed, reviewed and revised, when the need arises.

ii. Centre of Studies, Institutes, Centres, and Departments

Centre of Studies, Institutes, Centres, and Departments through the Deans and Boards of Examiners, and Boards of Appeal are responsible for ensuring that:

a. the Assessment Policy and supplementary documents, including Student Academic Performance Evaluation Rules, handouts, quality processes and procedures, and directives are made available to all faculty members;

b. new staff are informed of, and given opportunities to be trained in the policy, practice, and procedures of assessment;

c. an assessment plan / blueprint for every degree programme, focusing on the relative importance of the learning outcomes - derived from the mapping of the desired attributes of its graduates - is designed and reviewed periodically; the blueprint is to be used as the basis for the development and selection of assessment methods / tasks and the allocation of scores in each course;

d. Centre of Studies-wide assessment criteria and performance standards, consistent with the University's Assessment Policy, are subjected to regular environmental scanning, benchmarking, faculty's consensus, and documentation; gap analysis,

e. assessment events are coordinated in order to provide appropriate and reasonable workload across courses;

f. Senate's approval for a significant redistribution of grades is sought, and statistically defensible methods are used when scores are scaled and combined;

g. in addition to the course outline, students are provided in   advance with a handout on assessment tasks and events, detailing   out what is expected of them in each course;

h. assessment practices, including alternative assessment practices for students with disabilities, are explicit, fair and consistent;

i. students are routinely involved practices in the Centre of Studies; in discussions of assessment

j. mechanisms and procedures to address students' grievances and appeals are instituted and made known to stakeholders.

iii. Course Coordinators

The course coordinator has the responsibility to ensure that:

a. policies, practices, and procedures on assessment are adhered to in relation to the course(s) for which he / she is responsible;

b. regular review is conducted of the suitability of the existing assessment approach with the objectives and learning outcomes   of the course(s);

c. assessment approach reflects a balanced use of written tests / examinations and alternative assessment;

d. detailed guidelines of the alternative assessment, which describe the specification of tasks, timelines, scoring rubric, and the distribution of scores for the final grade, are collaboratively   developed and shared by instructors who are teaching the course; e. the course

outline and the assessment plan are distributed   in the first week of the semester, providing room for negotiations and amendments;

f.   scores that students obtain from other assessment tasks are   to be recorded online as scheduled, using the University's Continuous Assessment Management (CAM) system;

g.   students are made aware of the range of possible formats for the written examination by the instructor(s);

h.   all examiners / markers / scorers of the course are appropriately briefed; the score / grade awarded for a piece of work can be   defended in terms of the course standards;

i.   students have the opportunity to view and discuss their progress

and status prior to the end-of-semester examination;

v. Academic Staff

Individual members of the academic staff have the responsibility of ensuring that they:

a.   are familiar with the University's, Centre of Studies, and department's policy relating to assessment;

b.   communicate clearly the requirements for assessment to students;

c.   perform assessment-related responsibilities as indicated in the Student Academic Performance Evaluation Rules (2005, Part III, provisions 22-44);

d.   comply with the policies regarding the submission of scores and grades for examinations, assignments and other assessment items;

e.   are allowed to review and revise the assessment criteria and tasks according to procedures set by the respective Centre of Studies,

f.   use alternative assessment to give students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning progress, elicit performance, receive

feedback, identify and correct errors, and trigger continuous improvement;

g.   are available to students for a reasonable level of consultation and feedback;

h.   do not discuss or disclose personal information, including results, about students to anyone who does not have a legitimate right   and need to have access to the information;

i.   contribute to discussion on student assessment;

v. Students

Students have a right to:

a.   be treated fairly and consistently in all aspects of the assessment policy and practices;

b.   be informed of all aspects of the assessment policies and practices in each course; including the criteria to be met and penalties for breaches;

c.   the timely return of their work on specific assessment tasks, allowing for error correction;

d.   information and feedback which prompt them to self-evaluate, adjust, and attune their own performance against the criteria for   each course and the performance of other students;

e.   be informed of appeal processes. Students have a responsibility to:

   i.   ensure that they are properly enrolled and that they observe attendance and disciplinary rules; otherwise they may be refused assessment;

   ii.   be aware of the rules of progression and requirements for graduation;

iii. inform themselves on the University policies about academic honesty, legitimate cooperation, plagiarism and cheating, and timely submission of work;

iv. ensure that they understand the requirements for examinations and other assessment tasks;

v. ensure that the submitted assessment tasks are their own work; group-work is clearly acknowledged;

vi. be aware of the means for seeking assistance and advice on assessment, including appeals and dispute resolution;

vii. seek advice from the course authorities if they are confident that particular assessment tasks are not fair, either in terms of the workload or proportion of allocated scores;

viii. be aware that a major objective of assessment is the promotion of learning; for each course, a reasonable proportion of the final grade comprises scores that they have obtained from alternative assessment tasks;

ix. use assessment to develop strategies for learning and self-assessment; and

7.   Implications

On the basis of the desired attributes of the graduates, there is an urgent need for the development of programme-based learning outcomes, which cover content-specific knowledge and skills, and the generic skills deemed important by stakeholders, employers and significant others; it is to be facilitated by the University's Academic Board. The exercise should lead up to:

a.   A series of workshops to be participated in by the course coordinators and resource persons of the respective academic programmes, aiming at the construction and mapping of the learning outcomes of the courses.

b.   Centre of Studies-based efforts to link assessment tasks and learning outcomes across courses, which would serve as a framework in the formulation of an assessment plan / blueprint in each programme.

c.   The development of well-articulated and shared criteria and performance standards for faculty members, taking into account the commonality and uniqueness of particular programmes.

d.   The establishment of empirically sound indicators of assessment practice which are useful for intra- and inter-institution comparisons, the results of which may contribute to the needs of the nation to achieve quality higher education and academic integrity.

e.   Continuous training and skill enhancement programmes, especially the inhouse training in knowledge and skills of student assessment.

f.   The monitoring and evaluation of assessment performance of lecturers; hence, offering an alternative approach to the assessment of instructors' professional competency (CLA).

g.   The evaluation of outcomes of the Assessment Policy in line with the University's vision and mission.