

Enhancing the Assessment of Learning in Australian Higher Education: Biological Science

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Project Summary

The purpose of this project is to develop and strategically disseminate resources designed to enhance the assessment of learning in the biological sciences in Australian universities. The project will involve fieldwork on assessment issues, current approaches and best practice in eight Australian universities. We propose an innovative methodology that has three principal components. First, we will consult widely across the sector to develop **ideas, exemplars and practical, ready-to-use resources** that will be of immediate value in the enhancement of assessment practices. Second, at a broader and more strategic level, we will collaborate to design **curriculum-level resources and frameworks** designed to facilitate systemic and sustainable transformation in assessment practices. Finally, through a carefully planned dissemination strategy we will **engage the disciplinary community** in the biological sciences in Australian higher education in an ongoing discussion about assessment practices and provide a **new mechanism for the sharing of the latest assessment resources**.

Project Rationale and Approach

The primary goal of the project is to promote and support strategic change in learning, teaching and curriculum development of biology in Australian universities. This will be achieved through the development and dissemination of resources to enhance and transform approaches to assessment in the discipline. The project team attaches the highest priority to collaborating with representatives of the discipline across the Australian higher education sector with a view to developing resources which reflect contemporary issues and trends and which are responsive to the diverse needs of staff and students across a range of institutional types and contexts.

The project team will adopt a strategic approach to generating and disseminating resources that will support long-term and sustainable change in the discipline. At one level, we will develop practical strategies for both formative and summative assessment that will be of immediate relevance and usefulness in learning and teaching. At a broader and more strategic level, resources will be designed to support sustainable transformation of assessment practices through an emphasis on their role in curriculum design, delivery and evaluation.

Our approach to the project will:

- recognise the central role that assessment plays in curriculum enhancement;
- recognise the importance of assessment in ensuring and monitoring academic standards; and

- recognise the different needs of academics who are carrying out classroom teaching and those who are in curriculum leadership roles.

The proposed method will:

- involve extensive consultation with the disciplinary community;
- facilitate the sharing and adoption of good practice and establish the pre-conditions for future benchmarking;
- build on previous Australian work, in particular the *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities* project;
- draw on existing networks and resources, including UniServe and the Australian Council of Deans of Science; and
- acknowledge and draw on the work of the UK Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) for Bioscience.

Through fieldwork in eight universities and a series of 'roundtables' in each state, the project will produce a website and companion booklet, *Assessing Learning in the Biological Sciences: Ideas, strategies and resources*, which will provide an ongoing forum for the sharing of assessment resources. Our primary objective is for the resources we develop to reflect and take account of a range of learning styles, experiences and contexts. It is expected that the new materials, while situated in the biological sciences domain, will be widely applicable across the disciplines.