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Title of paper: Leading Edge Curriculum Framework: Assuring the combined assessment journey

Main purpose of the paper: For approval

Presenter(s): Professor David Kennedy, Dean of Digital Education and Rachel Dearlove, Director of Registry and Education Services

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Purpose of the paper

To receive a proposal for the adoption of 'stage-gate assessment' with supervised, assured and open assessment types as part of the implementation of the Leading Edge Curriculum Framework.

Relation to strategy and values

Education Strategy

Recommendations:

To approve the 'stage-gate assessment' approach for adoption as part of the planned curriculum transformation process

Consultation to date (including any previous committee consideration and its outcome):

Education Strategy Programme Board, University Education Committee

Leading Edge Curriculum Framework: Assuring the combined assessment journey

Background

1. At its September 2025 meeting Senate received a paper entitled 'Next steps for AI in education' as a result of which University Education Committee had agreed three key actions: to review existing programmes to identify those most vulnerable to misuse of AI, to establish a task and finish group to review the use of AI tools in education; and to ensure that the Leading Edge Curriculum Framework (LEC) took account of the need for structural changes within our approach to assessment in response to the threat of AI use to academic integrity. This paper presents the output of the third action.

2. Within the Leading Edge Curriculum Framework (LEC) there are a set of assessment principles to *'enable programme teams to create assessment strategies that reflect disciplinary needs and promote student success*.' Principle 3.2 requires that programme teams '*ensure the integrity of the award through the combined assessment journey*'. Further work has now been undertaken to propose more detailed requirements to ensure that the principle is met.

3. The rapid and ongoing development of sophisticated generative AI tools presents a challenge to the very core of higher education – how do our students demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes of their programme, entitling them to recognition in the form of a University degree, in an environment where AI can produce sophisticated responses to many types of unsupervised assessment?

4. The University's 5 Principles for the use of AI require us *'to adapt our teaching and assessment strategies to incorporate AI*' and a commitment that '*academic integrity and rigour in assessment will be upheld'*. Work has taken place this year in programmes that currently used the highest proportion of unsupervised assessment tasks to revise assessment approaches ahead of the LEC. But in the medium term the LEC redesign process affords us an opportunity to adapt assessment in a structural way to ensure that we can guarantee that a student receiving a Newcastle award has directly demonstrated that they meet the programme learning outcomes required for their award.

5. All higher education institutions around the world are or soon will be grappling with this challenge. The Office for Students, somewhat surprisingly, has not yet put forward any regulatory advice or expectations for providers. However the B conditions of registration set clear expectations of providers in relation to assessment and awards, the following are a summary of the relevant provisions of B4, providers must:

   Ensure that students are assessed effectively – 'assessed in a challenging and appropriately comprehensive way':
   - providing stretch and rigour consistent with the level of the course;
   - testing relevant skills;
   - assessments being designed in a way that minimises the opportunities for academic misconduct

   Ensure that assessments that contribute to an award are:
   - valid - takes place in a way that results in students demonstrating knowledge and skills in the way intended by design of the assessment

- reliable - requires students to demonstrate knowledge and skills in a manner which is consistent as between the students registered on a higher education course and over time

Ensure that our awards are credible

6. Without making a substantial change in approach to assessment many of our programmes are unlikely to be able to clearly demonstrate that condition B4 is met through their assessment strategy and their combined assessment journey. In developing our approach we must find a balance between assessment that is effective, valid and reliable, to ensure our awards are credible in the context of generative AI; and ensuring that our assessment is effective as a tool for learning, with students having a chance to develop and test skills that they will need in their futures.

7. In Australia the regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, has set an explicit challenge to the sector in its Assessment reform for the age of artificial intelligence (November 2023) this has lead to a range of proposals for change from different universities. The University of Sydney has adopted a 'Two Lane' approach, driven by programme level design, as is the LEC, ensuring that students have a range of supervised assessment *of* learning and retaining non-secure assessment *for* and *as* learning. The University of Newcastle Australia has also published their approach, but this has less of a programme level focus in comparison with Sydney.

Stage-gate assessment

8. With the existing commitment to Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) as supporting policy for the LEC, it is proposed that we develop an approach built around a **'stage-gate' set of assessments** for each Stage/PGT programme with a student showing progress towards or attainment of PLOs in the stage-gate, using methods of assessment that are either **'supervised'** or **'assured'**.

9. The stage-gate assessments would have to be passed before a student could progress to the next stage or receive an award. Programmes that utilise 'core' modules (must be taken and passed) already operate this approach. But for stage-gate assessments it could be a single assessment component within a module, if a module includes more than one component, rather than the whole module that would need to be passed as part of the stage-gate.

10. Supervised assessment by its nature ensures students have to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that are being assessed in a secure environment. Assured assessment uses a process of triangulation either through observation of the work in progress and/or dialogic review, to provide assurance that the student has acquired the knowledge and skills that they have demonstrated in their work undertaken outside of a supervised environment – they have to 'show their workings'. The development of 'assured' assessment will involve changes in teaching and assessment practice where this approach is not already in use, but its inclusion supports a wider range of assessment types being considered as able to contribute to the stage-gate.

11. Stage-gate assessments would be embedded in some or all compulsory modules, or families of optional modules where a student must take one of a choice that include the same learning outcome. For example, a learning outcome such as "locate, identify,

analyse and contextualise materials that provide insight into the past" can be assessed equivalently in a module on any period of history. Assessment coverage of PLOs would be developed and mapped as part of module design and module learning outcomes, and together the programme level designed stage-gate assessments would provide assurance that a student has met their PLOs.

12. Programmes that did not wish to build the stage-gate fully into modular assessment, would have the option of operating a supervised or assured integrated non-credit bearing stage-gate assessment covering the relevant PLOs for the Stage/Programme, allowing a wider retention of open tasks within modules. This could, for example, take the form of an integrated written or oral exam.

13. Stage-gate supervised and assured assessment tasks would be complemented by **'open'** assessments allowing a wide range of tasks to support student learning and skill development. Students would still remain responsible for the quality and integrity of their work in open assessments and should receive advice on the appropriate use of generative AI in their work. This is different to the Sydney model which has been criticised for encouraging a 'free for all' in their Lane 2 assessment.

Type	**Supervised**	**Assured**	**Open**
Context	Work produced only in a supervised environment	Work produced outside of a supervised environment that is assured through review	Work produced outside of a supervised environment
Examples	In-class tests: written, practical In-class completion of written or creative work (e.g. creative writing portfolio) Live simulation based assessments Invigilated exams: written, practical or oral Peer or expert supervision of practical, performance or clinical tasks (e.g. OSCE)	Long-form dissertations/projects/creative works that are validated through submission of drafts, discussions of works in progress, final Q&A or viva voce Live Q&A following presentation or submissions Group based or individual oral assessments	Out of class quiz All forms of 'coursework': data analysis, case studies, research analysis; written tasks, creative tasks etc.
Role of generative AI	Not allowed unless specifically part of the supervised activity	Clear guidance provided as to appropriate and inappropriate use of AI	Clear guidance provided as to appropriate and inappropriate use of AI

14. An illustration of a Stage combining supervised, assured and open assessment:

UG Stage 2 (6 x 20 credit modules)

Stage contributes to: PLO 2, PLO 3, PLO 5 and PLO 6

Stage-gate assessments marked **≠**

4 out of 8 tasks contribute to the stage-gate

Compulsory module 1	PLO 2	**Supervised ≠**: practical in-class test Open: data analysis
Compulsory module 2	PLO 3	**Supervised ≠**: invigilated written exam
Compulsory module 3	PLO 5	Open: written task
Compulsory module 4	PLO 5	Open: out of class quiz **Supervised ≠**: in-class completed written task
Optional module 1 (family)	PLO 6	**Assured ≠**: Live Q&A following presentation or submission
Optional module 2 (wider choice)	Range of PLOs	Open: range of coursework tasks

15. The LEC pilot phase (Spring 2026) allows us to develop and refine the stage-gate approach as part of course re-design, developing further detailed policy, supportive materials and case studies of different approaches to inform Phase 2 (UG) and Phase 3 (PGT).

16. The implications for reasonable adjustments to assessments of the need to ensure the demonstration of programme learning outcomes needs to be further explored, in particular how requirements to maintain academic integrity and academic standards intersect with the definition of ‘competence standards’ under the Equality Act 2010. A specific equality impact assessment will be undertaken alongside the exploration of the stage-gate and supervised/assured assessment types as part of the LEC pilot phase along with seeking legal guidance as necessary.