Abstract
Assessment expectations are communicated to students in various ways and at different points in the semester. The provision of written information in learning guides given to students at the start of semester articulates what they are to do and how well they are to perform in assessment tasks. This paper examines how assessment expectations at an Australian university were communicated by staff in 159 first-year units (subjects) in the first year of university-wide implementation of criteria and standards-based assessment and learning guides policies. A framework was developed to analyse the extent and types of assessment information provided in learning guides. The paper provides a snapshot of the types of assessment used in the first year, including exams and analytical, reflective and authentic tasks. The paper contributes to an understanding of how university-wide assessment policy implementation can be evaluated through an examination of documents produced by staff.

Keywords
assessment expectations; evaluation of policy implementation; first year, standards-based assessment, types of assessment. (272)

Introduction
The paper begins with a general discussion of the importance of making assessment expectations transparent for students and an overview of the benefits and limitations of providing this information in written form. The role of assessment in defining the curriculum for many students is also addressed. This section incorporates recent and relevant literature on these topics.

The study to be reported is then contextualised through the provision of a profile of the institution in which it was undertaken and a brief overview of its policy shift from a norm-referenced to a criterion and standards-based assessment (CSBA) approach. Staff in the institutional teaching development unit (TDU) played a major role in supporting this shift in assessment direction through contributions to policy development and the production of an assessment guide. They therefore had an interest in investigating the nature and extent of implementation and undertook this through an analysis of the type of information provided to students in first-year learning guides.
The study investigated:

1. how staff had enacted CSBA in learning guides in the first year of policy implementation
2. in what ways the information in learning guides had provided a basis for clarifying what students were expected to do in each assessment task
3. whether there were differences in how CSBA had been communicated for different types of tasks
4. whether it would be possible to infer from learning guides produced by staff that TDU resources and support had been useful in implementing CSBA (275).

The study

Information provided about the study included the number of learning guides and tasks analysed, and the schools and disciplines represented. A six part framework (below) was used as the basis for analysis and this selection was justified with reference to a range of relevant literature:

1. There is alignment between unit learning outcomes and the type of assessment task.
2. Task description is provided.
3. Criteria and standards of performance are provided.
4. Task description and criteria and standards are clearly consistent with each other.
5. Rationale for doing the task is explained.

Findings

After undertaking processes to develop inter-rater reliability, all tasks were classified into assessment type categories and then coded using the framework described above.

Major findings were:

- Exams and tests were the most commonly used types of assessment - this was attributed to factors such as unit level, cohort size, ease of marking and perceived reliability.
- Presentations were widely used - also attributed to the assurance provided that tasks were done by individual students.
- Reflective tasks were not extensively used.
- Authentic tasks, those aligned with the requirements of professional practice, comprised almost 20% of tasks.
- Learning objectives were found to be observable and measurable (69%), vague or incomplete (28%), or absent (3%).
- Alignment of assessment tasks with learning objectives was less than 100%.
- Task descriptions were variable in length - a few sentences to a page- and, in complexity - simple statements about topics and submission formats to detailed advice on process.
- For tasks where standards were provided they were analytic (25%) or holistic (8.2%): other tasks provided criteria only (14.6%), combinations of several types of criteria and standards (7%), worked examples (2.8%) and ‘to be developed in class’ (0.4%): 9% of tasks (all of which were exams or tests) provided a very brief statement of expected standards - the number of correct responses students would have to produce in order to achieve the threshold standards.
- Criteria and standards provided were either task-specific (30.4%) or generic (22%).
- The consistency of task descriptions with criteria and standards provided was low.
- Authentic or reflective tasks were those most likely to have an explicit rationale.
- Exemplars were provided for 17.2% of tasks.
Summary and conclusions
A summary of findings based on the analytic framework is presented in tabular form.

In conclusion the study provided a snapshot of the ways in which first year assessment tasks were communicated in writing to students at the start of semester. The audit reported in this study has provided useful information about the types of assessment used and areas where communication about assessment requirements could be improved. The findings were consequential in that they were widely reported and used to inform ongoing quality assurance processes.

References
The paper provides 31 references.