Developing assessment as a collaborative endeavour

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The tertiary landscape is undergoing significant challenges and pressures. Academics are facing ever increasing workload, increased student numbers, reduced resources, the demands of new technologies and fierce competition for research funding. Coupled with this are "Massive Online Open Courses" (MOOCs) which are questioning conventional lecture based formats and present a potential paradigm shift in the purpose and business of a university. The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) and the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) are creating a more regulated environment and a future where evidence will be required to explicitly demonstrate achievement of standards. Despite all the innovations, assessment inexorably continues to drive learning and the curriculum. The field of assessment is at the same time becoming more and more complex with e-assessment, adaptive e-learning and learning analytics coming to prominence. In the face of all these changes, we academics must develop new strategies to work in environments which are changing faster than most of our institutions are able to adapt. Across the broader tertiary arena there is significant expertise and many of the solutions and tools. The question is; how can the individual or even a department gain access to the appropriate information and resources in such a vast ocean?

The Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs) for Science give a clear indication of the areas that need to be covered by assessment. It is also evident from this recent work that there will be considerable overlap between disciplinary areas in science in the way that these outcomes are addressed. One effective way of tackling these issues is through collaborative networks that can establish basic principles and approaches that can then be contextualised at the disciplinary level. Working collaboratively across national and even international boundaries has a number of potential advantages including spreading the workload, avoiding repetition and overlap and benefiting from collective wisdom. Most importantly, collaborative networks can provide the critical mass and unified voice that are essential to leverage the resources and support that are fundamental to improving our assessment practices and curriculum.