**SUEQ Assignment 3B: Advice Note**

To: MEEM Teachers and Programme Coordinators

From: MEEM Programme Director

Date: 22 November 2023

Re: Assessment Policy of MEEM

**Summary**

An effective assessment policy has multiple functions. It outlines how assessment is used within the programme for diagnostic, feedback and qualification purposes; identifies the responsibilities of the stakeholders; describes the assessment procedures and guidelines; and gives directions to assure and safeguard the quality of assessment[[1]](#footnote-1). Currently, the MSc Programme in Environmental and Energy Management (MEEM) has several components of such a policy. However, they are not communicated clearly and implemented regularly, which causes confusion and ambiguity about the vision, principles, roles and procedures regarding assessment. This advice note offers four recommendations to improve the assessment policy of MEEM: 1) Creating a vision on assessment, 2) Clarifying the responsibilities of stakeholders regarding assessment quality, 3) Diversifying the tools and support for the quality assurance process, and 4) Enhancing the assessment-related communication towards students and teachers. Implementation of these recommendations relies on the ownership and participation of all stakeholders, particularly the teachers and programme coordinators of MEEM. As the programme director, I am committed to facilitate the process towards realising the actions that will improve the assessment policy, and invite you to participate in this process.

**Background: Current assessment policy of the MEEM programme**

Currently, the MEEM programme doesn’t have an assessment policy document. Several elements are included in different processes and documents, such as the programme-specific appendix (PSA) of the Education and Examination Regulations (EER)[[2]](#footnote-2), self-assessment report for accreditation[[3]](#footnote-3), programme-level assessment plan, programme development plans (PDP), Safeguarding of Assessment Quality (SAQ) meetings with the Examination Board, and test screening. As the programme has been changing over the recent years, it also becomes essential to implement and evaluate measures to ensure that assessment quality is maintained. The programme-level intended learning outcomes (PILOs) and the assessment plan were revised in 2022, and several courses have been (re)designed or taken over by new teachers that joined the programme over the past few years. These changes at the programme and course levels have implications for the assessment quality. For instance, the diversity and plurality in assessment methods and approaches should be maintained, while preventing the over-fragmentation of assessment methods. Therefore, proactive measures should be taken by the programme management team (PMT).

The lack of an assessment policy communicated clearly and implemented regularly causes confusion about the vision, principles, roles and procedures regarding assessment. As a result, the programme runs the risks of creating ambiguity about the scope and purpose of assessment across courses and quartiles; failing to ensure the achievement of PILOs by students; and the teachers not demonstrating the necessary assessment competences. An assessment policy can provide guidance to teachers by clarifying the underlying vision on assessment, their roles and responsibilities in assessment, and the programme-level measures for assuring and safeguarding the quality of assessment. Such a policy would also improve the transparency of assessment by informing all stakeholders of MEEM.

**Advice: How to improve the assessment policy of MEEM?**

An assessment policy consists of nine components[[4]](#footnote-4). A broader initiative can be taken to design a complete assessment policy document including all the components. In this advice note, I focus on the following components in order to provide guidance to teachers, particularly the new ones:

* Vision on education and assessment in the programme
* Roles, tasks and responsibilities of everybody involved
* Communication towards teachers and students
* Quality assurance and control
* Assessment competence of all involved

I provide four recommendations that can improve the MEEM assessment policy by paying attention to the five components above. The recommendations have direct implications for several elements of the quality of assessment pyramid[[5]](#footnote-5), mainly the assessment policy, assessment plan, and assessment competence.

**1. Create a Vision on Assessment**

The MEEM programme should have a specific vision about assessment. There are vision and mission statements, as included in the latest PSA to the EER[[6]](#footnote-6):

**Vision**: “socio-technological change is necessary to achieve sustainable development”.

**Mission**: “to educate sustainability professionals, who can organize and manage such socio-technological change in the environment, energy and water domains”.

These two elements also form the foundation of the assessment vision in other programmes. For instance, the assessment policy of the (I)BA BSc and MSc programmes states that the vision on assessment is integrated into the vision on education through both constructive alignment and the principle that “assessment is designed to guide and enhance student learning and student’s professional development”. The assessment policy of (I)BA programmes also includes 24 assessment-specific principles.[[7]](#footnote-7) Similarly, the assessment policy of health-related education programmes states that making the educational vision and mission explicit as part of the assessment policy is crucial for multidisciplinary programmes, since the staff and teachers involved have different backgrounds, each with their own disciplinary visions on education.[[8]](#footnote-8)

During the previous accreditation of MEEM, a “test vision” was formulated by the PMT.[[9]](#footnote-9) This vision consists of eight specific principles, such as diversity in testing and balancing individual and group assessments, and another 15 principles listed under a “test policy”. While this vision provides comprehensive information, it has not been incorporated in MEEM practices so far, nor adopted as a programme document. The PMT, particularly I, as the programme director, should take the lead in creating the vision on assessment. Such a vision would enable a shared understanding of assessment quality for all the stakeholders. The vision should be aligned with the focus of the programme on organising and managing socio-technological change, addressing societal challenges towards sustainable development, and demonstrating a critical-analytical attitude. The vision on assessment should also be integrated into and communicated through the main programme documents, such as the PSA to the EER. The assessment vision should be aligned with the UT assessment policy[[10]](#footnote-10), the EER of BMS Master programmes[[11]](#footnote-11) and the PSA of MEEM4. I don’t expect any consequences for UT- and faculty-level documents, but for the programme documents, specifically the PSA.

**2. Clarify the Responsibilities of Stakeholders regarding Assessment Quality**

The roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders of assessment quality should be clarified and communicated by the PMT. Main stakeholders of the MEEM are the teachers, the PMT, the students, the Examination Board and the Programme Committee. Other stakeholders at the faculty and university level include the dean, the vice dean of education, educational specialists and advisors, exam office, accreditation support team, etc[[12]](#footnote-12).

Each main stakeholder has responsibilities that directly relate to assessment quality. For instance, in their role as examiners, the teachers are responsible for designing, conducting and analysing the assessment of their course(s), whereas the teachers and students have the responsibility to follow the assessment rules and regulations. Course coordinators have the further responsibility to assure assessment quality at the course level. The PMT fulfils several tasks, such as establishing, communicating and updating the programme-level assessment principles and documents; promoting the quality of assessment to teachers and students; and supporting the teachers to enhance their assessment competences.

While presumably each stakeholder is aware of their responsibilities regarding the assessment quality, these responsibilities are neither laid out in a document, nor communicated clearly and regularly to all stakeholders. For instance, with the current emphasis on the challenge-based learning (CBL) approach, the students are expected to be involved in assessment through peer-to-peer feedback and assessment. This implies self-responsibility of students to take charge of their learning, including the assessment, as also adopted in other educational programmes[[13]](#footnote-13). Such expectations from students and teachers should be communicated within specific courses by the course coordinators and across the four quartiles by the programme coordinators.

**3. Diversify the Tools and Support for the Quality Assurance Process**

The quality of assessment should be assured at the course and programme levels throughout the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle. At the course level, the competence of teachers is crucial for assuring the quality of assessment. Other programmes also address the importance of teachers’ competence in showing their understanding of the assessment quality criteria, i.e., validity, transparency and reliability[[14]](#footnote-14). To improve teachers’ assessment competences, the main support comes from the UT-level through the UTQ and SUTQ/SUEQ programmes and specific trainings. While the UTQ is mandatory for all teachers, I observe the added-value of SUTQ/SUEQ and encourage the MEEM teachers to participate in these programmes. During the UTQ process, the PMT can proactively interact with new teachers to increase their awareness of the assessment policy and the related vision, principles, roles and procedures. The PMT also offers some support to teachers in improving their competences. In May 2023, we organised an intervision meeting about thesis supervision. As now planned for the 2023-2024 academic year, the PMT should regularly organise such meetings to facilitate peer-to-peer support and feedback, and ensure to address the quality of assessment.

Within the PDCA cycle, there are several steps for monitoring of assessment quality at the course level. Improvements are needed for several of them. For instance, an assessment analysis should be conducted after completing each course, and actions should be taken in case of concerns regarding transparency, validity or reliability. Currently, the assessment analysis is left to the discretion of course coordinators, and not discussed among the teachers or with the PMT. Similarly, the assessment screening of courses takes place on an ad-hoc basis. Programme coordinators should encourage and support the course coordinators to conduct both the assessment analysis and assessment screening on a regular basis.

The PMT also implements the PDCA cycle at the programme level. The main PDCA tool that provides evidence for the assessment quality at the programme level is the annual improvement plan (AIP). It is drafted and discussed by all teachers and the PMT during the annual evaluation meeting (AEM), and shared with the Programme Committee and the Examination Board for their feedback. The AIP is based on students’ evaluations as well as teachers’ observations regarding the quality of education in their course. The PMT can pay more attention to addressing the evaluation of assessment quality within the AIP and use “assessment dossiers” at course and programme levels[[15]](#footnote-15), and add a template for the dossiers to the Teachers’ Guide. In addition, the PMT has recently introduced the “thesis carousel”, which provides a comprehensive review and reflections on the assessment process and criteria for the MSc theses. The PMT should make the thesis carousel a regular element of the PDCA cycle.

**4. Enhance the Assessment-related Communication towards Students and Teachers**

All three recommendations above rely on effective communication among the stakeholders of assessment quality. Simply adding new procedures will not necessarily improve the assessment quality. All teachers should have a good understanding of the constructive alignment between learning objectives, learning activities and assessments. It is essential to enhance such assessment-related communication towards students and teachers, especially course coordinators. This is a function to be fulfilled by the PMT. The information regarding the assessment procedures and quality that is communicated with the students and teachers should be easily accessible, clear and up-to-date. Such communication will directly improve the assessment quality criterion of transparency.

Currently, various MEEM documents and webpages exist that provide information about assessment (quality). For instance, at the programme-level, the “Programme Information” Canvas page is used for several purposes, such as sharing the programme documents, announcing workshops and guest lectures that are not part of a specific course, requesting the students to submit their specialisation choices and elective courses, and informing the students about career events. This Canvas page currently targets the students. Although it is also accessible by the teachers, it is often not explicit what the teachers can/should do with the information shared on that page. The programme coordinators should reorganise this page in a way that both teachers and students receive information about programme-level assessment principles, plans and procedures.

**Implementation of the Recommendations**

Outlined above are four recommendations to improve the assessment policy of MEEM. They require specific actions to be taken by all the stakeholders involved. Their implementation will take time, also considering that resources are limited, especially in terms of teaching and support staff. Two measures can be taken to facilitate implementation within the existing constraints.

First, the current preparation process for the next accreditation, which will take place in 2025, can be used to implement the recommendations and write the assessment policy document. The six-year accreditation cycle can be used for a comprehensive evaluation and revision of the assessment policy, for instance 1-2 years before the accreditation takes place. Second, as I mentioned above, several steps within the PDCA cycle, such as the AIP and the PDP, are repeated annually and they are directly related to the assessment policy. The four recommendations can be included in these documents by defining time-bound actions and assigning responsible team members. After realising the four recommendations, the annual cycle of the AIP and PDP can be followed to evaluate the assessment policy and to receive regular feedback from the Examination Board and Programme Committee. For the AIP, the interaction between the course coordinators and the PMT is essential regarding the assessment-related improvements at the course level.

Implementation of the recommendations relies on the ownership and participation of all MEEM stakeholders, particularly the teachers, who need to adopt the policy, and the PMT, who are responsible for implementing and monitoring the policy. As the programme director, I am committed to facilitate the process towards realising the actions that will improve the assessment policy, and invite you to participate in this process.

1. Van den Berg, F., 2023. Components of Assessment Policy at Programme Level. <https://canvas.utwente.nl/courses/12196/pages/m1-assessment-policy?module_item_id=379468> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. MEEM, 2023. Programme-specific Appendix to the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) 2023-2024. <https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/education/regulations/2023-2024-eng/EER%20master%202023-2024/psp-msc-eem-2023-2024-join-bms-eer-12.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. MEEM, 2019. Self-assessment Report. Appendix 7 – MEEM 20 Assessment Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Van den Berg, F., 2023. Components of Assessment Policy at Programme Level. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. CES/UT, n.d., Assessment Policy Programme Level. <https://www.utwente.nl/en/examination-board/Safeguarding_assessment_quality/Assessment_Policy> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. MEEM, 2023. Programme-specific Appendix to the Education and Examination Regulations (EER) 2023-2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Assessment Policy BSc International Business Administration (IBA) and MSc Business Administration (BA), 2019-2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Toetsbeleid Health opleidingen UT, Health Sciences - Biomedical Engineering - Technical Medicine, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. MEEM, 2019. Self-assessment Report. Appendix 7 – MEEM 20 Assessment Plan. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. UT, 2016. Quality Assurance Framework for Student Assessment, <https://www.utwente.nl/en/examination-board/Policy-rules-guidelines/quality-assurance-framework-student-assessment-ut-12-dec-2016.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Education and Examination Regulations (EER) of BMS Master programmes, 2023-2024. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Van den Berg, F., 2023. Components of Assessment Policy at Programme Level. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Fontys ICT Assessment Policy, <https://beleidswiki.fhict.nl/doku.php?id=en:beleid:toetsbeleid> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Toetsbeleid Health Opleidingen UT; Fontys ICT Assessment Policy. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Toetsbeleid Health Opleidingen UT; Assessment Policy of (I)BA Programmes. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)