
Unit Coordinator's Handbook

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Prepared by the Office of Learning and Teaching

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1. OVERVIEW OF THE HANDBOOK FOR UNIT COORDINATORS AT CDU

1.1 Introduction

This handbook provides a guide to unit coordinators at Charles Darwin University (CDU) regarding their roles and responsibilities as well as those in their teams. The primary focus of this handbook is on the key role the unit coordinator plays in enhancing learning and teaching quality of a unit in terms of:

- Accuracy and currency of unit content
- Relevance of learning activities and assessment
- Compliance with accreditation documentation and relevant policies
- Equivalence, efficiency and effectiveness in delivery across modalities, locations and tutors/lecturers
- Quality and currency of the Learnline site.

The information in this handbook has been informed by recommendations made by the Academic Board (CDU, 2008).

1.2 The Unit Coordinator in context

Each unit within a higher education award is administered by a Unit Coordinator who has the overall responsibility of overseeing the running of the unit whether they are teaching it alone, teaching it with other people or someone else is teaching it.

The role of a Unit Coordinator is a widely recognised one in Australian universities, particularly in higher education courses. The following job description for unit coordinators comes from a report from an ALTC-supported project:

The Unit Coordinator is responsible for leading, managing and coordinating a unit of study, the students who enrol in the unit and, depending on the size and nature of the unit, guest and sessional staff. As the person in charge of a unit, the Unit Coordinator is also responsible for setting the example in disciplinary practice, adopting scholarly teaching practices, developing and continually refining Units, maintaining unit quality and disciplinary integrity, looking after the interests of their students, and building collaborative networks (Roberts, Butcher and Brooker, 2010 p. 34).

Clearly, the role of the unit coordinator is central to the success of a unit, in every respect.

1.3 Roles and responsibilities of unit coordinators at CDU

Typically, the unit coordinator is responsible for units taught at different locations and in different modalities. The primary focus of the unit coordinator is to ensure quality and consistency of a unit in terms of its content, delivery and assessments, and evaluation. In addition, the unit coordinator is responsible for academic and administrative tasks of units. These include: preparatory activities, managing quality and consistency of the unit teaching, ensuring technical and delivery problems are solved as well as assessment, in all locations and contributing towards continuous improvement of the unit.

2. THE UNIT LIFE CYCLE

Once approved through the course and unit accreditation process, units of study undergo a regular lifecycle usually on an annual basis. At all stages of this cycle the unit coordinator plays a pivotal role and has the ultimate responsibility of ensuring that quality is maintained throughout. Therefore an understanding of what happens at every stage is crucial. Figure 1 below traces the unit life after it has been approved to be offered. The lifecycle, which allows for continuous improvement, can be broadly divided into three stages: Pre-teaching period, Teaching period and Post-teaching period. Post teaching is characterised by *Post-assessment activities* and *Unit review*.

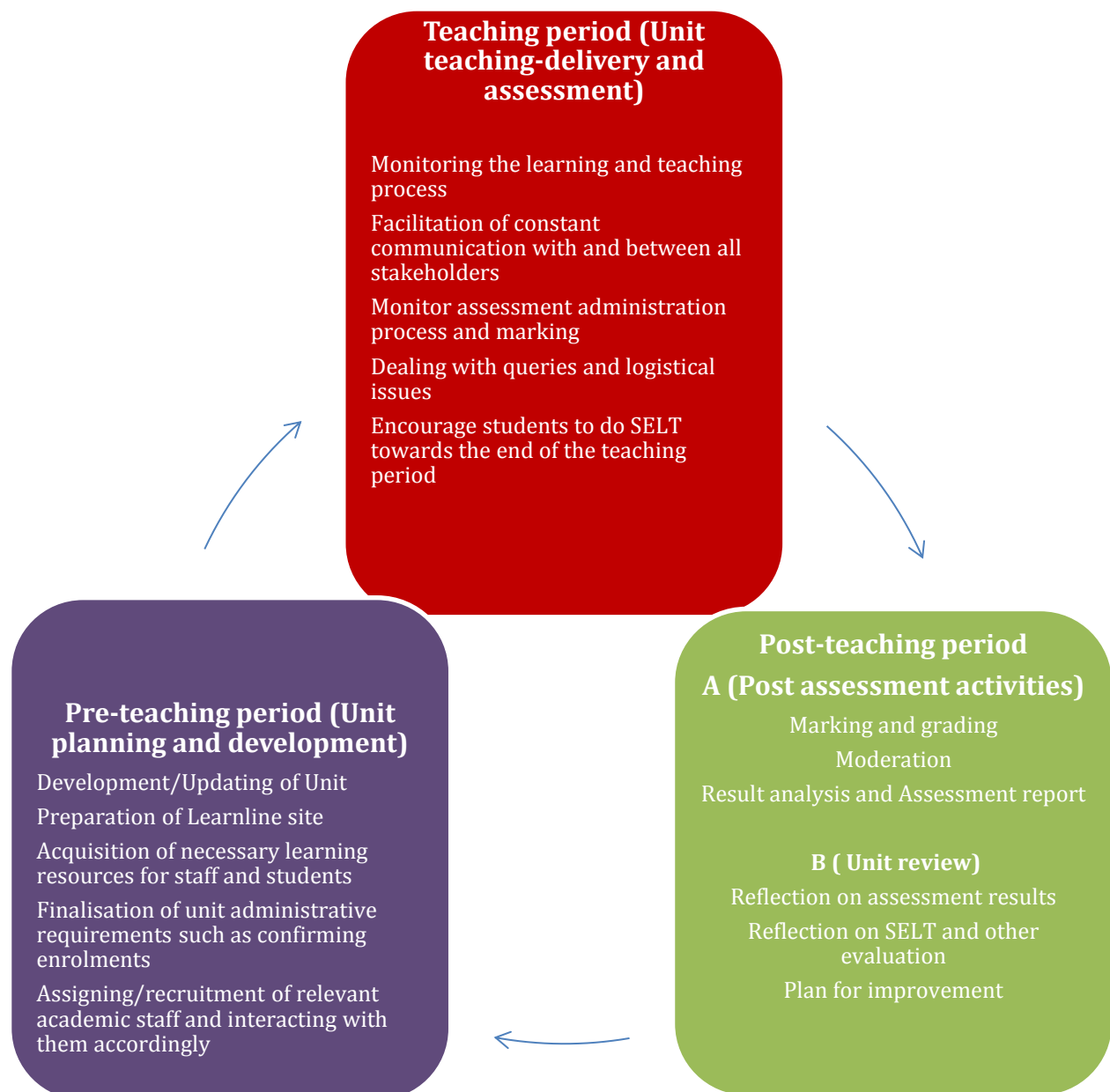


Fig 1: The Unit Life cycle

2.1 Responsibilities of Unit Coordinators during the unit lifecycle

On the basis of the unit life cycle, the key responsibilities of the unit coordinator are described in the following pages for all of the three stages. In addition, possible collaborators/liaisons and necessary resources enabling unit coordinators to carry out their responsibilities effectively are listed. Please note that the list of responsibilities and resources is by no means exhaustive and the expectations on unit coordinators may vary slightly from school to school.

2.2 Pre-teaching period (Unit planning and development)

About 6 months before the teaching period commences, the unit development and planning activities need to be commenced by the Unit coordinator so that the unit is completely ready to be taught by start of semester. OLT normally sends out notification at the appropriate time that the unit is ready to be updated on Learnline.

Responsibilities (These do not necessarily follow this order)

- Update and /or develop unit content, activities and assessment tasks on the basis of:
 - Unit QA document requirements available from arteam@cdu.edu.au
 - Planned unit improvement arising from unit evaluation such as SELT
 - Staff and any other student feedback
 - Latest developments in the field
 - CDU's 6 Key Principles for Online Teaching (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/teaching/6keyprinciples.html>)
 - Views and contributions of other people involved in the unit
- Liaise with library for the necessary resources
- Update the Unit Study Guide (USG) document using the Unit Study Guide template as a guide (available through the Learnline Production and Support page at <http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/learnline/production.html>)
- Prepare Learnline site, this includes:
 - Removing old information e.g. discussion board threads
 - Updating information e.g. assessment due dates
 - Creating new content e.g. new resources or revised notes
- Self and/or peer review using Learnline site checklist (available through the Learnline production link above) before submitting for site check at learnlinestaff@cdu.edu.au. Adhere to production deadlines (available through the Learnline production link above)
 - Ensure that the unit in Learnline is:
 - Well structured
 - Offers opportunities for active and collaborative learning
 - Allows for teachers to facilitate the learning process
 - Has feedback mechanisms built in
 - Is inclusive of the diversity of students in its approach to teaching, including adequately catering for external students and students with differing learning styles
- Ensure administrative requirements are sorted (e.g. timetabling/room allocation) and, access Callista and liaise with the Academic Liaison Unit for any necessary enrolment and student information.
- Liaise with theme leader if there is need for appointment of casual academic staff.
- If there are any specific software requirements for the unit, contact ITMS for advice.
- Carry out inductions for staff
 - Unit inductions (briefing on the unit requirements and expectations)
- Avail teaching resources (including textbooks) to all staff in all centres and ensure timely access to Learnline. Note that Learnline access is only available to new staff after the one-on-one induction by OLT staff.
- Submit textbook requirements to the bookshop using Textbook advice form (<http://bookshop.cdu.edu.au/pages/lecturer-textbook-advice>)

Liaisons/collaborators

During this stage, working with the following is recommended:

- Course coordinator- for any advice that relates to course level issues e.g. if proposing changes to a unit, what are the implications of the changes to the whole course?
- Theme Leaders for administrative issues e.g. appointment of casual staff.
- Office of Learning and Teaching staff
 - Education developer(s)- in the course of developing a unit an education developer can assist with pedagogical strategies that can enhance the quality of the learning and teaching process.
 - Accreditation and Registration Team (ART)-Education Developers can help with determining whether course material complies with accreditation documents. However, should a need for re-accrediting or making major changes to the unit arise, the ART can give specific technical advice on processes to follow and information required.
 - Learnline Development and Training (LDT) Team- this team carries out site checks on a unit to determine its readiness for release before commencement of teaching. LDT staff also train and assist with the use of Learnline tools and provide a help desk function (learnlinestaff@cdu.edu.au)
 - Innovative Media Production Studio (IMPS) team which can advise and assist in the production of innovative learning resources such as video, animations and other interactive digital learning content. Contact: imps@cdu.edu.au.
- ALU staff for any enrolment and other related issues(<http://www.cdu.edu.au/faculties/alu>)
- Calista team for lists of enrolled students.
- **Library(Liaison Librarians):** <http://www.cdu.edu.au/library/how/librarians.html#LILLteam>

Resources/tools available

- Course and Unit Design issues (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/teaching/understandinglearning.html>)
- HE USG template and key dates for Learnline units (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/learnline/production.html>)
- Learnline site checklist (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/learnline/production.html>)
- Higher Education Learnline template or relevant school or course level Learnline Template
- Subject Libguide: <http://libguides.cdu.edu.au/>
- Short term loan – How to... :<http://www.cdu.edu.au/library/how/stl.html>
- Copyright: <http://www.cdu.edu.au/library/copyright/pages/lecturers.html>
- Graduate attributes (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/graduateattributes/index.html>)
- Assessment procedures (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/governance/procedures/pro-113.pdf>)
- Exemplary Learnline Unit: review tool (contact your School HETD)

2.3 Teaching period (Unit delivery and continuous assessment)

Once the unit has passed site check, it is then ready to be made available to students just prior to the start of the teaching period. During the teaching period, the coordinator ensures that the unit is delivered according to plan and monitors all activities related to its implementation, including assessment.

Responsibilities

- **Monitoring the learning and teaching process**
 - Conduct or ensure all lectures, tutorials, workshops etc happen as scheduled
 - Ensure students with special needs are catered for e.g. disability support, learning plans and extenuating circumstances
 - Ensure guest and/or external lecturers are given extra help with administration and logistics issues e.g. access and using facilities.
 - Ensure all students, internal and external, can conveniently access all the necessary teaching sessions e.g. scheduling of the virtual classes, recordings are in accessible formats
 - Ensure all necessary learning material, whether online or printed, are available on time for each session.
 - Have scheduled conversations with all tutor or partner lectures on a regular basis e.g. weekly or fortnightly
 - Monitor activity in Learnline and if there is need for intervention, act accordingly.
 - Using the Retention Centre, identify and contact students who have not accessed Learnline by the end of week 2
 - Archive resources in the designated location – contact your head of school for more information
- **Facilitation of constant communication with and between all stakeholders**
 - Clarify communication channels to partner lecturers, tutors and students and foster mutual responsibility for communication.
 - Be responsive to queries from all stakeholders and facilitate consultative problem solving
 - Provide any announcements to partner lecturers, tutors and students on time
- **Monitor assessment administration process through ensuring that:**
 - Assessment tasks are clarified to students
 - Deadlines are adhered to and assignments are marked and returned within two weeks
 - Rubrics or other marking tools are appropriate and used consistently
 - Moderation of marking by new or multiple markers
 - Feedback on student work is prompt, supportive and constructive
- **Central exams are scheduled using eTic, accessible through AREA 52, and papers produced and reviewed according to ALU policies (<http://cdu.edu.au/olt/teaching/assessing.html>)**
- **Dealing with queries and logistical issues**
 - Address queries accordingly ensuring that all stakeholders are on board
 - Deal with any other logistical or administrative issues related to the unit
- **Administration of Student Experience of Learning and Teaching (SELT)**
 - Encourage and ensure the administration of SELT (survey@cdu.edu.au)

Liaisons/collaborators

During this stage, working with the following is critical:

- Course coordinators
- OLT staff, particularly Education Developers and Learnline staff for ongoing support.
- ALU staff especially around administration of examination

Resources/tools available

- Assessment and Moderation Policy <http://www.cdu.edu.au/governance/policies/pol-002.pdf>
- Higher education Assessment procedures <http://www.cdu.edu.au/governance/procedures/pro-113.pdf>
- Higher Education Examination Policy <http://www.cdu.edu.au/governance/policies/pol-019.pdf>
- Exemplary Learnline Unit: review tool
- Grading Policy <http://www.cdu.edu.au/governance/policies/pol-017.pdf>

2.4 Post-teaching period (Post-assessment activities and unit review)

Most assessment activities take place during teaching period and are meant to be monitored as an integral part of unit delivery. However, the post-teaching period is usually characterised by assessment related activities which require due attention of the unit coordinator. The review/evaluation process, on the other hand, characterises the whole life cycle of a unit, and where possible, improvements should be effected immediately. However, the post-teaching period offers an opportunity to take a comprehensive, retrospective and collective reflection on the unit. The Unit coordinator's role is ensuring that this process is effectively carried out.

Responsibilities

a. Post-assessment activities

- Administration and marking final examinations (where applicable).
- Marking, moderation and grading
 - During marking/grading the coordinators need to ensure that there is consistency across different markers through a process of moderation.
 - Examination marks should not be released to students through the grade centre as this is not the official reporting system of the university.
 - Review cohort performance, identify potential factors influencing differences and potential avenues for improvement
- Analysis of results and Assessment report
 - Entering final grades into Callista
 - Preparing and submitting reports to Board of Examiners- final class lists, summary of report of numeric and lettering grades in the unit and analysis by location, identification of awards (See Higher Education assessment procedures for details)

b. Unit review

- Reflection on assessment results
 - Conduct a retrospective analysis of the student assessment results, preferably with the teaching team, noting areas of significantly poor performance and marked differences across delivery modes and/or centres
- Reflection on SELT and other evaluation
 - Assess results of SELT and any other evaluation conducted(e.g. focus groups, teaching team feedback), noting areas of concern and differences across delivery modes and/or centres
- Plan for improvement
 - Taking into account outcomes from the reflections above, outline plan for improvement of the unit for next offering, possibly at a theme meeting.
 - In the course of improving the unit, some changes may have implications for the existing accreditation documentation and may necessitate a revision thereof. Consulting the course coordinator is imperative in this situation. Depending on whether the changes are minor or major there would be different procedures to be followed. Information on amending accredited units a can be found at <http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/heaccreditation.html>

Liaisons/collaborators

During this stage, working with the following is critical:

- Course coordinators
- OLT staff, particularly Education Developers
- ALU staff especially around administration of examination
- Callista team

Resources/tools available

- Assessment and Moderation Policy <http://www.cdu.edu.au/governance/policies/pol-002.pdf>
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3. ADDITIONAL USEFUL INFORMATION

3.1 The Learnline Unit Production Process

The diagram (Figure 2) below shows the process for the production and checking of Learnline units. This is the process that most Learnline units go through at CDU; for further detail see the “Guide to Higher Education Learnline Unit Production Process”.

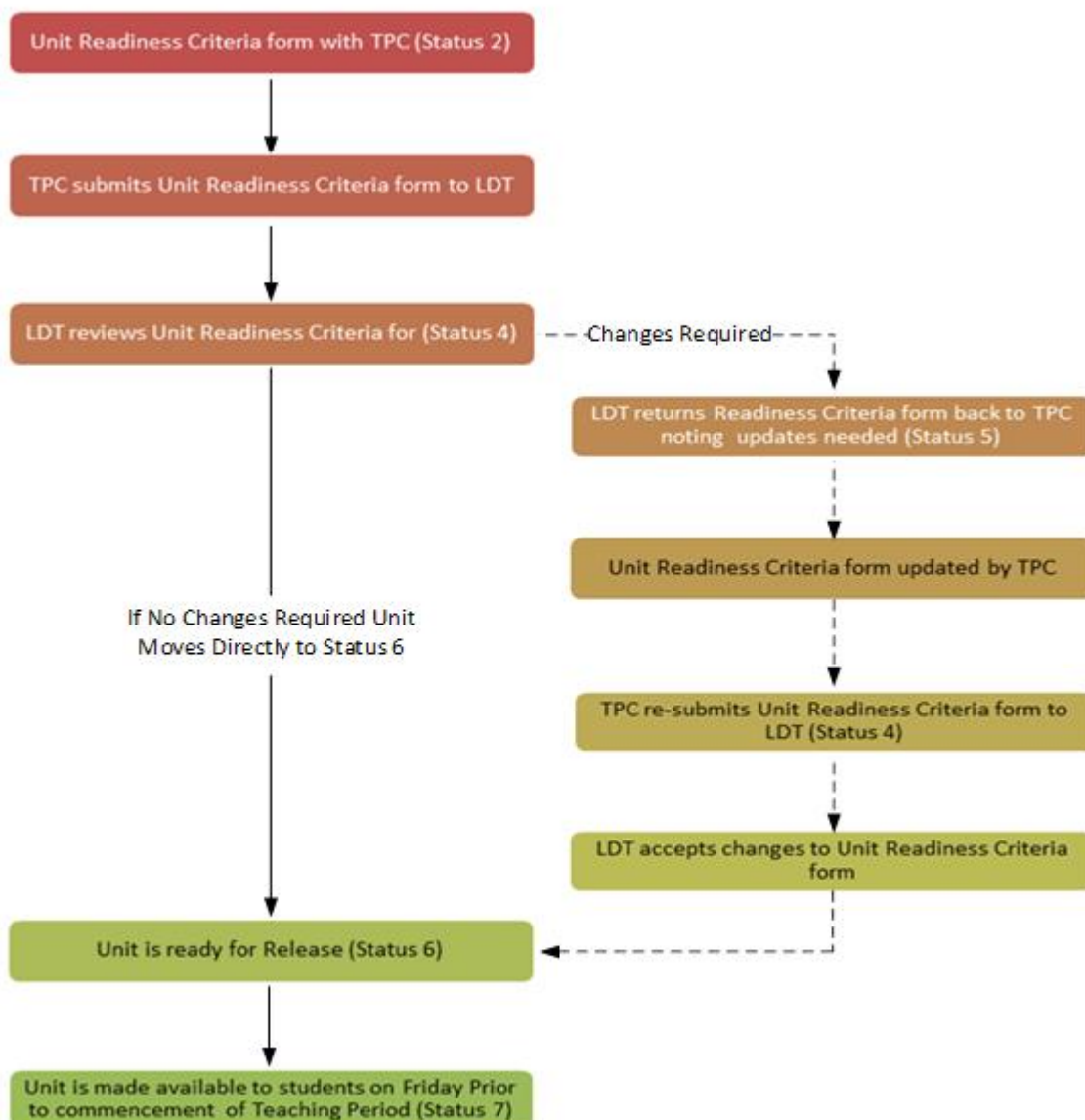


Fig. 2: The Learnline Unit Production Process

3.2 Office of Learning and Teaching website

The Office of Learning and Teaching website <http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/> contains resources on the following themes relevant to unit coordinators:

- For new teaching staff
- Learnline production and support
- Professional development
- Scholarship of learning and teaching
- Learning and teaching practice
- Registration and accreditation
- External student support

Contact details for OLT Education Developers assigned to schools is located at <http://www.cdu.edu.au/olt/about/schoolcontacts.html>

4. CONCLUSION

This Unit Coordinator's handbook is not meant to supersede any document that governs the terms and conditions of academic staff or any policies around learning and teaching. It is simply a set of guidelines that schools can adopt or adapt for their own purposes. The handbook therefore forms a good basis for schools, or even individuals, to develop their own specific guidelines, work processes and procedures that reflect their own idiosyncrasies.

5 REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

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