Proceedings

of

AUQF2007

Evolution and Renewal in Quality Assurance

Hobart, Australia
11–13 July 2007
AUQA Occasional Publications Series

AUQA's Occasional Publications (AOP) Series provides a vehicle for the publication of research and reflection on quality assurance and quality enhancement in higher education, with an emphasis on topics of relevance to Australia. The Series includes conference proceedings, themed collections of articles, special issues, reports and monographs. Aims of the Series are to:

- contribute to the enhancement of quality practices and quality assurance in Australian higher education (wherever offered) and internationally
- provide a means for sharing insights, research and analysis that is responsive to identified or emerging needs of quality facilitators in higher education
- stimulate discussion and reflection on directions, evolution and progress in quality improvement relevant to higher education and external quality assurance agencies
- explore the breadth and diversity of approaches to quality assurance in Australian higher education
- provide substantial scholarly contributions to the literature on quality assurance in higher education that would otherwise not be available to a wide audience.

The AOP Series is not intended to duplicate the function of other academic journals that address quality in higher education. Rather, it is intended to provide a vehicle for the publication of works relevant to AUQA's activities and the Australian higher education sector, as indicated above. Works in the AOP Series are expected to demonstrate a high standard of research, scholarship and critical reflection. Publications in the Series will be substantial works such as monographs, edited compilations or analytical reports, normally between 10,000 and 30,000 words. The Series also includes the Proceedings of the annual Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF). For a list of current publications visit the website: http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityenhancement/publications/index.shtml.

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The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government.
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AUQF2007 (The Australian Universities Quality Forum) was held for the sixth time from 11 to 13 July 2007 in Hobart and was attended by approximately 200 delegates.

The delegates included senior academics and managers in the Australian higher education sector, government officials, and international representatives from ten countries. It is pleasing to note the attendance of a significant number of delegates from non self-accrediting higher education institutions, including institutions that are also providers of vocational education and training. While the Forum has never been exclusively for Australian universities, AUQF2007 demonstrated the extent to which there is interest in approaches to higher education quality assurance that transcend national and traditional sectoral boundaries. I expect that future AUQFs will reflect the growing internationalisation and convergence of quality assurance and enhancement in post-secondary education.

Each year AUQF is organised by the Joint Steering Group (JSG), an unincorporated, pan-sectoral group whose sole purpose is to facilitate discussion about quality and quality assurance in higher education by organising the annual AUQF and associated activities and publications. The Joint Steering Group is not-for-profit and is underwritten by the Australian Universities Quality Agency.

The theme for AUQF2007 was ‘Evolution and Renewal in Quality Assurance’. The theme was selected by the JSG in recognition of the fact that the year 2007 represents, in many respects, a transition year for higher education quality assurance in Australia. New National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes are being implemented, as are new approaches to external quality assurance in vocational education and training. AUQF2007 took place as AUQA completes its first cycle of audits of universities, other self-accrediting institutions and accrediting agencies, and moves into its second cycle. At the same time, AUQA and selected state and territory accrediting agencies are commencing quality audits of non self-accrediting institutions.

The sub-themes for AUQF2007 were designed to allow broad-ranging ‘forwards and backwards’ reflection on how higher education quality assurance is being transformed, for example through an increased focus on academic standards and comparative outcomes. These sub-themes were:

- Integration of Quality Assurance Systems: Converging Pathways?
- Impact of Quality Audit
- Changing Approaches and Attitudes
- Benchmarking
- International Collaboration in Quality Assurance
- Qualitative Data and Quality Outcomes

The JSG was very pleased that a number of highly regarded international and Australian speakers agreed to provide keynote addresses and to participate in plenary panel sessions or invited workshops that addressed the sub-themes. Keynote addresses were delivered by:

- **Emeritus Professor Deryck Schreuder**, Chair of the AUQA Board: *Hamlet’s Challenge – ‘Come show us your quality…’ Reflections on the Dynamics of QA in Australia*
- **Professor, Bob Zemsky**, Chair of The Learning Alliance, USA: *Leveraging Change – what the American and European experience are teaching us about the process of changing higher education*
- **Professor Roger Brown**, Vice-Chancellor, Southampton Solent University, UK: *Can Quality Assurance Resist the Market?*
Other plenary sessions were:

- a panel discussion on ‘International Trends in Higher Education Quality Assurance’, with Dr Andrée Sursock of EUA, Associate Professor Zita Mohd Fahmi of LAN in Malaysia, Dr Jagannath Patil from NAAC in India and Dr David Woodhouse
- a panel discussion on ‘Impact of Audit’, by Professors Gail Hart and Sharon Bell and Andrew Nette of the NTEU, chaired by Ivan Skaines
- presentations by Professor Jim Barber of RMIT and Julie Moss of ACPET on ‘HE and VET: Converging Pathways in Quality Audit, Accreditation and Outcomes’.
- presentations on the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (Shirley Stokes) and the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority (Dr Reg Allen).

I extend thanks from the JSG to the following people and organisations:

- The AUQF Principal Sponsor, the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), through the International Education Group / AEI. We are particularly grateful to DEST for its ongoing support of AUQF. In 2007, this support made possible the attendance of Professor Zemsky and the plenary session on ‘International Trends in Higher Education Quality Assurance’.
- The Tasmanian Department of Education, in particular for its sponsorship of the Welcome Reception
- Our other sponsors: the Australian Council of Educational Research; Kistend Campus Travel; and AUQA
- Ms Angela Triffitt, a Tasmanian Aborigine, for her welcome and acknowledgement
- Keynote and plenary session speakers and panel session members
- Day Chairs and session facilitators
- Dr Angela Boyes of the University of Tasmania, who chaired the Hobart Reference Group, provided valuable advice and guidance, and who has undertaken many local organisational and advisory activities for AUQF2007
- The Hobart Reference Group for refereeing the papers and for their other contributions
- Mrs Claire Gresty and, until April 2007, Ms Elizabeth Burke of AUQA, without whose dedication, organisational skills and professional approach AUQF2007 would not have been possible.

The JSG is grateful as well to those delegates who submitted papers and workshop proposals. We were very pleased with number of proposals submitted in response to the Call for Contributions, indicating a high degree of interest in examining current developments in higher education quality assurance. I would like to personally thank all current and previous members of the JSG for AUQF2007, for their contributions to the success of AUQF2007.

The JSG has offered awards for AUQF papers and presentations each year since 2004. For AUQF2007, the joint recipients of the Best Paper Award were:

- Professor David Kember, of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, for his paper ‘The Importance of Diagnostic Ability in Evidence for Quality Assurance Procedures’, and
- Professor Hilary Winchester of the University of South Australia for her paper ‘Academic Board and the Academy: Seizing the Moment’.
Professor Winchester also won the award for **Best Presentation**.

All papers contained in these Proceedings were presented at the Forum and were refereed, using a double-blind process, by the Hobart Reference Group, which is a committee of the JSG. Also included in these Proceedings are presentations from two of the keynote addresses and the outlines of the four workshops.

We look forward to welcoming you to AUQF2008 which will be held in Canberra from 9 to 11 July 2008 under the theme ‘Quality & Standards: Making a Difference’.

Jeanette Baird  
**JSG Chairperson**  

July 2007
AUQF JOINT STEERING GROUP

The Joint Steering Group (JSG) is responsible for organising the annual Australian Universities Quality Forum. The following is extracted from the JSG’s Terms of Reference and Constitution.

PURPOSE
The JSG is a collaborative, unincorporated body established to organise annual national fora on the topic of quality and targeted primarily, but not necessarily exclusively, for the Australian higher education sector.

Terms of Reference
1. The JSG shall be responsible for organising an annual Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF) primarily for the Australian higher education sector. The scope may be broadened to include international parties and other post-compulsory education sectors.
2. The purposes of the AUQF shall be to facilitate the discussion and advancement of quality assurance, quality enhancement and the sharing of good practices.
3. The JSG may take responsibility for publishing proceedings of the AUQF or other publications arising from the AUQF.
4. The JSG shall not have final responsibility for managing the financial affairs of each AUQF. The final responsibility shall rest with either AUQA or the host institution or organisation as appropriate. However, the JSG shall advise AUQA or the host institution or organisation in this regard.
5. Any net surpluses from the activities of the JSG shall be applied to the following, in order of priority: (a) to offset any deficits from previous activities of the JSG; (b) to help fund publications arising from AUQFs, and (c) to help fund subsequent AUQFs.
6. The JSG shall have the power to establish subcommittees as necessary to fulfil its terms of reference.

Current Members (by category)

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<td>(a)</td>
<td>Ms Maree Conway, ATEM</td>
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<td>(b)</td>
<td>Professor Shelda Debowski, HERDSA</td>
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<td>(c)</td>
<td>Mr Ivan Skaines, AAIR (succeeding Ms Wendy Marchment)</td>
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<td>Dr David Woodhouse, AUQA</td>
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<td>Dr Antony Stella, AUQA (JSG Chairperson for AUQF2008)</td>
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<td>(f)</td>
<td>Dr Jeanette Baird, AUQA (JSG Chairperson for AUQF2007)</td>
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<td>Professor Rudi Lidl, University of Tasmania: Alternate: Dr Angela Boyes, University of Tasmania</td>
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<td>Mr Alistair Broatch, Australian Maritime College</td>
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<td>Ms Sarah Cole, NUS (student representative)</td>
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<td>Dr Claire Atkinson, DEST (succeeding Ms Helen Marsden)</td>
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<td>Mr Frank Payne, Professions Australia (succeeding Ms Monica Persson)</td>
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<td>Ms Dorte Kristoffersen, AUQA (JSG Chairperson for AUQF2006)</td>
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<td>Professor Tom Angelo, Victoria University of Wellington, NZ (nominee of NZ VCC)</td>
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Full details of the JSG Constitution are available at [www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/jsg/constitution.html](http://www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/jsg/constitution.html).
HOBART REFERENCE GROUP

PURPOSE
The Hobart Reference Group (HRG) is a committee of the Joint Steering Group (JSG), which has primary oversight of the annual Australian Universities Quality Forum (AUQF). The purpose of the HRG is to assist the JSG in making AUQF a success by providing local expertise and networks.

Terms of Reference
1. To assist with the promotion of the AUQF2007 through members’ local networks.
2. To be involved in the development of the event, including the provision of logistical advice.
3. To provide advice to the JSG on the Call for Contributions, possible presenters and workshop facilitators.
4. To referee proposals and recommend to the JSG a schedule of those proposals to be accepted and those to be declined.
5. To advise on appropriate organisation of the accepted proposals into strands consistent with the conference theme.
6. To recommend to the JSG on the awarding of the Best Paper award for AUQF2007.

Current Members

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KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Hamlet’s Challenge: ‘Come, show us your quality …’

Deryck M. Schreuder

Chair, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Evolution and Renewal

There are many ways to ‘quality’ and many ways of measuring that elusive aspect of higher education. Hamlet’s challenge is not quite as simple as it might appear. Perhaps, as with so much else about the Bard’s more famous aphorisms, there are indeed layers of meaning to be uncovered.

Yet it is a timely ‘challenge’ to confront, and I warmly thank the Forum organisers for inviting me to give this Opening Address. There is nothing like a hanging in the morning to focus the mind, as they say; nothing like a Keynote Address on the first evening of the Forum to prompt some sharp reflections on quality assurance (QA) at this time of global transformation in higher education.

This AUQF conference is thus rightly focusing on change: ‘Evolution and Renewal’ is our theme for the next few days. There is contestation in educational circles about what we should actually be addressing or measuring in national QA processes. And there are, moreover, current political imperatives to recognise as they might well influence the future of QA. Australia has already (July 2007) begun to enter yet another extended Federal election phase where ‘education’ will clearly be a key issue; major parties and lobby groups are beginning to make the case for ‘change’ in public policy regarding schools and universities. QA arrangements will necessarily be caught up in any major higher education changes/reforms.

Having been involved in these ‘higher education wars’ ever since the Dawkins transformation of the sector, I am more than happy to offer these personal reflections at this moment of juncture. I do so less as an ‘educationalist’ as a battle-scarred veteran of policy skirmishes and institutional contestations over quality. And being the current AUQA Chair also brings with it a certain imperative to place in sharper focus the matter of ‘options for what is to be done’ — as the higher education environment enters another phase of fluidity; and as the policy settings are possibly yet again set to be re-calibrated.

A Philosophy of ‘Betterment’

We have reached indeed a certain ‘tilt moment’, to use the jargon of the moment, as regards QA both in the Australian system and more widely.

For some jurisdictions, the road to quality assurance has led to elaborate accreditation systems which assess educational programs directly. Others look to graduate exit outcomes and the assurance of ‘minimum standards’. Others again attempt to micro-manage quality through close state monitoring agencies. A strong notion of quality assurance as a community watchdog of standards is common to many such systems. When problems arise regarding institutional performance or student attributes, then the watchdog is said to lack sharp enough teeth.
The Australian approach over the last decade has been rather different. It has reflected the institutional reality that Australian universities are deemed to be ‘self-accrediting’, each with a governing body answerable to the community. A web of other accountabilities to the Government, professions and community also still exist. In my last University where I was a Vice-Chancellor we counted 102 such forms of formal external reporting ‘responsibilities’, ranging from DEST (the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training) to Auditors General and on to equity agencies and professional associations.

But, most of all, our Australian public system of quality assurance in higher education has come to work from the fundamental notion of ‘enhancement’ in professional performance and the pursuit of excellence in our universities. Not only do we conduct our quality audits based on philosophy of ‘fitness-for-purpose’ (FFI) in the self-definition of mission goals, but we rely on a QA agency which is independent of the state (in fact a company registered under Victorian law) and which uses a core of trained ‘peer’ auditors to engage with the higher education institutions. Public reports are issued which work to support a culture of ‘enhancement’ within all universities; and to provide accountability to all the stakeholders who engage with universities.

Far from relying on the rottweiler-style of watchdog — with funding and accreditation consequences of a savage audit ‘bite’, the Australian system has reflected a particularly Australian approach to QA in higher education.

In stressing self-assessment and professional engagement, the system works from a philosophy of quality assurance which is fundamentally collaborative (rather than punitive); and it looks to embed a culture of educational excellence over the long term (rather than focus on performance frameworks and institutional rankings).

This is not because AUQA lacks the residual authority to make adverse findings about institutional performance — something which is sometimes alleged by its critics. As the Australian Minister of Education, Training and Youth Affairs commented plainly in December 1999:

If the Agency finds and institution deficient and, after consulting the institution, publishes an adverse report, then the institution may become ineligible for Commonwealth funding for particular activities and, possibly, have its accreditation status forfeited or suspended.²

And only recently, when there was debate surrounding the revision of the National Protocols which govern the definition for the foundation and operation of a self-accrediting system of universities in Australia, the current Minister for Education, Science and Training spelled out the position in even greater detail (October 2006):

AUQA should be able to recommend to the university or higher education institution any areas that need substantial review, or improvement to ensure that acceptable academic standards are being met if the institution is to continue to offer an activity or course. It could also recommend that the activity or course be suspended or discontinued in extreme circumstances, subject to specific review and agreement by the AUQA Board.³

Those sanctions have never been formally invoked. Recommendations for change and reform have been taken up with the institutions through the audit process itself; and the underlying concepts of self-government, self-accreditation and self-improvement have prevailed. Throughout the recently completed first cycle of audits, there has been a fundamental concern for qualitative assessments and advice — towards ‘enhancement’ — over an approach which stresses hard-edged KPI targets and elusive ‘absolute standards’.

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This is not to say that the cycle of constant improvement itself cannot be brought to the established QA system; and AUQA is currently embarking on a ‘Cycle 2’ of national audits which will see the quality bar being raised. There will be a greater emphasis on testing the ways in which institutions set their academic standards, and the way in which they benchmark performance within a globally competitive higher education environment.

Such an approach is of course neither peculiar to AUQA as a higher education agency — it has much in common with the models operated in other self-accrediting university systems such as the UK and New Zealand — nor an oddity within the professions involved with public service. One of the most interesting expositions of the ‘enhancement’ approach came this past year in Atul Gawande’s bestselling book, Better: a Surgeon’s Notes on Performance.

In his evocative study, Dr Gawande offers us a fascinating analogy from his experience in medicine. Working from the history of medical advances made over the last century and the massively reduced human mortality rates — through medical science, preventative care and surgical intervention — he comes to consider the moot issue of quality improvement in medical outcomes.

Yes, medicine has been a modern triumph. But it is also a flawed triumph. Science surely advances, but it never quite catches up with the human medical needs. Moreover, medicine is all too human; mistakes are made in diagnosis, in surgical procedures and in hospital care. ‘Science and skills are the easiest parts of care …’ Gawande comments acutely. The real challenge to quality in health provision is indeed ‘care’, and here ‘Betterment is a perpetual labour…’ [See the interesting review of Gawande by Richard Norton in ‘Physician, heal thyself’, in the AFR for 1st June 2007].

For Gawande’s evocative notion of ‘Betterment’ we could well read our own educational notions of Enhancement. Both point us in the direction of a long-term strategy of embedding institutional professionalism and excellence towards the best possible outcomes for all stakeholders.

In strict educational policy terms, it also takes us away from notions of QA as a form of regulatory control and funding sanctions. Fiscal and accreditation consequences can indeed flow from the public reports of Australian quality audits; but they are not the primary aim of AUQA under its regime of ‘enhancement’. In popular analogy: QA can operate as either supportive ‘coach’ towards excellence in performance, or as sharp-toothed watchdog of conduct. The ‘Australian way’ has (so far) been to emphasise the former approach.

Quality Assurance Comes to Australia

Hard as it may be to recall, there was a university age of ‘BQ’ — ‘Before Quality’. From the first university foundations in the 1850s until the Dawkins higher education revolution in the early 1990s, Australia had no formal or overt QA audit processes. And because we had espoused a system of institutional self-accreditation — not least a legacy of the historical British connection — we had no developed system of external audit and program accreditation. The current QA approach is entirely an artifice of policy debate and higher education development over the last 20 years.

When I was first an Australian university professor at the University of Sydney (1980) my generation of academics would certainly not have known what was meant by ‘quality assurance’. Towards academic quality, we certainly had internal systems of scrutiny through the academic board over courses and marks, plus external examination assessment through double-marking of papers and theses.

Our notion of standards essentially related to the peer-review systems of a collegial academy of scholars in which we operated as publishing academics. The focus was on excellence
and esteem in our disciplines. We also worked in relatively small and academically more homogeneous institutions within a much smaller higher education system — positively ‘elite’ by contemporary standards of participation.

Then came the transformation of the Australian higher education sector which is associated with the White Paper of 1988 and the dynamic impact of a reforming minister in John Dawkins. Not only was the binary divide collapsed — so producing a single Unified National System (UNS) of university providers which combined universities and the old colleges of advanced education — but a new ethos was breathed into higher education.

The aim of this new ethos was now to bring the sector into national reform strategies involving not just wider ‘entry and access’ for the sake of equity, but additionally in the name of human capital advancement. A rapid increase in the skilled graduate was seen to be important in the development of national productivity. A national research council was also established to underpin a new and more focused national research strategy to meet ‘national needs’, not least to connect science and technology to industry and the economy in general.

Universities were broadly seen as the last unreformed sector in Australia, controlled essentially by unworldly academics and something of a sleeping giant in potential for the nation. A major ‘user pays’ initiative led to the creation of HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme), which had three key dimensions.

The first of these dimensions was to introduce a new market element into a higher education: a university credential was deemed to be not just a public good but also a ‘private benefit’ to the graduate. The second was to meet the equity test of ensuring that university was still free at the point of entry; by ensuring that all fees levied (now termed ‘contributions’) were only to be reclaimed in a delayed loan payment system linked to an earnings-threshold through the income tax. Finally, and perhaps most vital of all, HECS was to deliver a significant new income stream to the Commonwealth in helping to fund university expansion and research capacity.

In short, a far more instrumentalist approach had been introduced to expand and to shape higher education. It was more open to access. It was also subject to greater scrutiny and accountability in meeting national policy objectives. Enthusiasts for the changes spoke of a democratised university sector, now surely open to greater participation as the sector swelled from less than 200,000 students to the current nearly one million.

More accurately, the Dawkins reforms meant ‘massification’ and increasingly contestable funding. It was almost inevitable that ‘government’ would wish to regulate such a system involving universities as state agencies; and a super ministry was duly created in DEET (Department of Employment Education and Training) along with a national board (of education, employment and training, NBEET) to advise the Minister on the development of the new system.

Quality Assurance became the child of these new dispensations as all the newly identified ‘stakeholders’ — another new term for the scholarly tongue — required forms of accountability. Governments wanted assurance about significant funding initiatives and educational outcomes; employers and industry showed a new interest in university graduates, and the students, now deemed ‘consumers’, took a greater interest in what their HECS debt had delivered to them.

An early form of internationalisation also increasingly informed this heady policy mix as Australian universities enrolled substantial numbers of overseas students — either on Australian campuses or in programs offered ‘offshore’. ‘Brand Australia’, as it came to be known, soon needed the assurance of quality for a growing export market in education and skills.

The rest was history, as we might say; QA was soon integral to the new Australian higher education system. But it was actually history by trial and error — QA in two quite distinct steps involving as much failure as success.
Through NBEET, there was created the Commonwealth Quality Assurance in Higher Education (CQAHE) initiative of the mid-1990s. And I still vividly recall traveling to the first NBEET briefing session (in the Council Chambers of Adelaide University on 5th August 1993), to have the mystery of QA explained. I was then a very new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) at Macquarie University and about to learn about the even newer concept of ‘QA’ which was soon to be dropped on the Australian university sector; the United Kingdom, we learned, had already embraced QA for its transformed sector.

CQAHE had a troubled and relatively short life. As much was learned from its failures as from its positive impact in establishing the concept of QA for the UNS. Quite apart from the drama surrounding the first of the audit panel visits — we were not used to being ‘inspected’, and we tended to regard the challenge as being to defend and boost our institution — there was soon much greater controversy and unease over CQAHE’s public outcomes.

Notably, moves by CQAHE to rank all the institutions (into three bands), based on a far from clear methodology, with the allocation of relatively significant financial awards attached to the contested rankings. CQAHE departed the scene after three far from triumphant years, and more with a whimper than with a bang.

The Emergence of an ‘Australian Way’ in Educational Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance went into policy limbo for a few years. But it necessarily had to return, even if in another modified form. It was impossible to imagine operating a modern, increasingly large, costly public sector without the accountability of a QA system; or indeed the cloak of respectable standards which it gave to ‘Brand Australia’ and our somewhat differentiated but fast-growing export educational programs in the Asia-Pacific region.

My first encounter with an actual QA audit was on Tuesday 8th October 1994, when the CQAHE panel first visited Macquarie University. My last experience was some seven years later — by which time CQAHE had become AUQA, and was now clearly a rather different QA enterprise.

That new agency, ‘AUQA’, was not only to be an independent company owned by all the governments of Australia, but one of the agencies of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). Governance was to be through a representative Board of stakeholders as Directors. And it was through MCEETYA that its core values and procedures were ultimately to be established through four carefully negotiated principles of operation.

A philosophy of ‘fitness-for-purpose’ was to guide AUQA’s approach to a system of ‘self-assessment’ audit by portfolio and peers — with the ultimate aim being institutional enhancement. There was to be no ranking, and there was to be no monetary consequence of audit. The reports were to contain ‘commendations’ of good practice (which might be selected to appear within a ‘Good Practice Data Base’ on the AUQA website); and ‘recommendations’ for improvement. [Later, a new category was added of ‘affirmations’ of improvements already underway.]

The tone was essentially one of collaborative engagement and development — rather than one of regulatory imposition or judgment. In an increasingly deregulated sector, publication of the AUQA reports was taken to be a significant institutional influence for the betterment of practice, as well as a powerful consumer guide for the community in making enrolment choices. The foundation Executive Director was appointed from the already existent New Zealand quality assurance agency, which already operated along similar principled lines, albeit in a much smaller sector.

With some grumbles, stumbles and fumbles, Australia had finally evolved its own QA approach. This reflected both its federal form as a nation through MCEETYA ownership, and
also the commitment of all the education ministers and vice-chancellors to a QA system that was as much about quality assistance as quality assessment, enhancement as capacity building.

Since that point in time — the end of the 1990s — a full cycle of institutional and agency audits has been conducted across all universities, (as well as state and territory accrediting agencies and the few non-university self-accrediting institutions). Some shift in audit emphasis (e.g. greater concern for offshore operations and for risk) can be detected in that brief history. But overall, the initial charter and practice of AUQA has stayed relatively (or remarkably) unchanged compared to the trajectory of some other QA agencies globally.

It is now indeed possible for an ‘Australian way’ in QA to be identified across a range of international jurisdictions.

An external, international Review Panel audited AUQA itself in 2006. A call for public and stakeholder submissions was followed by an Australian site visit in 2005, at which the Panel interviewed members of the Board, AUQA staff and selected stakeholders. The result was a major assessment of the work of the Agency and of its guiding philosophy.

This ‘Jackson Report’ (2006) while essentially reaffirming the AUQA mission and approach, highlighted further challenges for implementation by the Agency. ‘Fitness of Purpose’ (as against ‘Fitness for Purpose’) was advanced as a consideration for audit practice, as was a pointer towards a greater concern for outcomes in the audits. The complex matter of ‘standards’ and ‘benchmarking’ were also put on the agenda of development for AUQA. And certain UK lessons in QA, not least in handling ‘matters of concern’ between audit cycles, were additionally highlighted.

Evolution rather than revolution was broadly recommended for the development of the Australia Way in QA. And this has been the approach of the AUQA Board in devising ‘Cycle 2’ of the national audits, now embedded in revised goals established by MCEETYA. The key recommendations of the ‘Jackson Report’ have been taken up, and the AUQA Board has done considerable work on the issue of ‘standards’: How do institutions set and measure their standards, and what is the role of international benchmarking in that process of academic and functional operations?

Cycle 2 audits will, moreover, see AUQA not only assess institutional progress against the earlier whole-of-institution audits, but also consider two much more focused ‘themes’ — topics which either define the strength of the institution or reflect greatest areas of ‘risk’. ‘International activities’, including transnational (offshore) education, is a preferred topic of the Agency for more detailed audit; while many of the universities have chosen as their favoured theme aspects of ‘teaching and learning’ or the ‘student experience’. In addition, the AUQA Board has reserved the right to engage in ‘follow-up’ audits between Cycles where issues of significance arise in the public domain.

There is change, but it is change within an established band of practice and outlook. Surveys of stakeholders have suggested a general satisfaction with AUQA; and the great majority of audited institutions have offered a positive view of the ‘AUQA experience’. The agency indeed enjoys a certain esteem across other higher education jurisdictions, with a steady stream of international visitors to 123 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne — the HQ of AUQA. Most recently, the Executive Director of AUQA (Dr David Woodhouse) was elected President of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), not only a commendable personal distinction, but also recognition of the standing of Australian QA processes and approach.

**Challenges to the Status Quo**

It takes an academic analyst/spoilsport to drop a disturbing pebble, let alone a critical rock into this apparently tranquil pool of policy satisfaction. But it is extremely important to con-
sider the current challenges to the evolving status quo that I have been describing.

For a start, while QA is often portrayed as a pure ‘public good’, in fact the policy (and political) environment is invariably far more contested.

Some of these issues are incipient in a dynamic and changing global environment for higher education. Some of them are more immediately associated with the politics of education within a liberal democracy, where all established practices are open to both critique and change as public policy evolves. But QA is also invariably a moveable feast in national policies and practices. In essence, there is no fixed point in the policy development of liberal democracies engaged with a globalising era of change in education. And as micro-reform has swept though OECD nations, so the moves to closer scrutiny by the state and by the community of its investment in higher education and its provision has grown with each of the developing systems.

Evolving those systems of accountability and consumer protection has indeed become a key feature of the neo-liberal state. Higher education policy can hardly expect to be quarantined from major policy change and accountability pressures. The fact that the university tradition in the West is now a venerable 1000 years old does not give it a protected or privileged position within the modern state. QA is the state answer to the new educational dispensations.

Let me group those issues which contribute to the ferment over educational policy into a series of broad categories. The intention is simply to capture the breadth of issues and forces which particularly swirl around QA in the Australian higher education jurisdiction at the moment. However settled our QA arrangements appear to be, it is a structure which could just as easily experience significant change in a short period of time.

The first, and generic matter, is simply the oft-forgotten reality of the complexity (and to some degree ‘irrationality’) of the public policy arena which governs higher education, including all national QA arrangements.

Only darkly do most of us have any real grasp of how public policy actually originates and is implemented. ‘Politics today is all about creativity and pragmatism in policy choice’, as Dr Geoff Gallop has commented from the considerable insight of a successful former state premier (and now director of the Sydney University School of Government). ‘Governments face short and long term pressures and have available a range of options to deal with them …[and] the list is being expanded all the time’. Moreover:

Political considerations are rarely made independently of political considerations. Indeed, the world of policy is at the intersection between the world of natural and social sciences and the world of public opinion. There is research evidence and there is popular understanding…

Even more personally, Geoff Gallop warns against presuming that public policy always emerges out of a deliberative environment which is entirely dispassionate and utilitarian. ‘My friend former senator John Wheeldon … put it to me this way when I decided on a political career: “Geoff, always remember the first rule of politics: never assume rationality.”’

That caution, about the vagaries of the political dynamic which informs the shaping and evolution of public policy, should not be underestimated. Academic analysis and advocacy alone will neither shape the policies which are ultimately put in place, nor will they entirely explain the developments, sudden policy lurches or ministerial interventions that can frustrate and disappoint the independent observer. Politics is clearly both dynamic and volatile. Those who expect the ‘philosopher monarch’ approach to the development of universities and higher education policy are bound to end in grumpy despair.

And structurally the Australian political environment for higher education policy is almost certain to produce policy which reflects political contestations and complex political compromises which are probably endemic to federalised nations.
Since 1974, our higher education sector has indeed had a divided soul. Universities ‘belong’ to the states in their foundation and governance; while their operations and funding come of course from the Commonwealth. That division or positive ‘balance’ reflects both the allocations of power under the 1901 constitution, as well as the pragmatic changes which have been negotiated (or just legislated) over the years. It is an ongoing process and common to federal environments.

How does our system actually work then in practice? It may seem quite logical and understandable to those of us who live under the Southern Cross. But to outsiders it actually seems mysteriously complex, if not a constitutional oddity. Through MCEETYA, involving all the education ministers from all the governments of Australia, we see the collaborative face of federalism and federal policy formation. But we also see the tensions and conflicts which arise when national policy initiatives work against the sense of states’ rights.

And when the national government is of one ideological persuasion (currently conservative) with an increasing desire to tilt the balance of policy towards the Commonwealth priorities, and all the governments of states and territories are of another persuasion (uniformly Labor administrations) with their own sense of regional concerns, then higher education reform is not a smooth process.

On the other hand, if the national government were to change at the next federal election due later this year, and all of Australia at all levels was to be governed by Labor administrations, then a rather different federalism would operate — one which could potentially have some strikingly different consequences for higher education policy and QA.

Indeed, as the major parties begin to prepare their policy positions in the run up to the federal election (which must be held before 19th January 2008), it becomes plain that their policy strategies on higher education are interestingly divergent. In the area of Quality alone it would seem that the current Liberal–National Coalition would wish to press for a more uniform national approach, and a stronger capacity to link audit with funding, all perhaps implemented by a more powerful QA organisation. Conversely, Labor has indicated a special interest in measuring university graduate outcomes and ensuring ‘minimum standards’ across the sector, while they too consider how an appropriately reconfigured QA agency might be structured.

Beyond the political parties, there is also of course ‘movement at the station’ involving the major educational lobby groups. With an eye to the impending Federal election, policy advocacy is coming from such leading players as ‘Universities Australia’ and, more especially, from some of the subgroupings of universities. ‘The Group of 8’ — whose comprehensive plan for a deregulated university turns around not just vouchers for student choice but is a new buffer advisory body to government which would oversee QA. (Broadly, the Go8 sees AUQA as having significantly failed to sustain standards for ‘Brand Australia’)

The major business and employer groups will also surely join the debate with their concerns about the quality of job-ready university graduates and the professional associations and unions will make their policy bids.

Just how higher education policy is debated will also of course reflect the ways in which the issues are filtered through the national and state media.

And here the consequences are very uncertain and uneven. Broadly, the media find higher education policy and practice difficult to report or to analyse. Policy and funding is complex; the issues are not always clear-cut in a very diverse and increasingly stratified sector, and it is always easier to focus on individual events (apparent crises or scandals in university administration), people (vice-chancellorial salaries are especially favoured) or simple equity issues (the cost of the small number of fee-paying courses). Quality all too often gets covered in terms of problems arising out of the now extensive delivery of transnational education programs.
The print media is also deeply attracted to the ‘ranking’ of universities — with much less interest in how those fallible rankings were actually devised. Indeed, the general ‘ranking’ phenomena — ‘Rankomania’ as Professor Simon Marginson has pointedly termed it — is in many ways becoming ‘the next big idea’ in QA internationally.

The ranking approach is cheaper to develop, it is easier for policy makers (and funders) to deploy and it has immediate consumer impact. There are many academic studies which have revealed the peculiarities and vagaries of many, if not most of the global ranking projects. But universities, who might have been expected to be the main critics of ‘rankomania’, are in fact now complicit in the phenomena. They deride rankings — but often only until they find that their institution is well placed in some published list which is to their advantage.

Perhaps more seriously, in some higher education jurisdictions, rankings are becoming serious business in being used to identify the elite universities for research funding purposes, while in others, a ranking methodology is being adopted alongside other QA strategies as a quintessential measure of outcomes. AUQA has consistently repudiated simplistic approaches to ranking of institutions, as the awareness of, and fascination with, rankings as a form of QA grows globally.

The other pathway even more widely adopted in other jurisdictions — and especially among developing nations, where the greatest expansion in higher education is happening — concerns the further expansion of modes of accreditation and graduate testing. Accreditation is being implemented at the older level of subject or discipline, but in other cases it has been enlarged to take on whole-of-institution measurement against external frameworks of performance and outcomes. The concern to establish ‘minimum standards’ in that regard has also moved some jurisdictions towards a graduate testing regime, based on certain US models. Again, AUQA has preferred not to go down those roads as being against its core philosophy and approach.

Taken globally, the new developments in QA have tended to move the emphasis from ‘quality assurance’ to ‘quality assessment’, from models of long-term ‘enhancement’ to systems focused on more short-term outcomes measured in hard-edged KPIs — targets, ratings, and rankings. The ‘Australian way’ remains (increasingly) ‘the road less traveled ...’.

Within the Australian jurisdiction, there is also a greater variety of policy views than perhaps appears in the formal documents and submissions to the various organisations and venues where the future of QA is debated and determined.

Some of these views come from a radical perspective on Australian higher education, which argues that organisations like AUQA tend to mask the brute reality that only Australia, amongst the major OECD nations, is allowing its investment in funding public universities to decline (at a time when ‘knowledge nation’ strategies are moving other states in the very opposite direction). By this critical view, AUQA reports tend to give the false comfort that all is generally well in the sector when all is under intense strain across a majority of higher education institutions.

At the other end of the critique is a far from radical perspective which states that while AUQA has done a good job in ensuring that ‘massification’ in Australia has been accompanied by reasonable institutional standards, and indeed that much good practice is now part of an increasingly, highly professional sector there is a declining rate of return in persisting with this costly and time-consuming QA approach when the majority of the good has already been done. Analogies are drawn with the British RAE (‘Research Assessment Exercise’) where even its main protagonist, the late Professor Gareth Roberts, was ready to concede that the greatest benefit of the RAE perhaps lay in its first cycle of application.

Beyond these two polar points lies a great range of reforming or critical positions. For example, it is argued that under the AUQA aegis, the QA system in Australia:
Has become unduly concerned with institutional processes — rather than with actual standards of performance and academic outcomes

Simply does not provide enough of a ‘value-add’ for institutions to justify the costs of an AUQA audit (reckoned to be some $500,000 plus when indirect costs of staff time are added)

Through the ‘Fitness for Purpose’ approach, has allowed institutions to set their own levels for achievement and these have been set too low in a highly diverse and increasingly stratified sector

Has not included enough ‘Fitness of Purpose’ in the audits, with even suggestions that some financially insecure (let alone unviable) institutions have passed under the AUQA audit radar.

Some also imply that:

- Despite AUQA having made 89 overseas audit visits, Australian transnational higher education programs are far too uneven in what they deliver, and ‘risk’ should be given much greater attention in relation to local agents
- Because the AUQA audits do not directly challenge core academic values in the mission and operation of universities, the ‘commercialisation’ of the Australian higher education has gone unchecked
- Australia has evolved an increasingly vocational set of higher education institutions, in which the QA system has not engaged with the ideals of ‘a liberal education’
- The academic autonomy and the independence of universities have declined without any noticeable redress from the QA process
- Because institutions are only audited once in a long cycle of around six years, QA is not continuously applied, leaving open significant issues between audits.

And so on and on… There is never any shortage of critical debate on campuses about higher education policy as the fate and fortunes of universities change. Equally, in policy circles the urge to overturn the status quo, towards what is taken to be more effective public outcomes, is ever a force.

This is not the place to discuss or rebut such a range of issues. Nothing listed here would be ‘news’ for the AUQA Board or among the audit directors. AUQA Cycle 2 audit procedures and guidelines have attempted to address the key areas for development. And through the work of this AUQF, many of the contentious issues will surely be raised for further discussion.

In the end, all QA systems reflect their own mission, philosophy and mode of proceeding. There will always be a balance to be struck between past developments and future imperatives. Stakeholders will invariably look to a ‘betterment’ of any system put in place.

**Some Lessons From a Short History**

Even though the history of QA in Australian higher education has been relatively short there are indeed some simple ‘lessons’ to be taken from its experience.

The first relates to the already changing nature of the Australian QA Agency. As has been remarked elsewhere, ‘AUQA has not so much come of age as worked to deal with the age in which it lives…’

Within a particular approach to QA, the agency has made adjustments and changes; for example, now giving greater emphasis to transnational education and overseas audits than when AUQA first began its work. This has assured relevancy and timeliness in its approach. But that evolution and renewal was of course within its charter and its agreed Fitness for Purpose style of audits.
The second recognises that QA is invariably a ‘moveable feast’, reflecting the changing dynamics of politics and policies, and trend and mechanisms — both national and arising out of more international influences and practices. Just as AUQA was the child of the debates which followed CQAHE and the ideas then current about QA for self-accrediting institutional systems, so a new set of public priorities in the policy mix could well produce a modified, or substantially different outcome in approach.

Indeed, while Cycle 1 audits have broadly been seen to be of value to the recent dispensation of universities, that is no assurance towards the continuing existence of the current approach to QA in higher education. Environments and policy imperatives change, and a QA agency is but a servant of that evolving context. Within the public policy of the Commonwealth itself there is a demonstrable short life for many of its public boards and agencies. The bell has long tolled for CETEC, NBEEET and, more recently, for ANTA and the ARC council. Policy and stakeholders will always come before the continuity of an agency.

Finally, however, I would comment historically that building a workable approach to QA is no mean achievement, and there is certainly a considerable value in taking forward to any subsequent arrangements the experience and acceptance which AUQA has managed to create. The historical legacy can be a millstone for any organisation; but it can also be a learning resource on which the future is built.

Hamlet’s challenge therefore remains.

How we are indeed best ‘to show our quality’; and, consequently, how we are to measure it, is one of the enduring key issues in contemporary higher education globally. There is no perfect way. Australia has done it in its own fashion, and it has largely done it through the vehicle of AUQA.

But in changing environments and in democratic states the question will always be reasonably asked: Is there a better way?

In his own quintessential language, Shakespeare of course has already posed the issue for us (and for AUQA) in his own most famous of questions: ‘To be, or not to be…’

Notes


2 The Hon. Julie Bishop MP, Minister for Education, Science and Training, letter to Mr Maurice Wenn, Secretary, MCEETYA [16 October 2006].


4 Ibid.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

Can Quality Assurance Survive the Market?

Roger Brown

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A more competitive market is the approach that we are supporting elsewhere in education and elsewhere in the public services, and I believe that higher education in general will benefit.

(Ruth Kelly, Secretary of State for Education and Skills, speech to the Universities UK Annual Conference, 2005)

Everywhere in higher education market forces seem to be rampant. America, Australia and New Zealand are already well down the route to marketisation. Britain is following close behind with the introduction of variable fees whilst several countries on the European continent are keen to follow suit. In this presentation I want to reflect on the implications, and the dilemmas, for quality assurance. My overall argument is that we must resist at least the cruder forms of marketisation, but we must also, as an academic community, put our own house in order, beginning, I should say, with the Vice-Chancellors! Incidentally, by “marketisation” I simply mean a reduced role for government and the academy.

Before coming to the main part of my remarks, it may be worth mentioning my credentials. As you will have gathered from my CV, I am an unusual case of “gamekeeper” turned “poacher”.

I still feel that I do not know enough about quality in higher education. However I knew even less before the time in 1991 — as first (and as it proved last) CEO of the then Committee of Directors of Polytechnics — when I grappled with the consequences of the UK Government’s decision to abolish the former Council for National Academic Awards and enable the polytechnics and certain other colleges to offer their own awards. I became even more familiar with quality issues as Chief Executive of the former Higher Education Quality Council between 1993 and 1997. As you probably know, HEQC was not only responsible for developing and extending the institutional audit method first developed by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and since widely copied, but also for groundbreaking work on academic standards, much of which has now translated into accepted international practice.

In 1998 I became the head of an institution — Southampton Institute — which had, ironically, been badly fingered by the same HEQC. Not without difficulty I led the institution out of the crisis, caused in part by an HEQC audit, through to degree awarding powers and university title as Southampton Solent University, the post from which I am shortly to step down. I have continued my interest in quality assurance and have written many articles on the subject culminating in my book Quality Assurance in Higher Education: The UK Experience since 1992 (Brown, 2004) with which some of you may be familiar.

In February 2005 I visited Penn State University in the United States and took part in a conference on the future of the American public research university. This led me to develop a strong interest in the general issue of marketisation, about which I hope to shortly write a book. Marketisation is of course a subject about which many distinguished authors have written including Bob Zemsky, Bill Massy and Simon Marginson here. However no one has yet said very much about the potential implications for what I am for this purpose calling the...
Anglo-Australasian-American approach to quality assurance, which still rests, just about, on the principle of self-regulation through peer review. This is a gap that I propose to try to fill today. In particular, I want to ask what it is that we need to do to protect this model. But I want first to look at the threats and potential threats.

The most recent serious challenge to academic self-regulation has come from the Federal Commission report on American Higher Education [about which you may already have heard from Professor Zemsky]. Essentially, the Commission was concerned about value for money. Their starting point was that the costs of tuition have risen inexorably in recent years, with parallel changes in student financial support — and particularly the shift from needs-based to merit-based aid — which have made colleges less and less affordable for poorer Americans. But even many students from better off backgrounds have difficulty in achieving satisfactory learning outcomes or economic value from their higher education.

The Commission's central message was that American higher education:

must change from a system primarily based on reputation to one based on performance (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006: 21).

To deal with these problems the Commission made a wide range of recommendations, but pride of place was given to accountability and transparency:

Every one of our goals, from improving access and affordability to enhancing quality and innovation, will be more easily achieved if higher education institutions embrace and implement serious accountability measures (2006: 20).

The Commission recommended the creation of:

A consumer-friendly information database on higher education with useful, reliable information on institutions, coupled with a search engine to enable students, parents, policymakers and others to weight and rank comparative institutional performance (2006: 20).

As well as this new consumer oriented database, more and better information on the quality and cost of higher education is needed. The Federal Government should:

Develop a national system for tracking student records to follow the progress of each student in the country with appropriate privacy safeguards (Fischer, 2006: A43).

Finally, accreditation agencies:

Should make performance outcomes including completion rates and student learning the core of their assessment as a priority over inputs or processes. A framework that aligns and expands existing accreditation standards should be established to (1) allow comparisons among institutions regarding learning outcomes and other performance measures (2) encourage innovation and continuous improvements and (3) require institutions and programs to move towards world-class quality relative to specific missions and report measurable progress in relationship to their national and international peers (2006: 24).

Incidentally, in making this recommendation, the Commission may have been influenced by developments in Australia and Britain where there are of course officially sanctioned websites containing information about programme quality in addition to commercial league tables.

Well I understand that government officials are now bogged down in negotiations with university and college representatives about finding a way of implementing these recommendations in a way that protects academic self-regulation (Bollag, 2007: A33).
The issue I want to focus on here is information particularly bearing in mind the Commission’s notion of a user friendly comparative database.

The one thing — perhaps the only thing — on which economists appear to agree is that markets cannot function without adequate — sound and impartial — information about quality. Applied to higher education, this must require students and others to be able to make, and to act upon, rational judgements about the quality of programmes and awards at different institutions — alongside information about price and availability — and for institutions to respond to those judgements (and actions) by improving quality.

If, on the other hand, these judgements cannot, or will not, be made, and the necessary consequential actions are not taken (by students, funders and institutions), then there can clearly be no justification for preferring particular institutions for purposes of resource or value allocation. In these circumstances the only legitimate economic argument for variable tuition charges concerns non-quality related costs such as the local price of inputs like staff and property. This is of course leaving aside the case where fees may be reduced through public subsidy to promote or protect particular kinds of provision.

As we go down the market route, therefore, a — I would say the — crucial question is whether it is in fact possible to have sound and impartial — ie valid, reliable and consistent — information about the quality of programmes and awards from different institutions as a basis for judgements.

However that is only the beginning of the discussion. To be effective as a basis for decision making, such information must also:

- be available to decision makers in a timely, accessible, and fair fashion;
- be interpreted in a rational manner by those decision makers;
- be acted upon by those decision makers; and
- lead to responsive adjustments to quality by the providing institutions.\(^2\)

What conditions will need to be in place for sound and impartial judgements to be made about the comparative quality of programmes of study and the associated awards at two or more institutions? In other words:

how can valid and reliable information about the comparative quality of programmes and awards be created?

I would suggest the following:

- the programmes must be comparable in terms of aims, structure, content, learning outcomes, delivery, support and learning environments;
- similarly, the awards must involve comparable assessment methods, criteria and outcomes (marks or grades);
- the assessment judgements must be valid, reliable and consistent, and validly, reliably and consistently moderated;
- students pursuing the programmes — and/or interested in pursuing the programmes — must have comparable starting attainments, aspirations, motivations, learning objectives etc.

Well one has only to consider these points for a moment to see how very unlikely it is that these conditions could be created in the diverse, mass higher education systems that we all now have. In fact, the only way of fulfilling these conditions, or even of attempting to do so, would be to have a national curriculum with national tests administered by national examiners. This is unimaginable but it can be confidently predicted that as markets develop, there will be renewed calls for controls of this kind. I have christened this “Brown’s paradox”: the fact that as the system expands, the desire for comparability grows, yet by the same token the possibility of achieving meaningful comparability recedes.
Let us imagine, nevertheless, that it were possible for some person, group or organisation to arrive at such judgements. Making such judgements is of course not sufficient. The judgements also need to be made available to each decision maker in a timely, accessible and equitable manner.

As regards timeliness, if information about programme quality is to be useful as a basis of student choice then it has, by definition, to be available well in advance of the choice being made. But higher education is an “experience good”: something that is experienced only as it is consumed. So the only really secure way of obtaining information about a course or institution is to experience it. Yet by that time it may be too late particularly given the difficulties of switching course or institution. This incidentally highlights another key assumption — that students are able to act on the information they receive.

As regards accessibility, leaving aside all the issues about disaggregating institutional information to the level of detail — programme or even module — in which the individual student may be really interested, there is the undoubted difficulty that few students have the interest, the energy or the expertise to usefully interrogate it. This is what I call the “two clicks maximum” phenomenon.

Finally, as regards equity, it is notorious that some students are better able to access and use the available information than others. It is often argued that working class students will benefit particularly from comparative information about quality because they lack the social and cultural capital of middle class students. I shall come back to this in a minute.

Let us assume, nevertheless, that these conditions have been met, or even that the difficulties of meeting them have been reduced by, for example, making it easier for students to switch programmes. There remains the question of the use made of the judgements.

Implicit in the markets approach is the notion of the rational consumer. But as Jongbloed in a recent and valuable discussion (Teixeira et al 2006), points out, this idea no longer holds currency amongst economists:

> If individuals are fundamentally rational and the problems are … (uncertainty, imperfect information), the potential role for policy would be to try to address those market imperfections by helping students make the decisions they want. If, on the other hand, students are fundamentally irrational then giving them more information or eliminating market imperfections will not necessarily improve outcomes. In the latter case there may not be a need to strengthen consumer choice in higher education, and it might be better to, for example, let educational authorities offer the programmes they deem best for students rather than let student preference drive programme selection (in Teixeira et al, 2006: 25).

The point about context is particularly relevant to students from backgrounds unfamiliar with higher education as another contributor to the same volume shows:

> the relationship between information and decision making appears much less straightforward than is assumed… People having access to identical information about higher education may construct it to come to entirely different decisions about whether or not to apply to university. These reflect their perceptions of the providers of information, as well as a whole range of contextual and identify factors (Hutchings 2003: 98 quoted by Callender, 2006) (Teixeira et al, 2006).

This point is exemplified by Lesley Pugsley’s study of decision making about higher education in South Wales (note, not New South Wales). Issues about information end up as being issues about social and cultural capital (Pughlsley, 2004). The same point is made from another angle by Bob Zemsky (in Burke et al, 2005) where he argues that it is doubtful whether
even if the information issue could be resolved, it would have much impact on student or funder choices, given higher education’s significance as a positional good. I understand him to be saying that even if we could show that less prestigious institutions offered a poorer educational experience, many students would still prefer to attend such institutions.

Finally, whilst there is certainly some evidence of institutions responding to critical external reports by taking remedial action on quality, we know very little about how they respond to the kinds of market signals envisaged by our governments. Most academic institutions certainly don’t work like that, and probably they never will. It will be necessary to show that the lack of student support was due to problems of quality. Given the lack of rationality exhibited by many students this would seen to be a forlorn hope. Yet without such evidence there is very little chance of making the necessary adjustments.

Now you may know that we in Britain have an official website containing Teaching Quality Information (TQI) based, indirectly, on your Course Experience Questionnaire. In a recent review, a national committee of which I was a member recommended the ending of the practice of placing so called “qualitative” information about quality — such things as summaries of external examiners’ reports, outcomes of internal reviews, institutional learning and teaching strategies, links with employers etc — on the website. This was on the basis that the costs to institutions of producing this information far outweighed any potential use by or benefits to students. This has been accepted (Brown et al, forthcoming).

So, if it is indeed impossible to provide meaningful and accessible comparative information about quality, should we simply stand there and say: sorry it can’t be done, perhaps adding insult to injury by reminding our governments of Martin Trow’s famous statement:

*Higher education is a process masquerading as an outcome.*

This is where I come to the second part of my remarks — putting our own house in order. Here is my personal agenda for a serious and responsible response to these insistent pressures about information on quality:

- not crying wolf;
- not harking back to the good old days;
- providing information;
- providing evidence;
- not cooperating with league tables;
- being serious about student learning;
- improving academic practice.

Let me now unpack these.

**Not Crying Wolf**

To read some accounts of recent developments in higher education, not to mention the letters column of the *Times Higher*, you would think that a national curriculum enforced by a national inspectorate was just around the corner. It is certainly true that from time to time governments — or at least our government — tries to nibble away at the higher education curriculum. It is also true that where government itself acts as the professional accreditor — as in initial teacher training — there can be seen a tendency to what let us unkindly call “dumbing down”. But with these important, but partial, exceptions, all the key dimensions of the higher education curriculum — course design, delivery, assessment, evaluation, not to mention the recruitment and graduation of students (and staff) remain well within the control of the academy.\(^3\)
**Not Harking Back to the Good Old Days**

One of the things which nearly put me off applying to be a student at one of our ancient universities was the amount of time that my masters at schools spent reminiscing about their time there: it was as if that was the time of their lives and everything since had been a declension. But there were no “good old days”. Those who were working in universities then, and who are honest, will admit that there was a lot of wasted effort and a lot of weak performance. In any case, there is no going back to those days, which is not of course to endorse all the regulatory demands we make on academic staff. Nevertheless it needs to be borne in mind that the direct costs of the regulation of both teaching and research, at least in the UK, are miniscule in relation to the sums of expenditure involved. I will now duck as you throw rotten fruit at me!

**Providing information**

My argument against comparative information about quality should not be taken as an argument against providing information for students about programme quality. Let me repeat that. On the contrary, I believe that in addition to providing information about things like entry qualifications, application rates, graduation rates etc institutions should publish information describing in some detail what educational outcomes they are aiming to achieve for their students, how effectively they are achieving them, and how they plan to do better. Unfortunately very few institutions even attempt to do this.

**Providing Evidence**

All over the country these groups of scholars, who would not make a decision about the shape of a leaf or the derivation of a word or the author of a manuscript without painstakingly assembling the evidence, make decisions about admission policy, size of universities, staff-student ratios, content of courses and similar issues, based on dubious assumptions, scrappy data and mere hunch. (Ashby 1963, quoted in Elton 1992)

Now I know that there are arguments about the nature and value of “evidence”: that it is, in posh academic language, a “contested” term. Putting that aside, and also bearing in mind the thought of Martin Trow’s advice, I still feel that our ability — or rather our inability — to point to convincing evidence to support and improve our academic practices is a real weakness.

As an example, let me quote the hoo hah about the Government’s plan in 2003 to create what were disparagingly called “teaching only” universities. Needless to say, the early universities jumped to the barricades and argued that this was devaluing higher education, weakening the link etc. However when Charles Clarke challenged them they were unable to provide any really convincing evidence. What are we to make of the phenomenon of the non-take-up of new ideas about teaching and learning in the STEM disciplines described by Elaine Seymour in a recent colloquium?

the collective experience of the reform movement (and some research evidence) calls into question the dominant theory of change (implicitly — or explicitly — held) that has guided public and private agencies in their approach to the diffusion of educational innovations. Both STEM reformers and their funders had expected that, if new resources and practices for teaching and learning were shown to have value for improving learning process and performance, then individual faculty, departments, and their institutions were likely to adopt and institutionalize these improvements without sustained agency support.
Notwithstanding a considerable effort to “prove” the educational value of different approaches to learning (via presentations and publication of research and evaluation findings, and workshops demonstrations), the innovators’ peers and departments have been highly resistant to the implications of such evidence for their own practice. As researchers of this phenomenon have noted, scientists respond differently to the outcomes of experiments when they are undertaken in education rather than their own discipline.

Providing the value of teaching strategy may be seen as a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for change. Many STEM innovators report resistance to their work — from students, teaching assistants, and colleagues, and sometimes from their departments. The risk to pre-tenured faculty has proved serious enough to prompt senior colleagues to discourage their participation in educational experimentation until their research careers are established and tenure is secured (Seymour, 2007: 5-6).

**Not Cooperating with Commercial League Tables**

You will of course appreciate that my arguments about the difficulty of providing comparative information about quality apply “with knobs on” to the commercial league tables, and particularly to those that rank institutions on criteria ultimately determined by the compiler and primarily designed to sell their newspaper (Brown, 2006). I therefore believe that higher education institutions should have as little as possible to do with them. As my own small contribution to this, and in addition to not providing my governing body with any information at all about our position in any of the commercial league tables, I also always write to any Vice-Chancellor who is seen to be supporting any particular league table.

Not long ago the Vice-Chancellor of quite a distinguished university in the north of England wrote an article in the *Sunday Times University Guide* commending our National Student Survey. I wrote to him pointing out that this was known to be statistically dubious and that already the newspapers were using it to construct league tables that were deeply damaging to the interest of higher education. I also pointed out that I had recently had approaches from two different firms of consultants offering specialist help in improving our institutional satisfaction rating, one of whom had actually quoted this particular Vice-Chancellor. I wondered why the Vice-Chancellor of such a respected university should want to give any credence to this sort of thing. I added a copy of a long and detailed article by me quoting the research evidence on league tables which was subsequently published in a respected journal. I received the following reply:

> Dear Professor Brown, I am sorry you disagree with my comments in the article in the Sunday Times. I think we should do what we can to support students attending universities.

As an aside I find it remarkable how often it is the representatives of those institutions that you might think were most wedded to traditional academic norms that seem to be among the keenest to abandon them (University of Cambridge)! In a recent *Chronicle* report about the appointment of Drew Gilpin Faust as the new President of Harvard, one of her professors was quoted as saying:

> Getting major donors to write $100-million-plus checks, that’s what we need… What everyone around Cambridge is asking you is, Will Drew Faust be able to do that? (Wilson, 2007: A23)
There is a major issue here. I believe, quite genuinely, that if we continue to acknowledge league tables we shall seriously damage the quality of what we can offer. I say this for four reasons which in the time and space available I can only adumbrate.

First, all such rankings contain data or assumptions that are highly questionable by any scientific criterion. Higher education is ultimately the generator and guardian of those criteria. If we engage with the publishers in a serious way, and thus legitimise them, we may be giving away our birthright, what it is that makes universities unique, and uniquely valuable to society. Moreover, there is no compensating gain because the league tablers can never change their approach. This is because they are ultimately more concerned with income and profit than with accuracy or truth. But once we have lost our preoccupation with accuracy and truth we are lost, and so is society.

Second, league tables will produce the “wrong” kind of higher education (leaves on the line). League tables reinforce the role of prestige as the main allocator of value in the system, at the expense of activities and institutions that seek to build reputation by trying to meet the needs of students and funders. We can all think of institutions that responded to their enhanced status as universities by cutting out provision that they or their academic staff saw as no longer appropriate, shifting resources into other activities more suited to their image of themselves, and moving away from the strengths that led to the enhancement of the institution in the first place.

Third, by pandering to the notion that higher education is ultimately a product like any other, league tables reinforce other trends that lead students and others to see higher education in mainly instrumental terms, as a good to be exchanged rather than a good to be used to use the nice phrase of Naidoo and Jamieson (2005: 40). (The phrase ultimately comes from Karl Marx.) Our National Student Survey is badly described: the job of a university is not to satisfy students but to change them.

So let us have nothing to do with league tables, whatever our institutional league table position.

Being Serious about Student Education

Although the evidence on the subject is mixed, I am a strong believer in the interpenetration of teaching and research or, as I would prefer to describe it, student education and staff research and scholarship (personally I favour the American term “scholarly inquiry”). But I also acknowledge that they do not make easy bedfellows, and that forces from outside the academy are driving them apart. What saddens me is how the academy itself has connived at this, so that research performance is the main indicator of prestige not only for individuals and departments, but also for whole institutions. At a conference in London recently I was asked to talk about the attitude on the part of the universities towards our Research Assessment Exercise. I quoted the case of a photograph which appeared in the Picture Post in 1942 or 1943. It showed thousands of Italian prisoners of war in the Western desert being guarded by a couple of British squaddies and with the Italians fighting for the honour of carrying the soldiers’ rifles.

Improving Academic Practice

So you will not be surprised that my final point is the need to improve our own academic practices. A particular case in point is student assessment. There is ample evidence that academic assessment practices in Britain leave a great deal to be desired (Warren Piper 1995, HEQC 1994, HEQC 1997, QAA 2003, QAA 2006). In the most recent survey, based on 128
institutional audit reports published between 2003 and 2006, the QAA concluded that, in
general higher education institutions have “only weak control” over marking practices (QAA,
2007). My former colleague Peter Williams, QAA Chief Executive, is quoted in the THES as
saying:

*The achievement of reliable and consistent degree classifications matters to all in the
higher education community. How they are determined should be clear to all who have
to depend on them.*

*In this area, the evidence of the QAA’s audits is not completely reassuring* (Williams,

Given the sort of language that is used by quality agency chief executives this is a pretty
clear warning that we need to pull our socks up! But will it be heeded any more than the
previous ones?

**Conclusions**

I believe that markets represent a fundamental challenge to quality assurance and self-
regulation as it has been developed and practised in the Anglo/Australasian/American
systems. The fundamental issue is what makes for high quality, and indeed who determines
what is meant by that phrase.

The market view is that high quality is achieved through competition between providers
between whose programmes students decide on the basis of information about price, avail-
ability and quality. The key information here is information about comparative quality which
needs to be available to students. I have already set out the fundamental difficulty with this.

The academic view is that high quality is achieved through high standards of academic
practice in an adequately funded system. The key information here is the information that
institutions and academics collect about the effectiveness of their practices in protecting and
raising quality.

Alongside this there is a still more fundamental difference of view about what is meant
by quality.

In a market it is consumers — students, parents, employers and governments acting
or claiming to act on their behalf — whose expectations dominate the discussion. Quality is
seen in terms of the fit between any individual programme/institution and the needs of those
consumers. This is a fitness for purpose view where consumers determine both purpose and
fitness. Quality is ultimately judged in terms of student satisfaction.

Under the academic view, it is academic staff whose expectations and norms are decisive.
Quality is seen in terms of the extent to which individual students fulfil certain prescribed aca-
demic requirements and norms. Here it is the academy that determines the worth/value both
of those requirements/norms and of the student’s achievements in relation to them. Quality is
ultimately determined in terms of an academic view of what it is to be an educated person in,
usually, that particular discipline or field of practice. This is a fitness of purpose view as well as
a fitness for purpose one.

I personally believe that, whilst student, employer and indeed government views are
important, ultimately the only proper judges of quality — of the value of an essay, a project,
a qualification — are (and must be) professional academic staff. They should of course be as
transparent as they can be.

I also believe that, in spite of the ever growing pressures of market forces, we can still
preserve serious self-regulation, where quality is ultimately judged in academic terms. But in
order to be able to do so, we must bring to quality assurance — the protection of quality
— the same commitment, resources and rigour that we customarily bring to other academic activities like research. Until we do so I fear that we shall always as an academy remain on the defensive.

References


Brown, R (2006) ‘League tables — do we have to live with them?’ perspectives, 10 (2), April


Higher Education Quality Council (1994) Learning from Audit, London


Notes
1 Australia has operated the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) since 1991. Based on the CEQ Britain introduced the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2005 and there is also a Teaching Quality Information website that has been in operation since September 2005. All this is in addition to commercial league tables of various kinds, in Britain notably the Sunday Times University League, The Good University Guide, and the Guardian University Guide, in Australia there’s the Good Universities Guides.
2 There has also to be a reasonable relationship between the overall benefits, costs and detriments associated with the collection, processing and publication of the information. Other things being equal, the collection and publication of information about quality must represent the best use of resources for that purpose: greater welfare with fewer detriments.
3 It is the RAE and selective funding of research that is arguably the greatest threat to the curriculum.
4 At Southampton Solent University the Solent Curriculum specifies key features of the learning experience offered to students. These include the balance of theory and practice and application of theory to practice, the development of employability and research skills through use of ‘live’, ‘real work’ and ‘real world’ project work and collaborative practice projects with fellow students, staff, industry and community organisations. Attention to these features is build into the University’s course design and validation processes, along with the requirement for courses to offer our Curriculum Plus programme of options, where students across the University undertake volunteering, work-based learning or sports coaching placements for credit. A recent analysis of unsolicited comments by external examiners in their reports shows that the Solent Curriculum is working. Out of 142 reports, 97 commended the professional and industry relevance of the provision concerned and its development of student employability.
5 The National Student Survey has been criticised by statistical experts for not including “essential requirements” to safeguard against low response rates (Baty, 2005).
6 Within a few weeks of the latest new universities being announced there was speculation in the press about early applications for research degree awarding powers from several of them (Tysome, 2005).
AUQA Audit of a ‘Complex and Diverse’ Institution

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Abstract

This paper does not attempted to address quality assurance issues such as course approval processes, curriculum development and review, moderation, educational policies, learning and teaching environments and programmes, teaching and supervisory support, research and research training, flexible learning, library resources and other matters relating to assuring quality within a higher education institution. Rather, it is an account of how one private, self-accrediting, federated higher education institution prepared for, underwent, and benefited from an Audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency. Simply put, the paper is concerned with the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ of a quality audit process. In other words, it focuses on the context rather than the content of the process. It is hoped that this paper might be of some value to institutions which have a similar structure to the Melbourne College of Divinity (MCD) and are required to undergo an AUQA Audit, or to multi-campus institutions which strive to assure the quality of their teaching, learning and research programs across a broad range of locations, administrations, faculties and facilities. Rather than provide answers or attempt to produce a model approach to undergoing an AUQA audit, which would be an act of unsustainable hubris, the aim of the paper is to continue a multi-levelled conversation which has already begun regarding how institutions which AUQA Auditors have themselves described as ‘complex’ can gain maximum benefit from an AUQA Audit, and other audits associated with it.

Keywords

Federated; ATI (Associated Teaching Institution); self-review

1. Background to the Audit

Six months after I took over as Dean of the MCD in early 2001, I contacted my immediate predecessor and asked him if he was missing anything about his former position. He replied: “It has taken me all this time not to wake up thinking ‘I have to prepare for the AUQA Audit’!” I understood exactly what he meant.

Specifically, I had assumed his position under the Sword of Damocles of the AUQA Audit, held up as it was by an increasingly taut and fragile thread. There were many nights in the years preceding the Audit when I awoke in a cold sweat, in what Michael Leunig describes as *The Hour of the Black Truth*, in which, as a “poor little plankton of the night”, I was repeatedly swallowed by “the great whale of Doom”. During waking hours, the Audit was (to mix metaphors), the Elephant in the Room. No matter what else was under discussion, and no matter how serious, the Audit was always there in the background, impossible to ignore and growing in substance with every passing day.

There were several reasons for this preoccupation with the Audit, even four and half years ahead of its occurrence. These have to do primarily with the nature of the MCD, and its history to this point.
Firstly, the Melbourne College of Divinity is listed as a private self-accrediting Higher Education Institution in Table B of the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, a status it shares with Bond University and the University of Notre Dame. In its 96 years as a self-accrediting institution, the MCD had not been publicly audited, and it did not have to have its courses approved by State regulatory authorities every five years; rather, the MCD Annual Report is submitted to State Parliament annually, together with those of the eight public universities in Victoria. The public scrutiny which would result from a thorough, professional and in-depth Audit of the MCD’s quality assurance processes by AUQA was indeed a daunting prospect for an older institution faced with a new, largely unknown, challenge.

Secondly, the nature of the institution itself presented a challenge, both for the AUQA Auditors and all those at the MCD preparing for it. This challenge was identified in the initial section of the AUQA Report as follows:

> The MCD is one of only four non-university Self-Accrediting Institutions (SAIs) in Australia. As such—because of some aspects of its history in the development of theological education in this country and its unique ‘federated’ organisational structure—it is important to appreciate the distinctive nature of the institution itself before considering the effectiveness or otherwise of the arrangements for quality assurance. (Report of the Audit of the MCD, 2006)

It was the Audit of this “federated” organisational structure that presented the significant challenge.

Unlike a university, the MCD is not a single institution; nor is it a single institution with several campus locations. Rather, the MCD was comprised of seven Colleges aligned into four Associated Teaching Institutions (ATIs), linked by a central office which administered the self-accrediting procedures of the institution as a whole. Each ATI had its own administrative infrastructure, appointed and employed its own faculty and staff, and was sponsored and supported in the main by its ‘industry partner’—a denominational church or religious orders. (The past tense is appropriate as, running parallel with the AUQA Audit preparations was a thorough revision to the *Melbourne College of Divinity Act 1910*, to make it accord with new National Governance Protocols. The amended Act facilitated the introduction of Recognized Teaching Institutions (RTIs) which replaced the ATI structure. Currently the MCD consists of 7 such institutions comprising 8 Colleges and one specialist institution. The comments relating to the administrative structure of the institutions remain relevant.)

The AUQA Report of the MCD continued its commentary on the structure of the MCD as follows:

> Note the variety of terms that indicate the organisational arrangements at the various ATIs [Associated Teaching Institutions]: ‘College’, ‘Association’, ‘Faculty’ and ‘Union’. Furthermore, the two Catholic ATIs have only one campus location each, while the other two multi-denominational ATIs themselves consist of a number of college-based entities, and are located on multiple campuses. CTC [Catholic Theological College] and YTU [Yarra Theological Union] are grounded in the life of particular religious communities, but their students are drawn from much wider bases. ETA [Evangelical Theological Association] functions as a cooperative venture between the colleges of two different churches. And as the name implies, UFT [United Faculty of Theology] operates as a ‘united faculty’ who have agreed to teach theology together towards MCD awards. The MCD therefore has a very complex and diverse organisational structure. (Report of the Audit of the MCD 2006)
Noting that “the College has a central administration”, the Report explains that:

The teaching colleges and other bodies, like the faculties of a university, engage in teaching, learning, research and scholarship. Nevertheless, the MCD is unlike most universities insofar as the teaching colleges / ATIs are autonomous (but not degree-granting) bodies. The awards taught by the ATIs are accredited by the College.

(Report of the Audit of the MCD 2006)

Each teaching college has its own distinct heritage, stakeholders, governance and financial administration. The MCD administration receives tuition fees, and disburses payments for approved teaching and research, but the colleges are not “controlled entities” or “subsidiaries” of the College. The long-established ethos of the MCD is one of partnership between teaching colleges with their own ethos and commitments, facilitated by the MCD administration in relation to maintaining academic standards and overseeing research programmes. Maintaining a balanced interplay between colleges and College is a core value undergirding the structural realities of the MCD as a whole. However complex the formal structures, a spirit of cooperation reaches across the colleges, as the AUQA Report recognised in its Commendations, and in further affirmed in the listing of this cooperative ethos on the AUQA Good Practice database.

This system worked well for the 3 years the ATI structure was in place, and continues to do so under the new RTI structure. The problem that arose was this: how is it possible to conduct a quality Audit of an institution described in the previous paragraphs? How could statements be made about the institution as a whole which would be relevant and applicable to its diverse parts? In other words, the challenge that confronted the College and its constituent colleges was to accurately articulate and detail how the self-accrediting structures of the MCD assured both the quality and standardization of MCD awards, taught as they were within the ambit of four semi-autonomous institutions.

Given this “unique federated structure” the Audit had to be carefully planned and carried out, both by the AUQA Auditors and the MCD, working in cooperation.

2      Long Term Preparation

2.1 External Input

In November 2001, four years before the Audit took place, three staff members from AUQA addressed MCD faculty at the annual Staff Consultation Day. This marked the formal beginning of preparation for the Audit.

On April 8th 2003, the Dean of Arts and Sciences at Australian Catholic University, addressed an open session of the MCD’s governing body, the College, on the way ACU had prepared for its Audit by AUQA. The Dean of ACU had been invited to address the College because the multi-campus ACU faced similar problems to the MCD in preparing for its Audit.

In 2003 and 2004, each of the ATIs of the MCD underwent an AUQA style Audit conducted by external auditors from Australian Catholic University and Ridley College (2003) and the University of Melbourne and Monash University (2004). The Reports from these Audits were presented to the governing body of the MCD, the College, on their completion. In November 2004, the Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne, himself an AUQA Auditor, made a presentation at the MCD Staff Consultation Day, and received questions relating to preparation for the AUQA Audit.

Professor Richard James, Director of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne, an external auditor of an MCD ATI in 2004, met with the ATI
AUQA Representatives (refer to following section) on 1st December 2004 to offer his impression of the MCD and its quality assurance processes, and identified certain characteristics of the institution, both positive and negative, which he considered should be included in the MCD Performance Portfolio. Dr Rosemary Sheehan of Monash University, also an external auditor of an MCD ATI in 2004, joined Professor James in a follow-up meeting with the ATI AUQA Representatives on 2nd February 2005.

The Dean and Registrar of the MCD attended successive Australian University Quality Forums in 2003 and 2004, which proved to be very beneficial in preparing for the Audit and learning about the variety of quality assurance processes which had been employed by universities that had been audited by AUQA.

In the months immediately preceding the Audit, the MCD exchanged Performance Portfolios with the University of Melbourne with which the MCD is affiliated, and the Dean of the MCD met on several occasions with the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic, who was in charge of the University’s preparation for the AUQA Audit, and with the Dean of Arts. These meetings proved to have a formative influence on the MCD Performance Portfolio (PP) which was in its final stages of preparation.

A common theme that emanated from these discussions, Audits and consultations was that it was essential to communicate to AUQA that, in order for the Audit of the MCD to be effective, all the ATIs had to be visited, as well as the MCD administration, so that an accurate picture of the distinct institutions which comprised the MCD could be ascertained, together with the whole. This message was conveyed to AUQA by the MCD administration on several occasions.

2.2 Internal Input: Self-review of the ATIs and the MCD
A year and a half before the AUQA Audit was scheduled to take place, the Dean of the MCD assembled representatives from each ATI and began to prepare corporately for the Audit. This group was designated as the ATI AUQA Representatives. Chaired by the MCD Dean, the group acted as conduits for channelling comments and criticisms of the several drafts of the MCD PP prepared by the MCD administration. The group met seven times in the twelve-month period the MCD PP was being written and revised.

Three important decisions were made at the outset of the Self-review of the ATIs and the MCD as a whole, as follows:

- That the MCD PP would be as transparent and open as possible regarding the strengths and weakness of the MCD quality assurance processes.
- That each ATI would update the Performance Portfolio it had been prepared for the internal Audit process, and these would be used as supplements to the MCD PP.
- That a holistic, inclusive approach to the preparation for the AUQA Audit would be undertaken. Given the complex, federated nature of the MCD, this cross-ATI consultation process was admittedly a wild horse to ride, as it entailed attempting to produce a Performance Portfolio that all parts of the MCD could claim as its own. Thankfully, by the time the MCD Performance Portfolio was submitted, it was acknowledged as “our” PP by the MCD community.

3. Proximate Preparation
As it approached its final form, the Performance Portfolio was distributed to Chairs of Examiners and Chairs and Deputy Chairs of Boards of the MCD for their comments, and copies were forwarded to academics and administrators familiar with the operations of the MCD, who responded with valuable advice.
An open meeting of the MCD Policy and Strategy Committee, which included the Chairs of Examiners, Chairs of Boards and ATI AUQA Representatives, took place on 21st April, 2005, for feedback on the Performance Portfolio. The Performance Portfolio was finally revised and taken to the MCD Executive Committee on 4th May.

Six copies of the Performance Portfolio in hard copy and CD ROM, and six compartmentalized file boxes of supplementary materials, were delivered to the AUQA offices on time, three months in advance of the Audit.

4. **The Audit**

The Audit Visit lasted for three days (September 12-14). The Report states:

> In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 140 staff during the Audit Visit, including the President of the MCD, administrative support staff, including the Dean, the Registrar and the associate registrars, and their administrative support staff; academic and general staff at each of the ATIs; and undergraduate and postgraduate students studying at each ATI. The Audit Panel also spoke with external members of the Interim Council, and other external stakeholders, such as the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee. Sessions were also available for any member of the MCD community to meet the Audit Panel, but no one took the opportunity to exercise this option. (Report of the Audit of the MCD 2006)

The Report on the Audit of the MCD was posted on the AUQA Website on 25th January 2006. Subsequently, the MCD was invited by AUQA to submit two entries to the AUQA Good Practice Database, which it did.

5. **Reflection on the Audit Process**

5.1 **Commendations**

a) Contrary to expectations, the Sword of Damocles and the Elephant in the Room imagery faded away well in advance of the Audit, as did the “the great whale of Doom”. Their final disappearance coincided with the preliminary visit by the Chair of the AUQA Panel and the AUQA Director. We were deeply impressed by the professionalism of these two individuals, and indeed the full Panel of five people who conducted the Audit, as it was obvious that they were committed as a team to assisting the MCD to understand how it could become a better institution in relation to assuring the quality of its procedures, processes and programmes, while at the same time helping it to identify those areas in which it was performing well.

b) The AUQA Audit process was a valuable experience for the MCD on a variety of levels. Given a common task to prepare for, it united the MCD community and instilled a quiet confidence in the institution, not only in regard to its quality assurance processes, but also in its ability to work cooperatively as an ecumenical organization toward a goal that transcended particularized interests and “regional” concerns.

c) The Audit afforded the MCD the opportunity to consolidate policy in a wide range of areas and to take notice specifically where more development is needed.

d) Correspondingly, the Audit process provided the MCD with a blueprint for developing its Quality Assurance processes, and gave guidance in areas which, by the institution’s own admission, it is still a “work in progress”.

e) The Audit instilled an understanding of the importance of benchmarking with similar institutions nationally and internationally in setting, maintaining and monitoring quality assurance processes.
f) The Audit emphasised how essential it is to develop a Culture of Quality within the institution, owned and accepted by the institution at every level. It also identified a corresponding need to establish a Quality Conscience within the institution. The MCD responded to this advice through the establishment of an Academic Audit Committee comprised of academics external to the MCD, which regulates and oversees the continuing cycle of quality Audits within the MCD.

g) The Audit confirmed a realization within the MCD that the AUQA Audit process is not merely a five-yearly event, but is rather one of a series of Audits and quality assurance processes that are ongoing within the institution. The AUQA Audit is undoubtedly the most important of these processes. Yet it must be recognized and appreciated as one of a series of Audits that takes place in harmony with the ongoing five-yearly cycle of audits of the Recognized Teaching Institutions of the MCD.

5.2 Reservations

a) It is difficult for smaller institutions and their administrations to cope adequately with the preparation for, and undertaking of, an AUQA Audit, as the life of the institution, academically, administratively and managerially, continues apace. The lesson that we at the MCD learned is that it is essential to begin the preparation for the AUQA Audit as early as possible, and to plan carefully so that the preparation process is both inclusive and supportive.

b) Higher Education Institutions that comprise a federated/consortia model face particular problems in addition to time and load management mentioned in 1) above. For example, assuring common standards and quality assurance practices across the institution, consulting widely, conducting a self-review and producing a corporate Performance Portfolio that is not only acceptable to all but is supported and agreed upon by all, is not an easy or a simple task.

c) Although it is excellent value for money, the cost of an AUQA Audit is not inconsiderable for smaller institutions and must be budgeted for well in advance. If possible, the cost should be shared among constituents if a federated/consortia model applies.

d) Institutions, particularly smaller institutions, may experience “AUQA fatigue” among their constituents for at least a year following the AUQA Audit. Considering 1) to 3) above, this is a normal and natural reaction. However, 6) in the previous section should not be lost sight of in this period of R & R (Relief and Recovery) following the Audit.

6. Summary Statement

The MCD, with its federated organizational structure of a central administration linked to, and linking, nine semi-autonomous institutions clustered into seven Recognized Teaching Institutions, each with its own facilities, administration and charism, may appear unique. However, most modern universities, with their regional and international campuses, each of which are in some, if not many ways distinct, face similar challenges to the MCD in responding corporately to an AUQA Audit. I suggest that, based on what is written in this essay, a number of general principles can be identified, and applied to all institutions undertaking an AUQA Audit, as follows:

• to start preparations early, with a 4–5 year operational plan in place,
• to consult widely, frequently and transparently across the institution(s),
• to set up a cycle of internal audits conducted by external academics and administrators,
• to aim at ownership among faculty, staff and students not only of the Performance Portfolio, but of the institution itself.
These may appear self-evident; and they are admittedly goals that the MCD drew out of the Audit process, rather than achieved in it. But I can state with confidence that these will be the guiding principles which direct the MCD as it prepares for AUQA Audit Cycle 2.

In conclusion I wish to state what I consider to be the singular, most important reason why an AUQA audit should be taken as seriously as possible and prepared for, and followed up in a similar manner. This reason is as follows:

Our students deserve nothing less than the collective and wholehearted effort of an institution to live out and realize the institution’s Mission, Vision, Values, Goals, and Objectives through a critical, ongoing process of self-review, appraised by external and internal mechanisms working in harmony with all levels of a formative community of scholars and scholarship to assure, to the best of its ability, fitness for the purpose for which it was founded, and to which it continues to aspire.

References:
Developing Generalisable Measures of Knowledge and Skill Outcomes in Higher Education

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Abstract
We know much about higher education, but very little about assessing student knowledge and skill in ways which are generalisable beyond specific subjects or courses. This paper argues for greater progress in this rapidly developing area of higher education. It suggests approaches for enhancing the assessment of student knowledge and skill, and considers how these might underpin a model of assessment standards. Preliminary observations are made in conclusion about what might be required to bring such changes into practice. The analysis is by no means intended to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a discursive snapshot of a few main trends and possible developments.

Keywords: student outcomes, assessment methods, academic standards

1. Measuring Outcomes in Higher Education

Demonstrating what individuals know and have gained through years of higher learning has long been of interest to them and their communities. Yet uncertainty still surrounds efforts to produce generalisable measures of the outcomes of higher education. This paper argues that there is an increasing need to move beyond the obstacles which have hindered progress in this area and produce measures of knowledge and skill which are generalisable beyond localised individual or institutional contexts.

The paper considers possible improvements which might be made to assessment practices and outlines a model of assessment standards which such improvements would help to support. Many approaches in this area have been proposed and tested over the decades, although none of the approaches have fully addressed the demands placed upon them. There are grounds for optimism, as noted in a series of recent reviews (Miller & Ewell, 2005; Dwyer, Milller & Payne, 2006; NCPPHE, 2006), because current insights into higher education learning along with contemporary assessment methods say much about how we might produce generalisable measures of higher education outcomes.

Based on the conclusions advanced by Spellings (2006) and Ischinger (2006), it is assumed in this paper that interest in ‘outcomes’ will grow as higher education plays an ever-more important role in individual and community life. Governments no longer supply institutions with single-line budgets, focusing on the input side and leaving the processes and outcomes up to institutions. Increased regulation and prescription of institutional practice has grown with increases in the costs and value of higher education to advanced service economies. A further shift in individual and community focus towards outcomes seems very likely as quality processes can be largely assumed, and it becomes more strategically important to assure the competence and capability of highly trained individuals (James, 2003; Economist, 2006).

It is acknowledged at the outset that the terms ‘outcomes’ or ‘outcomes-based’ can be considered ‘dirty words’ in higher education. These terms are often seen to represent a position...
which, at its best, embraces futile attempts to measure intangible aspects of academic learning by reducing them to discrete competencies or, at its worst, reflects a pernicious agenda to prise the assessment of academic standards away from academics or institutions. Universities, academic knowledge and higher education pedagogy definitely do incorporate unique complexities to which any measurement of outcomes must be sensitive. It is unlikely that measuring outcomes in higher education is impossible, however, or that it cannot or should not be done in ways which are valid and value-adding to learners, teachers and institutions.

2. **A Focus on Knowledge and Skill Outcomes**

The outcomes of higher education are many and varied, but this paper focuses on student-level knowledge and skill. Individuals attend university to learn, and the development of knowledge is arguably the most basic outcome of university study. The focus and scope of this knowledge will of course vary across individuals and contexts. It will range from awareness of broad ideas, knowledge of basic facts, and understanding of sophisticated processes and systems.

While much knowledge will be specific to various courses and disciplines, individuals are also expected to acquire general knowledge through study. This may be knowledge about ethical standards and processes, of social contexts and systems, or of how best to manage personal learning. It is these more general kinds of knowledge that are often used to characterise the ‘higher-order’ or ‘value-added’ outcomes of university study.

In addition to knowledge, higher education should help people develop skills so that they can use their knowledge in productive ways. Given the nature of academic learning, many of the skills learned in higher education will likely be psychological rather than behavioural. As with knowledge, many are likely to be specific to particular contexts and fields of study. Others, however, will be more general and potentially form part of most, if not all, courses.

Many taxonomies of such generic graduate skills exist, often produced to link with various qualifications frameworks or definitions. A shortlist of the most common of these generic skills may include: critical and evaluative thinking, analytical problem solving, innovative and creative thinking, written and verbal communication, collaborative work, numeracy, technology literacy, independence and initiative, and planning and management. Citizenship or social and political awareness might be added to this list. Interestingly, many if not most of such lists omit the basic skill of knowledge development.

A skill for learning may be one of the most important outcomes of higher education. Most graduates will take up forms of knowledge work that require re-learning, updating and expanding their knowledge and skills. Graduates need to engage in formal learning throughout their lives, and it is important that they have the necessary skills and interests to do so. Oddly, while a capacity for learning and an appetite for inquiry are clearly basic and important outcomes, these are rarely taught explicitly at university.

3. **Enhancing the Assessment of Knowledge and Skill**

While there are pockets of excellence, developing generalisable measures of individual knowledge and skill outcomes remains a major challenge for higher education. There have been enormous advances in assessment over the last hundred years, much of which is summarised or exemplified by Linn (1989), Keeves (1998), AERA (1999), NRC (2001) and OECD (2003). Important aspects of this assessment methodology, however, have yet to be applied to higher education. Universities and academics are responsible for monitoring and assuring academic standards, and it is critical that continuous efforts are made to enhance the standard of assessment itself.
Currently, many tasks are developed by individual teaching staff for use in specific subjects whose content may change in various ways from year to year. Staff often develop such resources in relatively short periods of time, for localised purposes and with limited resources or knowledge of assessment methodology. As a result, student knowledge and skill is often measured using uncalibrated tasks with unknown reliabilities and validities, scored normatively by different raters using unstandardised rubrics and then, often with little moderation, adjusted to fit percentile distributions which are often specified *a priori* by departments, faculties or institutions.

It is feasible to develop validated assessment tasks for a large number of higher education subjects. In general, large subjects based on a single textbook, which take a ‘shrink-wrapped approach’, could well be accompanied by assessment materials. These materials could incorporate formative assignments for continuous assessment as well as validated examinations or items. The tasks themselves could be supported by notes for managing the assessment, analysing data, interpreting results and reporting achievement. A degree of flexibility would presumably need to be designed into the tasks to both encourage and support local adaptations. These assessments could be designed to fit different levels and fields of study, and may include performance tasks, portfolios, open ended questions, constructed response items, and multiple choice questions. The validated tasks for these mass subjects could take many different forms, their defining characteristic being that they are designed to optimise the measurement, diagnosis and enhancement of learning.

Many higher education subjects are specialised in nature or small in scale, and it may not be feasible to develop fully validated assessments. It is important, nonetheless, that the resource-consuming nature of assessment task design does not inhibit the use of high quality assessment activities. In such instances, the most appropriate approach may be to train academic staff. An awareness of basic principles of assessment design and advanced practice would develop the capacity of teaching staff to enhance their own assessment tasks and activities. It would also have more general pedagogical benefits, of course, by requiring academics to think not just about what and how they will teach, but about what students are expected to learn and how they should be assessed.

The training of teaching staff in assessment could be coupled with a process of assessment task review, in which technical experts or academic colleagues offer feedback on assessment tasks and approaches, and ensure that tasks are of appropriate quality. Of course, this currently happens for many courses and assessments, but the process is by no means universal. The largely individualised development of assessment tasks makes it difficult to develop informed and generalisable criteria which map out thresholds of increasing performance. It is difficult, as a result, for institutions to assure that quality of the tasks which are themselves used to set academic standards.

Moderation processes might be used to ensure the generalisability of assessment standards and outcomes. In general, moderation involves teaching staff reviewing samples of student work to assure the comparability of standards across contexts. Such moderation may be conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, as often already occurs. It is preferable to design robust and scalable management systems, however, to ensure that outcomes can be quality assured. Moderation could be managed by a cross-institutional agency, as in senior secondary education, or perhaps by a cluster of discipline-specific agencies. It might involve statistical calibration processes to help equate standards, highlight unusual scores and manage moderation processes.

The assessment of subject-specific skills might largely mirror the assessment of knowledge, with appropriate differences such as a greater emphasis on performance-based forms of assessment. Perhaps the greatest point of departure is in terms of the assessment of generic skills. While widely marketed in course descriptions and objectives, generic skills are rarely taught
explicitly in university courses. They are likely characterised and nuanced by the fields in which
people study, encounter and practice their skills. These skills are dynamic and tacit in nature,
therefore, and this has implications for how they are assessed.

Objective tests can be used to measure critical thinking, problem solving and numeracy
skills. Such tests have become increasingly popular over the last decade. Specific tests might
be conducted to measure these skills, or validated items could be embedded within more rou-
tine forms of assessment. While resource-demanding to produce and administer, these tests
have the advantages of providing objective estimates of each participant’s performance and of
moving beyond subjective self assessment. Several tests exist to measure adult generic skills,
including numeracy and literacy, and a few have even been applied in international studies.
Tests might include items to assess aspects of, but not all, other interpersonal, communication
and technology skills.

Performance assessment would seem to be the best means of assessing interpersonal,
communication and technology skills, which are more social and behavioural in nature. An
individual’s capacity to work and communicate with others, for instance, could be measured
by observing their participation in group tasks and class presentations. Technology literacy
could be assessed by observing how people interact with computers and other technologies.

Individual self reports have been shown to play a particularly useful role in seeking feed-
back from students on the extent to which they participate in productive learning practices,
and hence demonstrate a skill for learning. But self reports can also be used to capture learners’
perceptions of the extent to which their university study and experience has developed their
generic skills. Individual self reports might be obtained via a survey of later year, graduating or
exiting students or, possibly at the end of each subject.

4. A Model of Assessment Standards

It has been argued that only limited progress has been made in assessing university students’
achievement and capability in ways which are generalisable beyond individual subjects or
courses. This paper has asserted the need for progress in this area, and outlined approaches for
enhancing the assessment of student knowledge and skill which could advance current prac-
tice. Much would likely flow from developing and implementing such improvements, which
would play an important role in monitoring and enhancing academic standards. Much work,
however, would be required to bring many of the ideas sketched out above into practice.

A good way to begin would be to map out a valid and feasible model of assessment stand-
ards. Such a model could consist of an indicator framework, a series of performance standards,
a suite of measures to support these indicators, and an approach consisting of methods, such as
those outlined above, for gathering data on each measure. Such models have been developed by
several institutions around the world, and the essential building blocks already exist in many
institutions. Harnessing and developing this activity would be a productive way of making
early progress in this area.

Generalisability should be built into such models by ensuring that the indicators reflect
high-level educational outcomes such as those advanced in this paper. While the precise selec-
tion of such outcomes and the emphasis placed on each is likely to vary across contexts, it
is important that they have the sort of systemic and student relevance as those mapped out
above. The selection of indicators is important, as it contains a values statement, determines
the ultimate validity and feasibility of the model, and will likely influence future policy and
practice. Agreeing on a set of outcomes indicators, both within institutions and systems, is an
important activity in itself.

Once selected, the indicators should be positioned within a standards framework which
captures varying levels of performance. These levels would be linked to the underpinning
measures and desired benchmarks, and described in ways which are useful to students, teachers, institutions and industry. Some indicators are likely to be binary in nature, while others are likely to reflect several levels of increasing performance. Certain aspects of such a framework are likely to be locally defined, but others might well be underpinned by more generalisable learning or employment taxonomies. Ideally, the framework would be designed at a level of generality which enables it to be relevant to all year and qualification levels, and to all fields of education.

Each indicator framework would be underpinned by one or more measures. These would ideally be common within but also across institutions, although this may not always be possible or may take some years to achieve. It is likely to be necessary in certain instances to develop processes for equating or standardising different measures, to ensure that a certain level of performance on one measure is aligned in appropriate ways with performance on another. Clearly, it would be productive to work with existing measures, although these, as outlined above, may not always be sufficient to meet the revised needs placed upon them.

As discussed, developing robust measures of student-level outcomes is likely to require various objective forms of assessment. For many courses, it is likely that assessment tasks would need to be developed which are either standardised in nature, or which have been passed through a robust production, scoring or moderation process. Any changes in how outcomes are reported will most likely involve the specification of marking rubrics and mark equation or conversion tables. Developing generic scoring rubrics, forms of task peer review, or simply training teaching staff in assessment methods are all means of making initial progress in this area. As canvassed, it may be beneficial to conduct stand-alone or embedded generic skills assessments which, in addition to providing measures of individual performance and potential in targeted areas, provide data which could be used for the purposes of moderation.

5. Bringing the Advances into Practice

A series of new policies and practices will likely be required to support any extensive movement towards the generalisable measurement of student-level outcomes. Many might be developed from existing pockets of activity, or transferred from school systems in which they have been developed and tested over many years. Certain forms of cultural change would likely be required, along with significant investments in training and systems. These changes and investments may be costly, but their value lies in the significant information that they would provide on individual learning and growth.

It is essential that academics and institutions themselves take the lead in developing this growing aspect of higher education. This is not just because institutions have the authority to accredit their own programs and ensure academic standards and underpinning quality assurance processes. It is vital that progress in the measurement of student outcomes builds rather than breaks the link held by teachers and institutions between the development, dissemination and assessment of knowledge. It is important that any new measurement of student learning and development is itself collaborative in nature, given the broader individual, social and economic roles such measures will play.

It has only been possible in this paper to offer a preliminary analysis of the specification and measurement of student-level outcomes. No attempt has been made, for instance, to consider how outcomes data might be best analysed, or how it might be reported to individuals, institutions or government. Among others, many important questions surround the value of absolute performance measures compared with measures of individual growth and added-value. While graduates and employers often review trends in performance over the duration of a degree, this perspective is rarely captured explicitly in academic transcripts or reports. This paper has also not attempted to situate the proposed conception of outcomes within a broader
framework of academic standards. This would require defining ‘academic standards’, and determining how student-level outcomes could function as indicators of these for management or quality assurance purposes. Further, the paper has not examined many of the important pedagogical and course management considerations implied by the propositions made about outcomes measurement.

There are many such possibilities for further development, but this paper has focused squarely on the developing generalisable measures of knowledge and skill outcomes in higher education. It is assumed that much would flow from significant progress in this area. Monitoring the quality of education is, or should be, linked in important ways to a capacity to demonstrate that individual learning and development has taken place.

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Bridging the Rhetoric – Reality Chasm: The Contribution of Higher Education Organisational Development to University Evolution and Renewal

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Abstract
The rapid changes in higher education policy and governance require equally rapid responses within universities to shift attitudes, policies, systems and, practice. However, as many AUQA audit reports illustrate, there are frequently major discrepancies between university visions, philosophies and stated intentions and the reality of practice across the university community. This paper suggests that a major reason for this poor enactment of the university's goals is the absence of effective organisational development services. Using a single institutional case study, the potential value of higher education organisational development units is discussed. In particular, the various ways in which attitudes and enhanced approaches to quality assurance and good organisational practice can be enabled through these agencies are outlined. The implications for university management of change are also explored, particularly in relation to building stronger engagement with change agendas and priorities.

Keywords: organisational development; change management; university leadership

Few people would deny that universities are experiencing increasing pressure to adapt and evolve very rapidly. These traditional behemoths of education have been forced to move into spiralling trajectories of evolution in which systems, processes, principles and values must be constantly refined and redefined to meet expanding performance expectations. With federal funding tied to the demonstrated achievement of outcomes, and increasing competition for students and reputation, universities are faced with significant challenges in reshaping their futures. These pressures have encouraged many universities to generate new strategies that might assist their achievement of the desired goals.

Unfortunately, as many AUQA audits note, there are major challenges associated with shifting whole universities toward a re-aligned future. In particular, it can be very difficult to focus people's attention on changing cultural values, attitudes and integration of new practices within established frameworks and systems. In many cases universities are finding that they have a major disconnection between university philosophy, goals and rhetoric and the practices that remain firmly embedded in each separate university sub-community. Clark (2004, p.169) notes, in fact, that many universities around the world experience significant challenges in achieving “commitment and balance” as they seek to move toward more innovative modes of operation.

There are many reasons for organisational resistance to change. In the first place, the communication processes that operate in universities may only operate at deans and above. They may also fail to straddle the general / academic divide. Those who lead the change target areas will often feel too time-poor to devote time and energy to new change initiatives. The
targeted area of system enhancement may also operate interdependently with many other systems which remain firmly locked into contrary practice and principles, thereby undermining the refined system’s effectiveness. Further, those who are responsible for changing the processes may fail to see value or benefit from the proposed alterations to existing practices. Many leaders may in fact suggest that they will wait to see if any sanctions will be implemented for non-compliance. In many cases, no repercussions are experienced for non-support of change initiatives. Leaders within the university may feel they do not make a difference: that they are not essential to the university’s goals. These, and many other factors, serve to undermine the renewal and evolutionary processes that have been determined as desirable. And as a consequence, they fail, and the gap between reality and rhetoric grows larger.

**Higher Education Organisational Development: A Transformative Service**

The rate of change within universities has necessitated some new forms of organisational process. The acceptance of slow incremental improvements has been replaced by an impatience to shift entire work communities to new ways of operation within very short lead times. This desire to move rapidly into new forms of universal university practice has generated great pressure on many university communities – particularly at a time when the change foci are multiple and complex. There are many cases of rapid change where leaders have left their followers well behind – the grand vision has not translated into operational practice. Shattock (2003), notes the importance of five factors if sustainable change is to be achieved:

*Organizational coherence; the ability to assess the environment; translating that assessment into leading, rather than following change; linking strategic and operational change; and recognizing human resources as assets and liabilities in the process. (2003, p. 18)*

Many universities are ill-equipped to achieve these principles. They remain locked into standard organisational and hierarchically driven change processes that reduce their capacity to amend and adapt organisational processes as required. Further, they may be relying on traditional change management strategies that are ill-suited to the dynamic knowledge community that is now to be found in university settings. This paper will suggest that their inability to shift the prevailing culture and practices may be partly attributed to the absence of effective organisational developers within the university. It will explore the role of higher education organisational development, providing an overview of the way in which such a service might operate. It will draw on one university’s experience to illustrate the methods which might be employed and the outcomes that can be achieved. The paper suggests that this is one of the major ways in which effective change might be successfully accomplished.

**Higher Education Organisational Development**

When organisations aim to improve their outcomes they have two major goals: to identify the right strategies for implementation and to ensure that all staff across the university are aware of and embrace their adoption. Theories relating to change management note the necessity of achieving widespread commitment to change agendas so that there is a readiness and appetite for change (Burke, 2002). In order to achieve this outcome, the purpose and need for change should be readily apparent, and the individuals who will lead change need to be supported in their efforts by good organisational systems and compatible practices. Contingent rewards and recognition also assist. Where change is based on a compliance culture, the likelihood of success is much lower. Members of the organisation will seek to subvert the process or give it minimal lip service. A university seeking major organisational transformation needs to build strong commitment across its whole community. But of course, this is much more easily said
than done, given the diversity of cultures and communities that operate in a university setting. Further, the focus on change can be either top-driven or community driven. In an ideal organisation, the quest for quality enhancement may be evident across all members as they embrace the notion of continual improvement.

Organisational development has been described as “a system-wide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organization effectiveness.” (Cummings and Worley, 200,) These processes operate at various levels: as systemic interventions, through leadership capacity building and by supporting individual staff members as they seek to improve their professional practice.

There are various strategies that are used to develop these different elements of organisational behaviour. In brief, they encompass organisational diagnosis to identify areas where change (both strategic and operational) is needed; the development of interventions to assist in those change processes; the redesign of organisational practices to promote changes to culture, practice and rewards; the building of organisational readiness to embrace, assist and inform change, and the ongoing monitoring of change and its effects to enable further adaptation as needed. Organisational development operates as a dynamic interchange between the organisational goals, the stakeholders and the system imperatives which must also be accommodated. The higher education organisational developer acts as a conduit for change, enabling stakeholder commitment and assisting them with any necessary capability enhancement to achieve change goals.

One implication of building organisational readiness for change is that strong ownership of the process and the outcomes grows more likely. In this situation, the organisational capacity to adapt and respond to inputs from various levels in the organisation also becomes quite critical. Thus, a traditional model in which change is “driven” from the top becomes less appropriate as the community moves toward an organic and reflective evolution. In this model of organisational enhancement there remains a strong focus on strategic outcomes and priorities. Members still need to know where their endeavours should be focused and require ongoing guidance as to how well they are achieving their targets.

This process of development is well illustrated through the following case study.

The Case Study
As a research intensive university, the University of Western Australia has focused strongly on maintaining and developing its quality performance across both teaching and research. With over 17,000 students and 3,500 staff, it seeks to build effective processes and encourage strong engagement of staff with its strategic focus.

Organisational and Staff Development Services (OSDS) is a central organisational development unit which is allied to the human resources directorate. It is staffed by three academic developers, two staff developers and three administrative support staff. The unit provides support to the university at all three levels of organisational development: it promotes systemic change through organisational analysis and evaluation, university-wide events and organisational change projects; capacity building is undertaken through the provision of a range of development programmes, with each targeting strategic cohorts of high importance to the university, and finally, it offers a range of staff development opportunities to assist staff as they maintain their currency and develop new skills and strategies. Projects are an important element of the unit’s work as they focus on human processes, techno-structural and socio-technical change (DeSimone & Harris, 1998), often as dynamic components of the one project.

Following a major university restructure in 2002, focus interviews with heads of school and school managers were held. The following organisational characteristics were evident:
Academic heads of school had little knowledge of the strategic focus of the university, or the planning processes that were in operation; Cross faculty leader interaction was minimal; There was little interaction between academic and central service heads; School managers, a new administrative role established in 2002, were frustrated at the manner in which their roles were being integrated.

Following this diagnosis, a range of processes were initiated. These included:

- An annual two day retreat for the top 150 leaders and managers across the university, enabling intensive exploration of the university strategies and priorities and enabling focused contribution to ongoing strategic planning;
- Brokered community of practice sessions for heads of school and school managers to explore common issues and practices;
- The introduction of a range of leadership programmes for heads of school, early career academics, managers, and other cohorts identified as critical to the growth of the university, with all programmes encouraging intensive interaction with many senior leaders within the university;
- The construction of a development framework which links to the university strategy and enables all staff to map their development needs against the university's priorities;
- The design and introduction of a performance management system which promotes alignment with university strategies and priorities;
- The construction of a staff webpage in consultation with members of the university community which focused on strategic and operational know-how;
- The development of a university staff induction website to which many staff contributed;
- The conducting of an IT Skills audit which has resulted in major enhancements to financial and human resource practice as a result of subsequent Workplace Productivity Programme funding;
- In consultation with a range of service providers, OSDS developed a research project management framework which drew on the many areas of expertise, including research, legal and commercial services and leadership / management capabilities;
- Elements of the promotion system and academic portfolio guidelines have been re-aligned to match the university’s expectations and goals;
- A financial and human resource management skills matrix for all key leadership and administrative roles in the university has been developed in consultation with staff. This matrix allows the University to effectively plan support and standards so that quality assurance is maintained and enabled;
- Facilitation of workshops and planning events to ensure the optimal outcomes are achieved for leaders and their staff.

This list represents but a few of the processes that are now in place in the university as the result of the organisational development unit. They have significantly influenced the core systems and processes that ensure the university’s effectiveness. The processes have promoted widespread engagement with the university’s vision and facilitated the development of stakeholder strategic capabilities relevant to their roles and local contexts. The participation in events has encouraged robust debate and stronger commitment to the institution’s strategic
There is considerable evidence of the impact of these interventions on organisational practice and attitudes. These include:

- **The wide and positive interaction across the entire leadership community.** Over the last four years networking has been continuously cited as the most powerful outcome of the OSDS events – particularly with respect to the inclusive two day retreat at the start of each year. These events have also been influential in promoting joint problem-solving with faculty staff working closely with central leaders on mutual issues. The 2007 retreat enabled participants to work on self-set agendas, thereby increasing ownership of the issues and the resultant action plans that were generated.

- **Enhanced communication between the university executive, leaders and those who work within formal portfolios.** The various activities and events are all focused on increasing communication and shared information. Talks by executive members are a valuable formal strategy, along with the facilitation and effective management of key events to ensure outcomes are shared and rapidly disseminated. In the 2007 retreat, for example, all participants received a summary of thirty group discussions and associated action plans within five days of the event being concluded. These were placed on open access for all university staff and have been used in an array of planning processes since February. This example illustrates the ways in which increased alignment of staff with university goals and practices can be achieved through direct attendance at events and through working more intensively with key leaders across the university.

- **Sharing of models and best practice across leaders.** These have been encouraged through the community of practice networks and formal programmes and events. In the early career academic programme, for example, junior academics are provided with many opportunities to interact with senior researchers and leaders within their faculties.

- **Widespread contribution to strategic planning and priorities for the university.** In fact, the leadership retreat at the commencement of each year provides important feed-in to the strategic review process, which is now scheduled to occur after the retreat.

- **Increased empowerment of significant groups to contribute to university planning and quality assurance.** The Heads of School, for example, now meet with the Vice Chancellor and Senior Deputy Vice Chancellor on a quarterly basis to discuss emerging concerns and issues. These Red Flag Forums have been very powerful opportunities to contribute to the future directions and priorities.

- **Vertical mentorship via the leadership programmes.** The early career academic development programme has a strong research development focus, providing access to models, mentors and sponsors. The programme, as is often the case with many OSDS activities has also assisted in identifying further issues (such as academic staff induction) which will be subsequently addressed in consultation with faculty leaders. The programme is another example of how organisational development can increase the concern for quality assurance at the grass roots level.

**Concluding Comments**

This small snapshot of the UWA strategy illustrates the ways in which organisational developers operate as systemic influences and change agents. In all of these cases the service has operated as a whole of institution influence and catalyst for evolution and attitudinal change. The
significant capabilities of these staff members relate to their focus on building communities; their ability to build university staff capacity and the close relationship they share with the many leaders across the university.

A unit of this nature relies on its reputation and credibility. It seeks to work closely with many significant members of the community, reflecting and supporting the Executive priorities and also tailoring the support to local areas. As a responsive agency it assists organisational areas to evolve their systems and processes to meet the emerging challenges that are anticipated or currently being experienced. In a number of cases the work undertaken by academic heads with the support of OSDS has enabled a major crisis to be addressed. Curriculum reform, cultural interactions and strategic repositioning are common areas of concern. A significant factor in the success rate of these organisational developers is their highly developed knowledge of the university context, political nuances and strategic foci. As Wells (2006) notes, this knowledge of the socio-political setting in which leadership operates is a most critical aspect of leading successful change in universities. However, it is clearly not a strength of many novice leaders. Further, these developers offer in-depth expertise in designing organisational events, programmes and activities that ensure the development experiences are suited to the goals, participants and context. This applied knowledge of how adults learn and best achieve powerful outcomes ensures that precious time spent exploring strategic issues generates major benefits to the community and the institution.

Hopefully this paper has provided a brief insight into the added value that organisational developers can bring to a university focused on quality improvement and systemic change. To be fully successful, there must be a readiness for change and a willingness to adapt university planning to reflect the contributions of those who have fully engaged with the university’s agenda. Perhaps this is the strongest achievement of higher education organizational developers: to make strategic change a two way dynamic, where the entire leadership community is passionate about the university’s vision and its quest for excellence. They are a powerful option in bridging the rhetoric – reality divide.

References
Managing Change as Part of Improving Teaching and Learning:
Transparent Evaluation and Comprehensive Course Review

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Abstract
This paper outlines the process undertaken at Curtin University in response to increasing scrutiny of teaching and learning, particularly through the LTPF. Like many universities, Curtin needed to change its institutional processes rapidly to ensure better teaching and learning outcomes. Two key processes implemented in the last two years have paved the way for comprehensive course renewal: the first is transparent feedback on units and courses through an online unit evaluation system (eVALUate), and the second is comprehensive course review processes. These two initiatives have resulted in a third and new initiative: the Curriculum 2010 (C2010) project which uses eVALUate data, and implements the course review process to bring about more rapid improvement in the quality of the student experience, chiefly through intense work on mapping and refining course curricula. The paper concludes with a summary of the lessons learnt in attempting to bring about wide-scale change in a diverse and complex institution.

Keywords: Change management; student evaluation systems; curriculum renewal

Higher education is a highly competitive sector in which excellence is the key to survival and prosperity. The sector is volatile and experiencing radical change which is likely to continue. All universities are subject to compelling external drivers for change. One key driver is the Bologna model, and Australia’s adoption of the Diploma Supplement which will mean universities need to be very clear about the specific learning outcomes achieved in courses. Because of Bologna, European students will find intra-European mobility very easy. Asia has begun to explore how it might keep its students at home. Minister Bishop recently noted that China is committed to establishing its own world-class universities which will teach in English. When China realises its goal, the 80,000 Chinese students currently studying in Australia are likely to seek admission at home (The Hon Julie Bishop, 2006b). This is likely to have major impact on Australia’s international student intake. The National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes have opened the way for increasing competition from abroad and from private providers (Department of Education Science and Training, 2006; The Hon Julie Bishop, 2006a). In tandem with these factors is the Federal Government’s push for diversity: the Dawkins model endorsing the “one size fits all” university is over (The Hon Julie Bishop, 2006c), and diversity is the goal (Department of Education Science and Training, 2005). Australian universities have already begun to position themselves: the University of Melbourne has announced The Melbourne Model (Armitage, 2006b; Macnamara, 2006a, 2006c); the introduction of six “new generation” generalist undergraduate degrees and a changed emphasis on graduate entry to professional degrees from 2008 (The University of Melbourne,
2006). The University of Western Australia has announced a wide-ranging review of its curriculum and delivery models (Macnamara, 2006b) and its intention to increase its load to about 25,000 students. Second cycle quality audits are now in place through AUQA, and public ranking means that local universities are in closer competition through the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF). Its 2007 performance indicators in four Fields of Education focused on graduate outcomes: full-time employment; part-time or full-time study; Australian graduates’ level of satisfaction with generic skills, good teaching and overall satisfaction; progress and retention rates. The LTPF drew on well-known data sources which had been available to universities for years; however the public nature of the LTPF galvanised universities to pay much greater attention to teaching and learning indicators.

Curtin University of Technology (Curtin) is a large and diverse organisation which had for several years achieved varied results in the Course Experience Questionnaire and similar indicators. Evaluation of teaching was prescribed by clauses in the relevant industrial agreement such that Students’ Evaluations of Educational Quality (SEEQ) was the University instrument which could only be administered on request by the teacher (to whom results were confidential and not available to anyone except as part of a promotion process). It was therefore endorsed as a teaching development tool (and as data for promotion) but not as a measure of teaching performance. As a result, Curtin had no uniform or systematic data collection instrument (which clearly differentiated between unit and teacher feedback) and which could be used for university-wide reporting. Confidentiality of results led to a culture of privacy around teaching performance, and industrial angst and secrecy over poor performance. Good teachers at Curtin could only be rewarded by being part of well-funded teams which explored innovative teaching and learning projects: considerable funding was allocated to encourage pockets of innovation through the Learning Effectiveness Alliance Program which was commended by AUQA (Australian Universities Quality Audit, 2003). Course review was sporadic at best, and driven by accreditation processes and advisory boards. These practices (which were not institution-wide) did not help Curtin when LTPF funding focused on whole of institution data: Curtin’s lack of systematic evaluation was a threat to its eligibility for the scheme; in the first year, Curtin failed to win funding and was ranked at 24; in 2007, Curtin was awarded $500,000 for improvement and achieved an overall ranking of 20 (Armitage, 2006a). In the meantime, there has been rapid cultural change within the University, and much greater attention paid to teaching performance and good curriculum. This turnaround is a result of a strategic and methodical introduction of major reform which impacted on teaching staff, on academic areas and how they were assessed and on the institutions capacity to understand what was required to improve its teaching in relation to professional development for staff, innovation around the development of new product and improvement in facilities. The remainder of this paper documents those reforms; and the conclusion summarises lessons learnt about whole of institution change management.

The carrot of substantial LTPF funding (and the ignominy and threat of not achieving eligibility) was a key driver in forming the Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching Steering Committee in 2005. It reported to the University Teaching Learning Committee (and on to Academic Board) and was comprised of: the then Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Services); the Deans of Teaching and Learning and an academic representative form each teaching division; a Student Guild representative; an elected academic staff representative; support services; and a project team drawn from academic staff development. The Committee was charged with creating and implementing a university-wide system for gathering and reporting student feedback on units and teaching. Fortnightly meetings kept the project on track as key milestones were achieved:

1. consensus on and validation of a new unit evaluation survey instrument which asked
students to report their level of agreement on what helps their achievement of unit learning outcomes, and their level of motivation, engagement and overall satisfaction.

2. agreement that the system would be online (for several reasons including access, arm’s length from teaching staff, intrusion on class time, administration; sustainability)

3. agreement on the type and level of online reporting (unit reports containing all quantitative and qualitative data go to unit coordinators and their line managers; summaries of quantitative results can be published for students and staff access by unit coordinators; course summary reports to heads of school, Deans Teaching and Learning and course coordinators, and to those involved in academic review)

4. staged piloting of the system and reporting issues (and solutions) with the system, strategies to address student take-up and staff response.

5. consensus on and validation of a new teaching survey instrument which (like SEEQ) can be initiated by teachers (with reports confidential to the teacher but useable in performance management and promotion)

6. piloting of a teaching evaluation system (which sits within the original system) and addressing issues.

All of these stages, over 2005 and 2006, resulted in a comprehensive, reliable and validated online unit and teaching evaluation system called eVALUate (Curtin University of Technology, 2005) but this achievement was not won without considerable negotiation and consultation. Predictably the staff union mounted the greatest opposition, most particularly in relation to the issue of the privacy of feedback on teacher performance versus the University’s need for actionable feedback. Success was achieved by consultation, and by reassuring staff through word and deed that evaluation results brought reward for excellence, and assistance for improvement. The reality of change management was experienced as were the requirements of consultation in a large and diverse institution. The short term goal is to now continue to embed the system, to empower managers to manage and assist improvement, and to publicly recognise those who teach well. A longer term goal is to use the system to inform the notion of teaching standards and measures and what this means to collegiality.

A parallel but no less significant project was also in train in 2006: Curtin course review processes were designed and agreed upon through Courses Committee, and are ready for implementation in 2007. The course review process at Curtin consists of Annual Review and Comprehensive Course Review (which is completed at least every five years). Course reviews have three primary foci: course quality (curriculum design with clear, appropriate and developmental learning outcomes; engaging learning experiences; assessment clearly linked to outcomes; continual enhancement and efficient, management); course sustainability (cost effectiveness and viability); and course relevance (the course aligns with Curtin’s strategic priorities and external stakeholder and graduate employment confirms the course is meeting expectations). Student, community and other stakeholder feedback are incorporated within course review, as is the need to satisfy professional and accreditation requirements.

Annual Course Reviews monitor and analyse key indicators and their related measures and targets regarding student profile and demand, and the quality of teaching and learning (including use of eVALUate course summary reports), with the major focus being to analyse course performance and identify initiatives for enhancing the teaching and learning quality, resources and market responsiveness.

Comprehensive Course Reviews are a much more in depth review of the course. It seeks to review and analyse the entire academic program for an award; its regulations, structure (its units, major and minor sequences), currency of the curriculum, quality of teaching and learning, management, fieldwork, projects and work experience, and any other aspects which comprise the award course. The major focus is to review the course curriculum map (which shows
how the learning outcomes and their associated assessment tasks contribute to the achievement of course learning outcomes); to review the level of engagement in learning experiences in all modes, and to monitor student perceptions of how all aspects of the course support their achievement of the course learning outcomes.

Both eVALUate and the need to implement Annual and Comprehensive Course Review processes (and achieving some recognition for improvement in the LTPF for 2007) have set the scene for a third, even more ambitious overhaul of Curtin’s courses. The Curriculum 20 0 project is now into its first year. Using the course review processes (and associated eVALUate data) to review all courses in readiness for 2010 (Curtin University of Technology, 2007). In brief, when Curtin commences the 2010 academic year, we aim to have achieved the following:

1. revised the Curtin award (that is, we will have revisited and confirmed the educational emphases of a Curtin award, and it will have more consistent shape, structure and standards and policies);
2. have examined all our existing courses and determined which are sustainable in terms of strategic focus, quality and financial viability.
3. have implemented the Comprehensive Course Review process and reviewed all continuing courses to ensure that they fit the new shape, structure and standards, and to ensure that they are high quality. That is, all our courses will have course learning outcomes which will be achieved developmentally by students in sustainable, coherent units which have:
   a. clearly articulated and intellectually challenging unit learning outcomes assessment tasks designed to enable students to show their achievement of those outcomes;
   b. timely feedback focused on the achievement of the learning outcomes;
   c. engaging learning experiences (face-to-face, online or both)
   d. a web presence and readily accessible learning resources using e-Reserve and other digital materials;
   e. continuous improvement informed by eVALUate and other feedback processes;
4. Course data management systems will be up-to-date, and we will have clear processes for the development of potential new courses, and the maintenance of current information on existing courses, particularly in readiness for the Australian Diploma Supplement.

Building on the successful eVALUate model, the project team reports to the C2010 Steering Committee (established by the University Teaching and Learning Committee(UTLC)) which is chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic Services), meets fortnightly and reports regularly to UTLC and Courses Committee. The Steering Committee responsibilities are to monitor progress as reported by the project team, make decisions about strategic directions in keeping with the project deliverables, provide advice on the implementation of the various project phases, identify and recommend sources of information and contacts that may be of benefit to the project; and report project progress through UTLC and Courses Committee to Academic Board. The membership of the C2010 Steering Committee is representative of the teaching divisions and includes each Dean Teaching and Learning and one course coordinator from each Division, two student Guild representatives, an elected staff representative and key stakeholders in administrative implementation of the project. The project team consists of staff co-opted as required from across the University: central teaching support personnel, other support services, and most importantly teaching staff from the Divisions who will have time-release to work on enhancing course curricula.

C2010 is the University’s priority teaching and learning initiative, building on previous achievements and working parties, ensuring that the course-related objectives of the current Teaching and Learning Enabling Plan are achieved in a holistic fashion. The outcomes will be
significant as will the change management obligations required to arrive at these outcomes.

Lessons learnt—guiding principles for whole of institution change management

- It is essential to have an idea which is intellectually defendable and which is focussed on an issue that is of practical benefit to hard working staff
- Clear and unequivocal support for the idea is essential from the leaders of the institution
- Appropriate project funding is required so staff can be taken off line to develop the ideas and the process
- Communication of all aspects of the project, including the issues around change must be continuous and sufficiently detailed to the level at which it is directed
- Stamina and capacity to manage the natural resistance of the human condition to any form of change.
- Continuous reference back to the original intent so that the project is kept honest and on track
- Celebration of the achievements as these arrive
- Evaluation of the project in a transparent and open manner.

References


Being AUQA'd: Some Audit Experiences

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Abstract
In 2002 an AUQF workshop considered the issue of the impact of quality audits on institutions and urged institutions to share their audit experiences. In 2007, even after the first round of AUQA audits has almost been completed, the experience of being audited has still received comparatively little attention.

This paper reflects on Victoria University's audit in 2006, focusing on the process and its impact on the staff who were 'caught in the line of fire', drawing in particular on the experience of staff in the Quality, Information and Planning Branch. It argues that any assessment of audit processes must occur not only at the macro level, taking into account costs and benefits measured in financial or reputational terms, but must also consider the micro level impacts on people in the University community, as their experience of audit influences perceptions about Quality.

Keywords: AUQA, Audit, Experience

Introduction
In 2002 an AUQF workshop considered the question: 'How can Audit change HE? Assessing AUQA and its Impact', and discussed issues such as the importance of assessing the impacts of quality audits for 'informing policy on the development of an effective and efficient quality framework for the higher education sector in Australia' (Palermo 2002). In the on-line discussion prior to the workshop, Palermo made a plea for the sharing of experiences:

\textit{I am not assuming that there are no impediments to sharing your experiences, particularly for those institutions who are still negotiating a final report. However if this is the case, then that in itself would also be of interest. In itself, it informs a dialogue in relation to the complexities that may exist in trying to assess the impact of quality audit on invididual [sic] institutions and the Aust. Higher education system as a whole.}

While there has been some analysis of audit reports to identify major themes emerging out of audit reports and recommendations (Martin 2003), so far the impact of audit has been discussed mainly in terms of costs (especially financial) and benefits and lessons that can be learned for subsequent audits (Twomey 2003; Adams 2003). Evaluating the \textit{system-wide} impacts of Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) audits on Australian higher education is important and has yet to occur. This is probably because the first round of AUQA audits is only now in 2007 being concluded.

However, the immediate \textit{internal} impacts of an audit on an institution are also important and have not been considered in the detail that they warrant.

This paper takes up Palermo's challenge by attempting to provide a sense of what it was like to experience an audit as a quality practitioner and to trigger further discussion about the
less visible impacts of external audits. Hence, the paper seeks to promote discussion of the audit experience at the level of individual staff within an audited institution. From the perspective of the Quality, Information and Planning (QIP) Branch at Victoria University (VU), there appear to be a number of hidden issues associated with the audit process which should be considered in any assessment of its value. So far, these issues appear to be discussed only in private.

Assessing Impact
When writing about or discussing the AUQA process in public, quality practitioners and Vice-Chancellors tend to say, ‘Yes, it was a difficult and expensive process, but it was worthwhile and we learnt some valuable lessons from it’. Lance Twomey from Curtin concluded:

- The negatives consisted of an estimated indirect financial cost of $725,370, and impact on normal University planning processes – 12 months lost.
- The positives comprised valuable information generated and improvements made to processes, a greater ongoing interest and commitment to quality improvement evident, and an enhanced reputation through a positive final report from AUQA.

So, was it worth it? Yes.

What is not known, of course, is whether he would still have made this assessment if his institution's audit report had not been positive.

What is a ‘good’ audit? And, further, what is a good quality audit? These issues have not yet been discussed within the sector. A reading of *The Australian Higher Education Supplement* suggests that universities probably see it as one that results in a report judged by the institution as fair and that does not generate negative media publicity that is likely to damage business.

On that basis VU had a good audit.

This paper does not challenge the validity of, or necessity for, such macro level assessments of external audit impacts. Instead, the paper focuses attention at the micro level audit experience of quality practitioners, using VU as a case study to raise questions and issues for further discussion. It suggests that the process of preparing for an external audit may have both positive and some potentially negative impacts on perceptions of Quality.

Audits: Theory and Practice
In its audit preparations, VU generally followed the advice available from attending AUQF conferences to:

- plan carefully;
- conduct a self-assessment and, ideally, a ‘mock’ audit;
- implement good communication and feedback mechanisms;
- ensure that offshore programs have been reviewed;
- brief participants (Adams, 2003).

The quality practitioners in the Quality, Information and Planning (QIP) Branch at VU were generally positive in their approach to audit. They accepted the proposition that:

* a unique benefit of an upcoming external quality audit for a higher education institution is the motivation it will provide for that institution to document, critique and then enhance its internal capability for continuous quality assurance, improvement and innovation (Scott and Hawke, 2003, p. 330-31).
However, following their audit experience, staff in QIP believe there is a set of issues that could be raised for public discussion that presents another side of the audit process and of its impacts. These include:

- the way an audit can ‘take over’ an institution and its staff;
- challenges in managing the critical points in the process;
- dealing with staff perceptions about audits and quality; and
- dilemmas that confront quality practitioners.

**Audit Take-Over**

Audit preparations take a lot of lead time – up to 12 months or more – and absorb much of the time, resources and energy of key areas and staff in institutions. Preparations typically involve:

- a self-assessment process, which may or may not include a ‘trial’ audit;
- development of a portfolio;
- organisation and conduct of offshore audits;
- managing AUQA requests for follow-up data and information; and
- an audit visit typically involving the scheduling of sessions and lunches with various categories of staff, students and other stakeholder groups.

Paul Beirne (2006, p.2) indicated that the Dean of the Melbourne College of Divinity was preoccupied with audit up to four and half years in advance. VU undertook a major Institutional Self Assessment in 2002 with AUQA in mind and well ahead of the announcement of an audit date. When the audit was scheduled for October 2006, the University commenced focussed planning more than a year in advance. The question is: what are the opportunity cost implications of this ‘audit alert’ status for institutions and the sector?

**Managing Critical Points in the Process**

VU did not set up a dedicated project team to manage audit preparations, largely because of budget limitations, instead relying on quality practitioners in QIP to manage the process. One additional administrative staff member was seconded to the Branch for the period of audit preparations.

Detailed plans at University and Branch level were prepared and specific purpose committees to manage (1) the overall preparations and (2) the development of the portfolio were established. From QIP’s perspective the audit management structures worked reasonably well and the outcomes of its internal AUQA audit evaluation supported this conclusion.

Nonetheless, there were some points in the process that presented serious challenges. For example, AUQA’s additional requests for information and organising the audit timetable were both processes that required QIP staff to work quickly across the University. It isn’t easy to make a university, which is a complex, hierarchical system, work quickly even when parts of it are highly attuned to AUQA. The matter is even more problematic in a dual-sector university like VU, where what is generally conceived as a whole-of-institution audit process doesn’t even apply to large sections of the institution.

In organising the audit timetable, QIP found that it took time for appropriate senior staff to provide names of people, staff and students for interview. The process was even slower when it came to organising external stakeholders such as industry and community representatives to meet with the panel, as there are protocols to be observed. Further, it was not possible to guarantee that students and community and industry representatives would actually attend. They have priorities and commitments which may, at the last moment, derail their stated intentions to participate, and no amount of good planning can ensure attendance. Yet, the non-attendance of these people would have created a poor impression on the panel.
Staff Perceptions: The Pros and the Cons of Audits and Quality

VU conducted an internal evaluation approximately two months after the release of the audit report to gauge staff perceptions of the effectiveness of the audit preparation process, as well as their views on the audit experience and outcomes. It showed that most staff surveyed (81%) considered that the report ‘is a fair and accurate representation of the University and its strengths and weaknesses’. When asked about benefits and negative outcomes for the University, a similar proportion (79%) agreed that, ‘There are benefits for the University arising out of the audit process’. The responses to the statement, ‘There are some negative effects/outcomes of the process for the University’ were more evenly split (31% agreed and 35% disagreed). This pattern was replicated for similarly worded questions about the benefits and negative outcomes specifically for respondents’ own areas.

These findings reflect Lance Twomey’s assessment of the external and measurable impact of audit, that is, there are positives and negatives associated with external audit but, on balance, the positives outweigh the negatives.

However, some teaching staff in informal discussions with QIP staff expressed the view that, for them, the audit was not really about quality. The reason given was the apparent disjunction between what was being audited and the audit method. From this perspective the emphasis on documents as evidence of quality in teaching and learning was inappropriate. The audit, according to this view, did not touch on the interactions between teachers and learners, and the documentary evidence should have occupied a less central place in the process. The quality improvement focus was not obvious to these staff. Poor paperwork for them does not necessarily equate with poor teaching and learning. The fact that AUQA conducted interviews with teachers and students did not reassure these people as there was still no direct connection between the audit and the actual learning environment.

Another apparent reason for scepticism about the relationship between the audit and quality is the occasional nature of the audits. This seems to create the impression that they are additional to so-called ‘normal’ work. Quality is conflated with extra work, leading to the view that quality is not part of day-to-day work, but an added ‘burden’.

Notwithstanding such potentially negative views of the AUQA process, there was also considerable evidence during the audit and in the evaluation that staff do perceive the audit as having positive benefits. Comments such as the following highlight this:

- provided incentive to reflect on internal processes;
- it made us take a long hard look at ourselves;
- self-examination of VU’s activities. Long needed policies and procedures were developed, implemented and updated. We are now a more professional organisation than before the process; and
- it helped support some of the views I have about processes so I can push those ideas more.

Dilemmas for Quality Practitioners

For QIP staff, the audit process represented a period of intense work which sometimes challenged our ability to work effectively. While the imperative to produce a ‘quality’ portfolio and to ensure a professional audit visit remained paramount, AUQA dominated activity for some months, often to the detriment of continuing work in other areas of the Branch. At various points, there were questions about the compromises we felt we were making to meet AUQA deadlines.

Quality practitioners can therefore feel caught between the application of quality processes and wanting a good outcome for the institution. For QIP, these tensions were experienced most acutely during the preparation of the portfolio and in the preparations for the audit visit.
The drafting and finalising of a portfolio for a quality audit that is intended to describe the activities of a university is a political process. The issue of what went in the portfolio and what did not was contentious. Ensuring that staff understood the nature of a ‘quality portfolio’ took up some time.

QIP found that staff at all levels can be sensitive about descriptions of operations for which they are responsible. Some expressed unhappiness about the position the University finally adopted in relation to their issues. The need to remain within the word limit saw some sections edited or even removed, which also caused some dissatisfaction. Further, some staff saw it as their responsibility to put the institution’s ‘best foot forward’ and remain silent on problems and areas of poor performance. It can take a long time to foster the understanding in the University community that in a portfolio intended for a quality audit it is likely to be counterproductive to attempt to hide or whitewash shortcomings.

All groups appearing before the panel need to be briefed so that they understand that they are not undertaking a public relations exercise for the institution and that it is not the occasion to vent their spleen or grandstand about their own pet projects. The challenges for quality practitioners lie in successfully conveying this message. We were asked questions like: what should I say if I am asked questions about a process and my views differ from what is in the portfolio? How honest should I be? What do I have to do to make sure we look good for AUQA?

At VU between portfolio submission and the audit visit some areas of the University were asked to provide large amounts of documentation. The largest faculty was also the largest provider of offshore programs and therefore had to submit copious documents for both onshore and offshore programs. From a quality perspective it was a challenge to keep staff onside at the same time as requesting information, scrutinising it to make sure it matched AUQA’s request and sometimes asking them to improve it. QIP was both the conduit between AUQA and the University, and the institution’s gatekeepers which does sometimes stretch goodwill to the breaking point.

Some staff perceived that, prior to audit, some activities were driven more quickly than was good for the University. For example, this was seen to apply to policy development, as the University has recently moved from a legislatively driven environment to a more flexible policy framework. In several forums, including the evaluation, staff complained of policy overload. To address these concerns the University implemented a major policy roll-out and developed a ‘Blue Guide’ to provide staff with the means to quickly understand the implications for them. Nevertheless, the perception of ‘wet paint’ was present for both the auditors, and at least some staff.

A dilemma of a different kind arising out of the audit is the way in which the term ‘AUQA’ was inevitably employed by QIP to encourage compliance with timelines, the presentation of key documents and, ultimately, attendance at briefings and an interview. ‘AUQA’ was sometimes used as a big stick, rather than as an opportunity for reflection and quality improvement.

The same argument might be extended to include many of the broad institutional change agendas that occurred in the months or even years leading up to the audit, undertaken (at least in part) on the basis that ‘We’ve got to do this because AUQA’s coming’. Counterbalancing this pejorative view, however, and consistent with the view outlined by Scott and Hawke (2003), QIP identified a number of benefits for the Branch in managing quality in the University after the audit. The most important of these is the impetus it provided prior to audit for changes perceived as necessary, but which would otherwise have occurred more slowly, if at all. The audit recommendations provide further impetus for change. The value of external audit as a ‘change driver’ is significant.
One of the areas in which improvements occurred as a result of the audit was in relation to the student evaluation process. Prior to the audit process, student evaluation was not conducted systematically across the University, and the Validation Audit highlighted inconsistencies in approach. This finding, together with recognition of the need to be able to provide data on student evaluations as part of the AUQA portfolio generated an increase in the number of evaluations conducted during 2006. The AUQA Audit Panel, while noting the work underway, subsequently made a recommendation about the need to improve student evaluations. QIP is responsible for the evaluation process, and staff have noticed that, in 2007, staff are undertaking evaluations without any pressure from the Branch to remind them to do so. It appears that the process is now embedded.

QIP staff also perceived that the high profile of the audit within the University and the accessibility of the University’s documentation meant that the TAFE sector could more easily learn about higher education audit processes. In addition, some TAFE staff were involved in the audit process. This is important given that the University is in the process of breaking down the ‘silo’ mentality that has characterised sector operations in the past.

Conclusion

QIP believes that sharing audit experiences can only be beneficial for the sector. In the longer term, incorporating not only empirical data but also qualitative (and often less easily measured) data and information will provide a broader base from which to evaluate the impact of the audits on the Australian higher education sector.

Based on QIP’s experience, the formal evaluation and anecdotal evidence, the paper concludes that in terms of the impact of the audit on staff perceptions of quality, they have mixed feelings, but generally see that quality audits have benefits, even if there are some costs. For QIP the challenge, following the audit, is to build on the perception of benefits and to reinforce the notion that quality is not just about quality assurance at the time of audit but is equally about encouraging continuous improvement.

References


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Quality Assurance in a University Library

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Abstract
Libraries are significant cost centres in Universities, and in the current climate of economic pressures and outcomes assessments, cannot rely on a general perception that they are a “good thing”. This paper reviews the range of quality assurance practices employed in a large university library which put it in a position to demonstrate value. An annual quality assurance cycle of planning, implementing, reporting and reviewing is supplemented by quantitative measures of key indicators which are analysed for trends as well as benchmarked with cohorts of other university libraries. Qualitative assessment takes the form of external client satisfaction surveys, (also benchmarked) and internal staff perception surveys, conducted in alternate years. Through this program, a culture of quality service and continuous improvement has been fostered for more than a decade.

Keywords: university libraries; quality assurance; benchmarking; surveys; statistics

Introduction
Libraries in tertiary institutions in Australia share with their parent bodies the challenge of continuing to deliver top quality services in an increasingly stringent economic environment. The business of libraries is to provide extensive information resource access to their client communities. For libraries, an additional challenge lies in the fact that the information industry is at a critical point in its history. As one leading practitioner commented:

In recent years and with the development of networking technologies, the familiar and traditional roles of libraries have been called into question and greater calls for accountability have emerged. Library goodness was never a self-justified outcome, but it becomes even less so in an environment that is highly competitive with multiple information providers. How do we know that the library is serving the needs of its users? That it is a highly valued resource? And that it is making a meaningful and positive contribution towards improving teaching quality, research productivity and life-long learning? (Kyrillidou, 2005)

An additional consideration from 2007 onwards for the University of Queensland Library is a shift in the University to a new budget model. The method by which the library receives funding from the University is changing from the previous system of “off the top” funding from the overall University budget, (8.8% of the University Operating Grant plus a percentage (6.2% in 2005) of all student fees), to a system whereby all funding is dispersed to the seven Faculties, and all service providers in the University, including the Library, will receive their funding from the Faculties. It would be too easy for a Faculty to siphon off a million or two from the Library allocation and channel it into more teaching staff or funding for the researcher who is about to discover the cure for cancer.

The library with a culture of quality assurance and a continuous cycle of renewal is in a better position to demonstrate its value in the teaching, learning and research outcomes of
the university than otherwise. For the quality cycle requires regular scans of the operational environments (political, economic, industrial and local organisational), planning in the light of the information gained from such scans, enacting the plans, and finally reviewing the actions. Such a program means that the Library is constantly striving to be responsive to shifting client needs and expectations and optimally to be anticipating them. At the same time, the Library needs to know that its practice is comparable to the best in the industry, and therefore needs to be continually assessing its performance and benchmarking with other libraries.

The University of Queensland Library has a history of conducting both quantitative and qualitative assessments, and of benchmarking the results against those of other academic libraries in Australia and New Zealand. The Council of Australian University Librarians has for many years coordinated the collection of statistics from university libraries, with the result that a rich database of statistical measurements can now be mined to situate a Library’s performance for a range of indicators on ranked lists. Similarly, many libraries have participated in a series of client satisfaction surveys conducted over the last eight years, and this provides another set of benchmarking data. This benchmarking shows the University of Queensland Library at or near the top of the rankings across a range of significant indicators, and also demonstrating continuous improvement. Internal staff satisfaction surveys are also conducted biennially, to keep a finger on the pulse of the organisation itself in a climate of constant change.

This paper reviews the Library’s quality assurance practice over the last decade and explores how this history positions the Library in the accountability stakes of the current environment. Three major planks in the quality platform are discussed: an annual quality management and assurance cycle, statistical indicators, and qualitative data.

Quality Management and Assurance Cycle

Quality management and assurance in the library is embedded in its cycle of planning, reporting and reviewing. The elements are the annual planning process in which all staff participate, to produce a Library Operational Plan and a set of Operational Plans for each of the branches and sections of the Library; annual reporting on performance against objectives in the operational plans; and regular reviews of outcomes to inform the next cycle of planning. These framework elements are the responsibility of the University Librarian and Executive Managers to implement.

Accountability consists of appraisal of the performance of individual managers, oversight by the governing body of the Library, reporting quarterly to the Library Committee of the Academic Board, University Librarian reporting regularly to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and Reporting on Reviews to the University Senate.

The key features of the process are:

- Focus on attaining the Library’s goals and objectives through annual reporting on performance in relation to the University’s Strategic Plan and the Library’s Operational Plan.
- Annual review of the Operational Plan to reflect current priorities in a dynamic environment.
- Monitoring key indicators for Information Services provision to assist in assessing performance against strategic objectives.
- Appraisal of individual staff and managers in terms of their annual objectives.
- Surveying and benchmarking of results against either Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) members, Libraries of the Group of Eight Universities, or the Australasian members of Universitas 21.
- Allocation of resources to areas of identified strategic importance and to promote improved performance.
The key principles underlying the process are:

- Commitment to clear identification of strategic objectives and priorities for action
- Support for redirection of resources to meet recommendations for change emanating from reviews and to support strategic objectives
- Support for staff development to ensure continuous improvement and excellence
- Devolution of responsibility to its most effective organisation level, with clear lines of accountability

The Review process reflects the Library’s commitment to achieving improvement and excellence through:

- A regular cycle of policy and planning review
- Benchmarking of performance against external organisations
- Collection and analysis of stakeholder feedback and the incorporation of results into future planning
- A regular whole-of-library review conducted by a review panel, in accordance with the University’s rolling seven-year program.

The cycle is represented in the diagram below. (Figure 1)
Statistical Indicators
The Library has been collecting, recording, analysing and reporting on statistics for key indicators for many decades. These have informed internal management decision making, as well as being forwarded to the CAUL database, which has been collecting statistics from all University Libraries since 1953 and publishing comparative tables.

The Library has recently moved from collecting statistics using Excel spreadsheets to an online tool, developed in-house during 2006. LibStats is highly configurable, licensed under GNU GPL, for collecting and reporting on statistics in the academic library. The reporting module allows for the selection of reports on totals, comparatives over time and between library branches, time series, cumulative and percentage change reports, all of which can be graphed. Produced within seconds, these reports provide valuable information for management decision making. A report can also be generated which meets the annual reporting requirements of the Council of Australian University Libraries. (CAUL)

CAUL statistics now provide a rich database of statistical measurements which can be mined to situate the Library’s performance for a range of indicators on ranked lists. This shows the Library at or near the top of the rankings across a range of significant indicators and also demonstrating continuous improvement. The Library for example, provides more classroom seats with workstations than any other Go8 Library, and teaches more Information Skills classes to more students than any other in the country. (Figure 2) It also spends the highest amount on periodical subscriptions, and the highest amount on e-resources ($9.2 million). The quality of its collection is reflected in the fact that it supplies more items on inter-library loan than any other tertiary Library.

Figure 2: Information literacy class attendees, Go8 Libraries, 2000 – 2005. UQ is purple (top) line. (Graph from CAUL statistics portal - [http://statistics.caul.edu.au/graphs.php](http://statistics.caul.edu.au/graphs.php))

Qualitative Data
Since 1999, the Library has conducted four biennial Client Satisfaction Surveys to obtain qualitative information on its performance. Developed by the Rodski Research Surveys group, (now Insync Surveys) the survey tool has enabled the Library to identify opportunities
for improvement and to better respond to the needs of clients. The survey employs bivariate methodology and analyses both the importance and performance of a series of service related statements. Repetition of the survey has allowed performance to be mapped over time. The fact that the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) and the Australasian Group of Universitas 21 have also chosen to use this survey means that the results can be benchmarked against all of those libraries, or specific subsets (eg Group of Eight libraries).

The survey looks at five areas – Communication, Service Quality, Service Delivery, Facilities and Equipment, and Library Staff. (Surveys undertaken from 2006 also include a category “virtual library”). Responses are analysed by client cohort and by library branch, so that information is obtained on what undergraduate or postgraduate students, academics, researchers or administrators want from the Library, and also what services or facilities are either good or bad in which locations. (There are fourteen branch libraries with more than twenty service points). A bivariate methodology is used, asking respondents to rate each statement twice – first to measure the importance of each of the statements to them and secondly to measure their impression of the Library’s performance on each statement. The perceived difference – or “gap” – between importance and performance scores for each variable is analysed. The gaps indicate areas of frustration or dissatisfaction for clients and thus represent potential improvement opportunities. This allows for the identification of prioritised gaps between performance and importance, and again, by client cohort and location.

Thus the process in the 2005 survey told us that, for Academics, the main issues were around ease of use of the website and ease of access to information resources. Many academics never go into a library building, accessing resources electronically at their desks. The Library responded by conducting focus groups to obtain further feedback on the website, and redesigning for a more streamlined interface. The 2007 survey will tell us if this has been effective. On the other hand, undergraduate students, who do use the Library buildings, were most concerned about the number of computer workstations in the Library, the opening hours, the amount of seating and the space available. The Library responded by increasing numbers of computers, supplying laptops for loan, installing wireless capability in all branches, and redesigning spaces for particular types of usage (group, quiet).

Close attention to these results of each survey, and actions taken in response to improve services and their delivery, have resulted in a progressively improved performance rating overall, as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Library Categories</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>UQ Sept 05</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UQ Sept 03</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>UQ Oct 01</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
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<td>200</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>76</td>
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<td>156</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
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<td>155</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities &amp; Equipment</td>
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<td>69</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library Staff</td>
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<td>171</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>775</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: UQL 2001 - 2005 Surveys (Graph from UQL September 2005 Survey Report by Ambit Insights (now Insync)}
The following two graphs show (1) the average results for all libraries in the database and (2) the results for the University of Queensland Library in 2003 and 2005 surveys, showing UQL in a strong comparative position.

Figure 4: Average of all Libraries in database (graph from Insync’s CAUL portal)

Figure 5: University of Queensland Library 2003 – 2005 (graph from Insync’s CAUL portal)
The Library’s overall score in the survey of 775 points (77.5%), indicates a score in the first quartile (top 25%) when compared with other libraries in the database. This also reflects an increase of 1.2% since the previous survey in 2003. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: University of Queensland Library 2005-2003-2001
(Graph from UQL September 2005 Survey Report by Ambit Insights (now Insync))

Please give your general assessment of how satisfied you are with the Library

Figure 7: University of Queensland Library – General Satisfaction 2005 – 2003 – 2001 (Graph from UQL September 2005 Survey Report by Ambit Insights (now Insync))
The Survey also asks respondents to provide a general assessment of their satisfaction with the Library (see figure 7). In this case, the overall average of 5.43 places the Queensland University Library in the first quartile (or top 25%) when compared with other libraries that have surveyed over the last two years. The result is a slight but insignificant decrease of 0.09 since the previous survey in 2003.

The Report of the Client Satisfaction survey is placed on the Library’s public website, along with a report of the actions the Library commits to undertake in response.

**Staff Satisfaction Survey**

In addition to the Client Satisfaction Surveys, the Library also conducts biennial internal Staff Perception Surveys. The survey has been developed in-house, and also uses the bivariate methodology. It covers the areas of Training and Development, Customer Focus, Recognition and Development, Goal Setting and Feedback, Communication, Employee Involvement, Wellbeing and Morale, Employee Relations, Senior Management, and Local/Branch Leadership. The survey is conducted online, and responses are anonymous. As with the Client Satisfaction Survey, respondents can also make free text comments on what they think are the Library’s strongest and weakest points, and any other issue they wish to air.

Figure 8: Library staff perception survey scattergraph 2004 – 2006 (Graph from UQL intranet)
reveals issues which are most in need of attention. A scattergraph shows results from the previous and current surveys, with changes in position indicating trends. In figure 8 below, for example, it can be seen that statement 32, while still in the quadrant representing issues most in need of attention, has moved in a positive direction.

Verbatim responses are analysed for themes using Leximancer © (a data-mining tool developed at UQ that can be used to analyse the content of textual documents and visually display the extracted information). This survey has given management the ability to monitor and respond to staff attitudes through periods of extensive change in the Library.

Conclusion
All of the quality assurance and assessment practices described here have, individually and collectively resulted in changes in the Library – in collections, in services, facilities, programs and procedures. From redeveloping the website to refurbishing physical spaces to accommodate diverse learning styles, from introducing a Wellness program for staff to developing online programs in information discovery skills for postgraduates, the Library is constantly engaged in the quality cycle of assessment and response.

This history of quality assurance, of assessment and continuous improvement now means that a whole body of information is available to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Library in supporting the information needs of the teaching, learning and research enterprises of the University.

References
The Importance of Diagnostic Ability in Evidence for Quality Assurance Procedures

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Abstract

There are few available instruments for assessing students' perceptions of university teaching and learning environments and providing diagnostic feedback, at the degree or programme level, on the quality of the environment. This article describes the development, testing and application, for quality assurance purposes, of a suitable instrument. The final version of the questionnaire includes scales seeking students' feedback on nine facets of the teaching and learning environment. There are also scales seeking students' perceptions of the influence of the environment on the development of eight generic capabilities. The scales have been shown to be reliable. Validity has been established by the use of faculty panels to select appropriate generic capabilities and by testing, by structural equation modelling, of an underlying model of the nurturing of capabilities by the environment. The questionnaire has proved to be highly diagnostic when used for quality assurance purposes. A case is given showing how the questionnaire identifies strengths and weaknesses, which can lead to action plans for quality improvement. This diagnostic ability is vital if an instrument or source of feedback is to be of value for quality assurance purposes.

Evaluation of teaching and learning environments

While evaluation at the level of the instructor or course must be almost universal, evaluating teaching in degrees, programmes, majors or departments is less prevalent and has received a great deal less attention in the literature. This situation is somewhat surprising in that the curriculum for a degree is more than the sum of the teaching in the constituent courses. Universities have procedures for approving the plans for overall degrees and list degree awards in their calendars. Surely, then, the entity itself needs evaluation at least as much as the parts which make it up.

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ; Ramsden, 1991) appears to be the most widely used instrument designed to assess teaching effectiveness at the level of the whole degree or programme in higher education institutes. The CEQ has been employed in the annual national graduate survey in Australian higher education since 1993 and a similar national survey in the United Kingdom is currently being developed.

The CEQ was primarily designed as a performance indicator for teaching effectiveness which assesses a range of student perceptions related to teaching and learning. The older version of the CEQ consisted of 30 items measuring six dimensions: Good Teaching, Generic Skill, Overall Satisfaction, Clear Goal & Standard, Appropriate Workload, and Appropriate Assessment. In an extensive study by Wilson and Lizzio (1997) with three large samples of Australian graduates, a shortened version of the CEQ with 23 items measuring the same six constructs was developed. The 23 item CEQ had been shown to have moderate to high reliability for the six core scales, and acceptable construct validity. The CEQ also produced expected correlations with student's learning outcomes which established its external validity.

The CEQ consists of one overall satisfaction item and one scale which encompasses all generic skills. The teaching and learning environment is characterised by just four factors,
meaning that feedback to departments on the teaching and learning for their degree would be restricted to just four variables. Even at the instructor level, teaching is recognized as a multi-dimensional skill (Marsh, 1987) and well-designed teaching evaluation instruments have multiple scales. The CEQ must, therefore, be limited in its ability to adequately characterize even the pedagogical context of a learning environment. A further limitation is the inclusion of all generic skills within one scale, which implies that all are of the same nature. This is possibly why the CEQ has been used to produce ranking lists, as such a restricted number of scales can give little diagnostic feedback capable of identifying strengths or weaknesses which can be remedied.

Development of a programme-level diagnostic instrument

The design of an evaluation instrument, which was functional at the degree or programme level, was guided by two principles.

1. It needed to be sufficiently diagnostic to identify strengths and weaknesses, making it possible for feedback to lead to an action plan for improvement.
2. The instrument needed to be cognisant of research into teaching and learning environments; so recognizing the breadth of constructs encompassed within an environment.

Both principles would imply the inclusion of a range of scales representing the breadth of constructs implicit in a learning environment and able to provide diagnostic feedback on teaching and curriculum design. The restraint is that students are reluctant to complete questionnaires which they consider overly long. The resultant questionnaire, therefore, needed to include vital constructs without appearing daunting to complete.

The instrument consists of two parts.

1. A section seeking feedback on students’ perceptions of the development, during their degree, of a set of generic capabilities.
2. A section seeking feedback on perceptions of the quality of elements of the teaching and learning environment.

The capabilities included are:
- Critical thinking
- Creative thinking
- Self-managed learning
- Adaptability
- Problem solving
- Communication skills
- Interpersonal skills and groupwork
- Computer literacy.

The elements included in the teaching and learning environment part are those shown to have a major impact on the development of capabilities (Kember & Leung, 2005a, 2005b; Leung & Kember, 2005b, 2006) and others which give useful feedback to departments on teaching and curriculum design. The scales included are:
- Active learning
- Teaching for understanding
- Feedback to assist learning
- Assessment
• Relationship between teachers and students
• Workload
• Relationship with other students
• Cooperative learning
• Coherence of curriculum.

All but one of the scales have the minimum number of two items to form a scale. The remaining one has three. This was a deliberate design decision. It permits a range of constructs to be included in the instrument; so reflecting the breadth of the construct of a teaching and learning environment. The shortness of the scales, though, keeps the questionnaire to a reasonable length. The paper version fits on two A4 sides. The trade-off of short scales is the difficulty of constructing reliable scales which adequately represent the construct. Evidence of satisfactory reliability and validity of the scales is given in the following sections.

The questionnaire uses a five-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree for responses. The instrument also includes two open-ended questions which are:
• What are the best aspects of your programme?
• Which aspects are most in need of improvement?

Reliability
Data for the tests of reliability and validity were obtained from a sample of 2879 students from the 21 programmes surveyed in 2005. The return rate was 53.2%; so a total of 1530 usable questionnaires were available for analysis.

The reliabilities of the scales in the questionnaire were tested by the standard procedure of calculating Cronbach alpha values. All scales comfortably exceeded acceptable values for Cronbach alpha.

Validity
Validity of scales or instruments is harder to establish than reliability. The procedure of deriving the set of capabilities to be included from faculty panels provides a measure of construct validity in establishing them as a viable set of generic attributes which graduates could be expected to have developed. Further confirmation of construct validity comes from the adoption of a similar set by a second university which is a comprehensive research-intensive university, whereas the original was a former polytechnic concentrating on applied professional courses.

The content validity of the items in all scales, as measures of the intended constructs, was ensured by their examination by expert panels. The formulations were then checked by focus group discussions with small groups of typical students.

There are two strands of evidence that the scales included in the teaching and learning environment part of the instrument are a valid characterization of an environment. Firstly, the results from the surveys have been proved to give readily interpretable feedback which can diagnose strengths and weaknesses, as discussed in the next main section. Evidence from all of the scales has resulted in recommendations for curriculum revisions; so must be relevant elements of a teaching environment.

Model of capability development
A further demonstration of construct validity comes from using structural equation modelling (SEM) to establish that the elements included in the teaching and learning environment make a significant contribution to nurturing the set of generic capabilities included in the questionnaire.
SEM models are tested by examining the goodness of fit of the model against a collection of data measuring the variables included in the model. Assessment of model fit was based on multiple criteria including both absolute misfit and relative fit indexes. The absolute misfit indexes included the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) and the Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR). The relative goodness-of-fit index used in the study was the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). A model with RMSEA<0.08, SRMR<0.08, and CFI>0.9 would be considered as an excellent fit to the data.

The goodness-of-fit indexes for this model were RMSEA=0.07 (90% CI = 0.02, 0.062), SRMR=0.042 and CFI=0.943, which indicates an excellent fit to the observed data. The standardized parameter estimates of the model are shown in Figure 1. All of the paths between the latent variables were statistically significant, except the one from teaching to working together. Moreover, the directions of all the paths were positive as anticipated.

The excellent fit of the data from the questionnaire to the model provides further evidence of the validity to the questionnaire. Its design is based on a hypothesis that the teaching and learning environment, as characterised by the variables included in the questionnaire, will have a significant impact on the development of the set of generic capabilities, selected as being important for graduates. Data collected with the questionnaire, from a large sample of students, shows an excellent fit to the data confirming that the questionnaire has been based upon a valid overall model.

**Diagnostic power for quality assurance**

It has been fairly common to rely solely on psychometric data to establish the credentials of questionnaires. Where an instrument is used for quality assurance or enhancement purposes, through, diagnostic power is also important. If an instrument is to provide help in improving the quality of teaching and learning, it must be able to identify strengths and weaknesses.

To do this, it must have a factor structure representative of the multi-dimensional nature of a teaching and learning environment and including elements important to effective
environments. Marsh (1987) has established that the same principle applies to teaching evaluation questionnaires, which is why well-designed instruments have multiple factors, based on a model of effective teaching. Unfortunately, there are many poorly designed instruments, which have just one overall factor, and are, therefore, only capable of ranking teachers rather than providing diagnostic feedback.

**Use of the Questionnaire in a Quality Assurance Initiative**

For four years the results from the surveys have been used as part of a quality enhancement initiative. Each undergraduate programme is surveyed in alternate years. Feedback is supplied to departments by using a profile of the form shown in Figure 2. The departments receive a profile in this form for year 1 and year 3 responses. They are also provided with a complete set of responses to the two open-ended questions.

Figure 2: Feedback profile for the case-study programme

**Feedback on Programme X (Year 3, 2003)**

*from Student Engagement Project*

The feedback profile includes frequencies and means for each scale for the current and previous administrations of the instrument. Each scale score for the programme is compared to the overall university mean for all surveyed programmes. The comparison is shown graphically.
in the column at the right of the feedback sheet. This gives z-scores, which are the number of standard deviations from the mean.

The feedback profile shown in Figure 2 is illustrative of the diagnostic power of the instrument. The z-scores indicate that the department has a generally good record in teaching with most scales rating higher than the university mean. The marked variations in the z-scores, though, mean that it is possible to identify relative strengths and weaknesses.

Shortly after the feedback profiles are released to departments, an appointment is made for one of the two professors in the Centre for Learning Enhancement And Research (CLEAR) to meet with the department chair and other members of the department with responsibilities for teaching coordination. At this meeting there is a discussion of feedback profiles, the listings of qualitative comments and other available feedback. Data are treated as indicative, rather than absolute, and needing intelligent interpretation in the particular context of the programme. The meetings, therefore, take the form of interactive dialogues. The aim is to identify strengths, which can be built upon, and challenges, for which remedial action plans can be suggested. In the initial stages reactions to the initiative varied. In some quarters there was suspicion as CLEAR was a newly formed unit and departments were not used to receiving feedback at the programme level. Acceptance has grown as the feedback has been accepted as useful. An indication of the level of acceptance is that a growing number of departments are seeking additional information, including: annual surveys, additional years besides Yr 1 and 3, and additional capabilities specific to disciplines or professions.

Case study

A case study is now presented which shows how the collection of diagnostic feedback through evaluation informs and facilitates the enhancement of teaching and learning quality. The case is of the programme with the 3rd year feedback profile shown in Figure 2. Following is an extract from the meeting notes from the 2003 round of the survey.

Extract from meeting summary 2003

Areas which may need further attention:

- Inconsistency appears in students’ perceived low interpersonal and groupwork skills despite them having been involved in a great number of group projects;
- A low perception on problem solving and career preparation;
- Heavy workload.

Suggestions for ways forward were made during the meeting:

1. The compulsory first year courses, such as X and Y, could be examined to see if practical applications could be stressed more in order for them to become a means of developing critical thinking and problem solving ability.
2. The new module which introduces ‘Z’ with guest speakers sharing their experience in their profession seems likely to improve problem-solving and career preparation.
3. Examine the nature of group projects to see why they appear to be having negative effects on student relationships and cooperative learning. Possibly the introduction of peer assessment of contributions to the group might help.

Comparison of mean scores between 2003 and 2005 enables the department to monitor changes. In this case it can be seen that issues highlighted in the 2003 meeting notes have been acted upon in the way suggested and that significant improvements have resulted. This has been noted in the extract from the 2005 meeting notes.

Extract from meeting summary 2005

Compared to the 2003 data there were significant increases in the ratings for problem solving for both first and third years. This was attributed to teachers stressing
applications to solve typical problems. This improvement is worth communicating to the Department for wider application.

There were also very major advances in student-student relationships and cooperative learning. This was attributed to better handling of group projects and the wider adoption of the assessment of individual contributions to group projects. It could be worthwhile to suggest that the purpose and anticipated outcomes of projects are clearly explained to students each time as they are a time-consuming, but very worthwhile, form of learning.

The improvements in the identified aspects of teaching and learning are shown graphically below. The graph compares z-scores for 2003 and 2005 for the scales corresponding to the issues identified in the 2003 summary. It can be seen that there have been significant improvements.

Figure 3. Change in z-scores of five scales for Programme X

![Graph showing change in z-scores for Year 3 and Year 1 students](attachment:image.png)
Conclusion

There are numerous questionnaires for evaluating teaching and courses. However, instruments suitable for evaluating teaching and learning in programmes, degrees, majors or departments are comparatively scarce.

At this level, a major influence on the achievement of learning outcomes is the teaching and learning environment. An instrument suitable for programme-level quality assurance or enhancement purposes, therefore, needs to provide measures of a well characterised teaching and learning environment. The questionnaire described in this paper has nine scales for assessing a teaching and learning environment. Four are subsumed under a teaching higher order variable, two are concerned with teacher-student relationships and two with student-student relationships. The remaining variable is workload.

The instrument also has measures for student perceptions of the development of eight generic capabilities. These were included as there is wide agreement that these are important learning outcomes for graduates. Reliabilities of the scales in the instrument were established through the standard measure of Cronbach alpha. Validity of construct selection and scale and item design was initially addressed through consultation with panels with appropriate expertise. The validity of the whole instrument was then verified by testing a model inherent to the design of the questionnaire with SEM. There was a very good fit to collected data for a model of the teaching and learning environment being influential in the development of the set of generic capabilities.

The instrument also has good diagnostic properties, evidenced by its ability to identify relative strengths and weaknesses in a programme. This is an important characteristic of any questionnaire which is to be used for quality enhancement.

References


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Academic Leadership and the Course Coordinator:  
‘King Pin’ in the Quality Process

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Abstract

Quality teaching and learning are becoming critical priorities for Universities as these outcomes are increasingly being linked to funding, ranking and reputation. Course coordinators are a key player in the quality process because of their leadership role in managing, developing and running university courses. The decisions and actions they take have a large influence on student performance, feedback, learning outcomes, and overall course quality. Course coordinators, however, often find themselves in these positions because of their strengths in their academic discipline. They are often ill prepared for the leadership and quality monitoring requirements of this role. This paper reports on a survey conducted within a large metropolitan university to ascertain the development needs of course coordinators. The results indicate that this group are uncertain about the scope of their role and would be well served by clear duty statements. They are time poor and need development in two focal areas. The first need is building and leading academic teams in order to build positive work cultures. The second need is improving their knowledge of quality curriculum design, development and evaluation using an outcomes framework and the link to assessment. The implications of this survey suggest that academic developers need to provide training opportunities for this critical cohort of academic leaders. University management must also develop clearer role descriptions for this group of staff and consider recognition of their leadership efforts in promotion system.

Keywords: Academic Leadership, Quality, Course Coordinator

1. Introduction

Quality teaching and learning are increasingly becoming an institutional priority for universities. Whilst quality is often measured at the unit level by examining student feedback and performance, course level feedback is equally as important. Course coordinators (also known as program or degree coordinators) carry much of the leadership responsibility for ensuring that courses are of high quality and relevant to industry.

2. The Course Coordinator

Course coordinators (CCs) are academic leaders who tend to be highly competent and qualified academics who, by virtue of their accomplishments, advance to the role of managing and leading a university course (Yielder & Codling, 2004). One reason that these individuals may move into these roles is their commitment to the organization (Murphy, 2003) and the potential intrinsic and extrinsic rewards associated with this role such as personal satisfaction, higher status, salary and career advancement.

Frequently, however, these academics are ill-prepared for such a leadership role, given that they have focused their academic pursuits on developing their discipline expertise rather than on leadership and the scholarship of teaching and learning. Further, understanding of the
course coordinator role is often ill-defined, leaving individuals uncertain about their responsibilities (Briggs, 2001).

Course coordinators are vested with considerable academic, managerial and administrative responsibility for achieving the desired quality and credibility of course teaching and learning outcomes. This responsibility, however, is often accompanied with limited line management authority which makes implementation of ideas and actions difficult.

The Course Coordinator position is also viewed as an all-consuming, complex and demanding role with significant stress (Murphy, 2003). It is often seen to have an adverse impact on personal teaching, research and scholarly activity (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004). Currently there is little support within Australian universities to prepare, support and recognise academics in these crucial academic leadership roles (Parker & Wilson, 2002).

Bennett (1983) has noted the difficulty of moving into an academic leadership role. Individuals must shift from being a specialist to a generalist and an individualist to a collectivist. The academic leaders must also shift their loyalty to their discipline to the loyalty of the institution or course. A diverse set of leadership and quality control capabilities are also required. An ill-prepared course coordinator, therefore, may jeopardize the quality of a course by reducing teaching and learning effectiveness, which in turn may result in lowered university reputation (Wolverton, Ackerman, & Holt, 2002).

Through no fault of their own, Course Coordinators often focus on the managerial or transactional aspects of their role (Antonakis & Hourse, 2002) which, includes planning and budgeting, organising and staffing, course control and monitoring and solving problems. Unfortunately, the leadership or transformational aspect of the role (Antonakis & Hourse, 2002) is often neglected. Ramsden (1998) has noted similar findings in situations where academic leadership is lacking, resulting in an absence or neglect of strategic functions such as setting future directions and aligning people and groups with departmental and organisational goals.

The literature suggests that sound academic leadership ultimately improves student learning. Gibbs (2006) found that if department leaders facilitate a good teaching environment, then teachers are more likely to use a student-focused approach to learning, which in turn results in far superior learning outcomes due to a deep approach to study (Martin et al, 2003; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997). This approach was proposed by Ramsden (1998) who indicated that teaching which focuses primarily on student learning, rather than teacher activity, is best supported by academic leaders who provide clear goals and enable people to embrace change. More effective student performance is achieved when teachers are encouraged to discuss curriculum and teaching issues, and where management is open and collaborative (Prosser & Trigwell, 1997).

3. **Academic Leadership**

Academic leadership has been analysed alongside conventional leadership theory to ascertain how leadership manifests within the higher education sector. Ramsden (1998) in ‘Learning to Lead in Higher Education’ summarises many of the leadership issues facing higher education which are still noteworthy today. The sector is facing numerous challenges including swings in student enrolments, greater scrutiny from the community and government with respect to accountability, fiscal challenges, rising consumer demands, advancements in technology and workloads and industrial reform. The need for leadership, as a result, has never been more important. This need for leadership development at the Course Coordinator level must be considered by Universities given the pivotal role these individuals play in ensuring course quality.

Ramsden (1998) notes that effective academic leaders demonstrate leadership in teaching and research, along with the ability to strategically vision and network. They are adept at
collaborating and motivating others through their leadership, while being fair and efficient and recognise and develop good performance. They also have good interpersonal skills. This is difficult to achieve in the Course Coordinator role without any formal authority. Hence, the development and management of relationships is critical to this leadership role if outcomes are to be achieved with respect to leading and managing course quality.

In another study Marshall, Adams, & Cameron (2000) interviewed senior academics to ascertain conceptions of ‘academic leadership’. There were different conceptions when leaders in formal positions were asked for their ideas in comparison to those in the ‘rank and file’. In their review of the literature, Marshall and colleagues found that academic leadership could be viewed as a collection of tasks or functions which are performed by individuals in formal positions within the university. Alternatively, academic leadership could also be described as qualities or characteristics of individuals. What Marshall et al. (2000) describe is not unusual. As they note, the concept of ‘academic leadership’ is elusive.

In the research described by Marshall et al. (2000) specific dimensions of leadership within the academic environment are described. Those which are particularly relevant to CCs are described below:

- Introducing students to scholarly work.
- Coordinating large course units
- Building community among lecturers, through team building, coaching and mentoring, and involving others in discussions and planning.
- Mentoring younger members of staff.
- Keeping people informed of progress.
- Being available and being generous with time and expertise and building trust.
- Being supportive of staff by valuing what they do and seeing differences as positive, and coaching them to work better, but also having the courage to give positive and critical feedback.

Gaither (2004) also summarises some major findings on leadership within the academic context. Leadership is not connected to title and position, but is invested in behaviour. Academic leadership is much more interdependent than individualistic because of the people-centred nature of the organisation. Building and maintaining relationships across the system is critical to leadership success, particularly in the CC role given its lack of formal authority. Gaither (2004) and Murphy (2003) both note that academic leadership is about sharing power and authority which is very much in line with transformational leadership theory. Leadership is also contextual which parallels views of contingency leadership theory. Gaither states that extensive knowledge of the University’s environment and systems, strategy and culture are essential to leadership. This echoes again for defining the leadership of the course coordinator, who because of a lack of formal authority over others, must create interdependence with their team and share power to invoke change and chart progress.

Taylor (2005, p31) notes that academic leadership is a synergy among variable characteristics of the person, the academic development role, development strategies, and the institutional context. Taylor notes the importance of personal qualities such as communication, empathy, listening, and negotiation along with personal competencies in teaching, learning and academic culture.

There are also specific academic leadership challenges which are particularly noteworthy for course coordinators. Marshall et al. (2000) note several issues that complicate academic leadership. One particular challenge is lack of control over resources and the ability to make decisions. A second challenge is inherent in the blurring of hierarchical relationships, which are usually clear in corporate sectors, but fuzzy in academic settings. Colleagues typically want collaborative working relationships but do not comply readily with being led or supervised.
Lastly, Marshall and colleagues note that expectations can also be unrealistic, particularly when demands for research, scholarship, and teaching are added to leadership and management responsibilities. Sathye (2004) adds that academic leadership is distinctive from leadership in business or government agencies because individuals, like course coordinators, still must stay close to teaching, learning, research and scholarship to bring out the best in those academics they lead and collaborate. This leaves the CC with many challenges inherent in their role. They play a ‘king-pin’ role between the Head of School and the course team in leading, directing and managing course developments, all without the vestments of an authoritative position.

Leadership development also seems to suggest it is most successful when it includes opportunities for coaching and mentoring, 360 degree feedback, and discussion and support (Bolden, Gosling, & Petrov, 2006; Raines, 2003). Given the nature of academic leadership and the role of the course coordinator, what development needs are appropriate for this position?

4. Method
A survey was distributed to all CCs at Curtin University of Technology to ascertain their development needs in order to perform their academic leadership role and to inform the structure and delivery of a professional development program for CCs. There were 12 broad areas with options to add open ended comments at the end of the survey. Respondents were required to answer each question using a 5 point Likert Scale. Distribution of the survey was through email as well hard copy follow up. A total of 179 course coordinators were identified in the University, and 48 replied which represents a response rate of 26.8%.

5. Results
Table 1 provides a summary of the results rank ordered by level of priority indicated by the respondents. The top three priorities were providing a positive and supportive environment for the teaching team (78%) followed by establishing and maintaining quality assessment practices in the course (76%). This was followed by ensuring that the assessment practices align with the unit and course learning outcomes (68%). The next three priorities were all ranked equally (64%), namely, having a clear and consistent understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Course Coordinator, developing a high performance culture within the course team, and student management issues. Course review processes, outcome focussed education frameworks and understanding online learning technologies were ranked seventh to ninth respectively. Understanding course administration and management and career path issues were the lowest priorities for the CCs.

Table 1: Course Coordinator Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q10: Providing a positive and supportive environment for the teaching team engaged in this course</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2: Establishing &amp; maintaining – the quality of assessment practices within the course</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Percentages</td>
<td>Score</td>
<td></td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3: Ensuring that the assessment practices align with the unit and course learning outcomes</td>
<td>0 2 30 38 30</td>
<td>68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7: Having a clear and consistent understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Course Coordinator</td>
<td>6 10 20 28 36</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4: Developing a high performance culture within the course team</td>
<td>6 6 24 24 40</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6: Student management issues</td>
<td>4 6 26 40 24</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5: Undertaking course reviews to enhance the quality of the course outcomes</td>
<td>4 6 32 32 26</td>
<td>57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1: Ensuring appropriate and consistent application of the outcome focused education (OFE) framework</td>
<td>6 16 25 43 10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12: Understanding of online teaching and learning technologies</td>
<td>14 8 26 42 10</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8: Understand the course management and committee processes</td>
<td>2 16 32 28 22</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9: Understanding the course administrative processes, e.g. enrolment, StudentOne etc.</td>
<td>10 14 36 24 16</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11: Understanding career paths available to you</td>
<td>18 24 28 16 14</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specific sub-analyses of the data also revealed some interesting trends. For example, ensuring appropriate and consistent application of the outcomes focussed education framework was considered a higher priority in 63% of undergraduate CCs, as opposed to 44% of postgraduate CCs. Female course coordinators were more likely to rank this as a high priority (63%) as opposed to male CCs (37%). The same trend undergraduate/postgraduate and female/male trend was noted for establishing and maintaining quality assessment practices. Undergraduate course coordinators ranked this as a higher priority than postgraduate course coordinators (79 vs. 56% respectively). Females also ranked this higher than males (83 vs. 65% respectively).

Males in contrast to females ranked developing a high performance culture within the course team higher (75 vs. 58% respectively). The less experienced course coordinators (0 – 2 years) also put a higher priority on student management issues (89%). This tended to decrease with increasing experience, except in those course coordinators with 11+ years of experience where it increased again. Reasons for this latter phenomenon may be due to increasing complexity of student issues.

Undergraduate course coordinators also ranked having a clear and consistent understanding of the role and responsibilities of the course coordinator higher than postgraduate coordinators (79 vs. 44% respectively). Again, course coordinators with 0 – 2 years of experience also ranked this higher (89%) with decreasing prioritisation amongst more experienced course
coordinators, with the exception of those with 11+ years of experience who ranked this higher again. Reasons for this latter phenomenon may be the increasing challenges being placed on individuals in these roles, or perhaps they have taken on coordination roles for more complex courses based on their years of experience.

Understanding the course administrative processes was also ranked considerably higher as a priority in undergraduate course coordinators than postgraduate course coordinators (63 vs 11% respectively). Those with 0 – 2 years of experience also ranked understanding the course administrative process as a high priority relative to those with more experience (67%).

5.1 Summary — Qualitative Data
Course coordinators were also asked for open ended feedback on the three biggest challenges they face in their role. Of the 48 responses received, 40 course coordinators (84%) provided written feedback. Themes that emerged most strongly from the feedback included:

- Coping with the growing number of administrative burdens being allocated to academic staff along with complex internal information systems.
- Prescribing and managing quality assessment practices.
- Reviewing, planning and monitoring course curriculum load, overlap and strategies.
- Ambiguity about the role of the course coordinator, scope of influence, decision making power.
- Finding the time to manage the myriad of student issues and to provide a quality service and as well as finding the resources to support student needs.
- Supporting staff, managing non-compliant staff, and trying to build a high performance team
- Lack of time to complete responsibilities adequately, which also impinges on research, teaching and professional development.

6. Discussion
The increasing demand for high quality teaching and learning outcomes, and the link to Government funding, have highlighted the importance of the course coordinator role. The results of this single site survey, and the supporting literature, suggest that Universities cannot be complacent about the recruitment, development and support that is needed for this critical leadership role. CCs need professional development opportunities to build their leadership and course management competencies. As discipline specific specialists, they often lack these competencies when they move into this leadership role.

While the results are for a single Australian Technology Network institution, the literature indicates that the CC role is a difficult one. As noted in the literature review, leading a team of people, building a positive culture and managing pedagogical changes are inherent in this role. The results for this one institution, and the developmental needs of this cohort of CCs appear to align with this notion of leadership and suggest that senior leadership must pay heed to the developmental requirements of this important group in the quality cycle. Because of this organisation’s ‘applied’ focus, there may be added pressures on the CC role given the external pressure that is applied by accreditation bodies.

The need for leadership development and an understanding of pedagogy was clearly identified in the survey. Strategies such as mentoring and coaching, opportunities for rich feedback such as 360 assessments, and opportunities for discussion and sharing of information have been suggested by Bolden et al. (2006) and Raines (2003) to promote academic leadership development.
Undergraduate CCs appear to have more pressing needs for development than postgraduate coordinators. Similarly, individuals new into the role were more emphatic about their developmental needs. This illustrates the need for universities to put into place induction programs which support and develop these individuals. Clear role statements, with appropriate loadings are also needed.

Women indicated more of a pressing need for development and support in implementing pedagogical practices whereas men emphasized the need for more leadership skill development. There were also a small group of more tenured course coordinators with 11 or more years who indicated a strong need for development. Why these trends have manifested is interesting and further investigation into this pattern of responses is needed.

Workload issues are also of major concern with information suggesting that administrative burdens are increasing rather than decreasing in Universities. Student demands are also increasing. Managing complex data systems and reporting requirements are also problematic for the CCs.

The value of these positions on student teaching and course quality has been noted in the literature which suggests that sound academic leadership improves student learning (Gibbs, 2006; Martin et al., 2003; Prosser & Trigwell, 1997; Ramsden, 1998). Given this importance, the role needs greater consideration in promotion systems, which are heavily biased towards research and teaching.

The needs of CCs identified in this study support those competencies identified by Ramsden (1998). Clearly CCs need development in leadership, course design, building team performance and supporting students in order to facilitate high quality course experiences. Heads of Schools and university staff development officers need to be aware of CC needs for professional development. Academic developers must also consider the time poor nature of these positions when considering the design and delivery of professional development programs.

What does this mean in real terms? University leadership must consider this role and its specific job requirements and develop clear role descriptions. Leadership development programs must be put into place to support these individuals and to develop future course coordinators. Time to engage in development programs and to situate the learning in practice must also take place by ensuring balance in workload. University data systems must provide reliable, accurate and timely information in order for the CC to manage course quality and future direction. Lastly, promotion systems must look at this role and consider its merit in decisions related to career laddering and advancement.

7. Conclusion

The push for measurable indices of course quality with links to government funding are elevating the importance of the course coordinator role. Management needs to consider the developmental needs of this critical operational cohort in the higher education setting and begin to place greater value on this role from a rewards and promotion perspective, developmental needs perspective, and also budget and plan accordingly for the demanding and time intensive nature of these positions.

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References
Abstract

How do higher education institutions in the throes of fundamental organisational restructuring respond to external institutional quality audits? Do they view the externally driven quality audit as a catalyst for organisational transformation or are the audits and its potential outcomes interpreted and perceived as threats to managerial assumptions and predispositions? What happens when this context is disaggregated to staff level, when occupational positions within such institutions are at risk (real or perceived), either as a consequence of the audit or as a result of the restructuring or a combination of both?

Quality in higher education appears to operate within a democratising discourse as its agenda is located within the public good paradigm. External quality audits are presented as neutral, value-free and objective assessments of higher education institutions and are legitimated by the moral authority of peer review. However, there appears to be a paucity of cost-benefit analyses of such audits and even fewer impact studies on whether real or perceived quality benefits actually accrue.

The literature is equally sparse on the impact of such audits on institutions undergoing fundamental restructuring in a higher education system that is being radically transformed. This paper reports on the experiences of a recently merged institution that had undergone an external quality audit and focuses largely on the institutional self-assessment component. The institution’s assumptions underpinning its preparations for the audit and the themes that were used to drive the institutional self-assessment are explored. Finally, some tentative findings on the complexities and unintended consequences of the self-assessment and the external quality audit are discussed.

Key Words: External quality audits; institutional self-assessment; organisational restructuring

Introduction

A number of countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, India, the United Kingdom and South Africa, have in the last two decades introduced external quality assurance (or quality monitoring) of their higher education institutions. Such quality assurance generally includes the accreditation of institutions and programmes, institutional quality audits, national programme reviews and research reviews and is usually conducted by a statutory or quasi-governmental agency (Harvey, 2002, p. 6).

The rationale advanced for the introduction of external quality assurance is that it is primarily concerned with quality improvement and enhancement. Furthermore, it aims to engender public confidence in higher education’s ability to demonstrate greater responsiveness to societal needs as well as provide comprehensive information to the public on the manner in which higher education institutions maintain the quality and standards of their core business (CHE, 2004, p. v).

Therefore, it would appear that quality improvement in higher education (and by extension external quality assurance) operates within a democratic discourse. Indeed in the South African context, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the body responsible for quality
assurance in higher education via its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), declared that its approach aims to advance higher education transformation so that it reflects the democratic mores of a post-apartheid society (HEQC, 2001, pp. 3-8).

This discourse suggests an altruistic motivation by locating the quality agenda within the public good paradigm in response to demands for social and economic justice after decades of racial segregation and inequalities. Consequently, quality assurance would be one of the key drivers in restructuring higher education, at systemic and institutional level, so that it is a more just, effective, efficient and responsive system to construct a post-apartheid and democratic society (CHE, 2004, p. 2).

The HEQC’s primary instruments in discharging its quality assurance mandate include quality promotion, programme accreditation and institutional audits. The HEQC’s approach is generally consistent with the international models described by Brennan and Shah (2000, p. 11) of a national coordinating body, institutional self-evaluation, external evaluation by academic peers and published reports.

In addition to quality assurance as a transformatory and democratizing driver, the South African higher education landscape has been radically reconfigured to remove the last vestiges of the inherent inequalities of apartheid-based institutions. The reconfiguration of the landscape began in 2003 and was effected largely via institutional mergers and the creation of new institutional types such as university of technology and comprehensive university, resulting in thirty six higher education institutions being reduced to twenty one.

At more or less the same time, the HEQC announced that its first cycle of institutional audits would be scheduled for the 2004 to 2009 period. Those institutions in the throes of mergers and institutional restructuring would be granted a reprieve in that their audits would only be scheduled after 2007 (CHE, 2004, p. 13). It is within this context then, that this paper is located: an institution preparing for its external quality audit whilst simultaneous that engaged in fundamental restructuring after being merged and reconfigured into a new institutional type.

**Institutional Context**

To appreciate the magnitude of the restructuring of the institution concerned, it would be prudent to highlight the following: The institution was established by merging three technikons of differing historical contexts, size, shape, student and staff profiles, and organizational cultures. The resultant institution was reconfigured into a different institutional type, from technikon to university of technology. The entire governance, senior leadership, administrative, operational, and academic faculties of the institution were subjected to extensive restructuring and reconfiguration. In fact, the restructuring process continued into 2007 and was not yet completed at the time of the institutional quality audit.

Against this backdrop, the institution began its preparation for its external quality audit which was scheduled for March-April 2007. Consistent with the general approach to such preparations, the institution began its self-assessment in 2006 and submitted its institutional audit portfolio to the HEQC in January 2007.

While institutions sometimes perceive external quality audits as an unwelcome imposition, the university decided to appropriate the audit to underpin its restructuring processes. The university consequently declared that the audit would be used as “a lever for transformation” to underpin the merger as well as the creation of a new institution.

The primary themes to drive the audit were to test the validity and authenticity of planning assumptions and strategy, to assess the merger integration and equity of academic provisioning across the various learning sites, to ensure the alignment of planning, quality and resource allocation, to validate the appropriateness of multi-campus management model, to
quality manage teaching and learning, research and community engagement and finally to inform the restructuring and transformation into a university of technology.

The university believed that that self-assessment as well as the external quality audit would provide its new governance, management, academic and administrative structures with a comprehensive overview of baseline and prevailing conditions. It was further viewed as an opportunity for organisational learning via the involvement of its key stakeholders in order to engender confidence in the newly created institution. This institutional intelligence will then be used to underpin the organisational transformation and reengineering necessary to improve the quality of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

In order to support the institutional goals with regard to the audit, the university declared that the self-assessment would be done in an honest, open, transparent and inclusive manner. A central audit planning committee and the quality directorate coordinated the self-assessment, which was done by six working groups comprising of staff and student representatives. An internally developed self-assessment model was used to generate a descriptive and analytical exposition of performance in teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

**Tentative Findings**

It was assumed that the self-assessment would be conducted objectively and that its outcomes would inform the crafting of the new university. However, the radical reconfiguration of the governance, leadership, organisational and operational structures and the staffing thereof, tacitly and overtly, influenced the self-assessment. Some staff interpreted the outcomes in terms of consequences for the individual, as it was perceived as a form of performance assessment by stealth, to inform the appointment, retrenchment and redeployment of personnel.

A second finding related to the nature of organisational change as the self-assessment exposed tensions between the inherited, interim and futures states of the institution. As a newly merged university, a number of practices were inherited from the different institutions that formed part of the merger. These were informed largely by the prevailing organisational cultures of the erstwhile institutions and were often in conflict with interim arrangements and the strategic thrusts of the new institution. Consequently the self-assessment appeared to amplify differences and entrench previously held positions rather than fostering consensus and best practice.

A third finding, associated to the one above, was that the fluid context and the interim nature of operations at the university militated against the free flow of information. Gatekeepers of information filtered, misdirected and or subtly refused cooperation as their self-assessment produced either cryptic or elaborately embroidered accounts of operational activity without detailed analysis of performance.

Fourthly, positioning, posturing and circular arguments dominated the self-assessment process and the subsequent reporting. The analyses of performance appeared to be informed by the attending insecurities associated with the restructuring rather than philosophical and conceptual debates on higher education provisioning. Prejudices, biases, intellectual and professional limitations clouded the objectivity of the self-assessment and the authenticity of the analysis of the quality of academic provisioning.

Finally, and contrary to the institutional goal of authentic organisational learning, the self-assessment was done in rather instrumentalist and technicist manner to “get it over and done with minimal fuss”. The self-assessment had to compete against various other priorities jostling for institutional attention. Although this may appear to be somewhat paradoxical given university’s declared position on the primacy of quality, issues such as staff appointments, rationalization, faculty locations, harmonization of conditions of service, and other processes sometimes took the centre stage.
Discussion

The tentative findings in this context appear to challenge the dominant view that external quality audit and institutional self-assessment are neutral, objective, value-free and consensual efforts aimed at organisational learning and improvement. Such a view is generally founded upon the notion of organisational singularity, that is, overall consensus on organisational goals and strategy.

However, most modern organisations, and especially those that are undergoing fundamental change, are characterised by organisational fragmentation and complexity as various interests compete for dominance (Martin 1992). Likewise, universities are complex organisations with a variety of processes and functions with what may best be described as loosely coupled arrangements.

Therefore, Morley’s (2003) assertion that since quality audits create fictional appearances of coherence and unity, as the audit and the self-assessment requires consensus and alignment with institutional goals and objectives, the role of conflict, competing interests and consequences for the individual are often ignored or underplayed. The self-assessment plays out prejudices, suspicions and mistrust that seem to characterise stable universities and those in transition.

This situation is amplified in a newly merged or restructuring context as the self-assessment provides an opportunity to acquire intelligence about competing sections within the institution in the struggle for recognition and status (Morley 2003, p. 125). The self-assessment then could be a subtle and sophisticated route to dominance, which may in part explain the actions and contestations that characterized the self-assessment in this case.

In addition, it would appear the seemingly morally legitimate agenda of development and public good that is used to underpin the current logic of external audits may in fact disguise power relations and downplays potential coercive and punitive measures that may result from the self-assessment and external quality audit.

Consequently, little attention is paid to the impact of micropolitical considerations on the objectivity of self-assessment processes and the validity of its outcomes. Blase points out that micropolitics involves the use of power to influence others and protect the self, the use of conflict in competing for resources and influence and the use of cooperation to bring together disparate positions to achieve common ends (1991, p. 11).

Furthermore current audit methodology, despite assertions to the contrary, appears to be technicist in nature given its overtly accountability agenda and close connections to new managerialism (Newton, 2002). While policy makers attempt to punt the development rather than accountability agenda of external audits, academic staff seem to be of the view that audit processes and outcomes are aimed at new forms of control by a centralised bureaucracy.

Therefore the assumption that self-assessment, and by extension external quality audit, could be used to drive institutional transformation and infuse quality into academic processes is somewhat naïve. As Newton points out academic staff do not meekly acquiesce to externally driven change initiatives and external quality regimes (2002, p. 59). While academic staff may not shape policy, they nevertheless in the face of organisational flux will respond, resist and adapt as the circumstances evolve.

Conclusion

It would be disingenuous to portray higher education systems and their quality regimes as neutral and value free. In particular, the South African higher education system and institutions are highly contested terrains given the attempts to transform social institutions to be more reflective of the democratic ethos of a post-apartheid society.
While such contestations may be more visible in societies in transition, it may be argued that institutions in so-called stable democracies may well experience similar tensions. Academic staff may very well develop strategies to circumvent or indeed subvert the audit process if the outcomes of successive cycles of external audits are seen to be eroding academic freedom via new managerialism and the corporatisation of higher education.

The higher education sector as well universities may therefore find it prudent to plan and conduct the external quality audit and the institutional self-assessment with due consideration to the political, structural, conceptual and philosophical contestations that characterise higher education. Consequently, the accurate attribution of meanings from the valid decoding of the complex set of transactions within the academe may emerge from an authentic self-assessment and external quality assurance.

References
Evidence Based Decision Making to Effect Change:  
A Strategic Initiative

Chenicheri Sid Nair
Lorraine Bennett

Abstract
Universities in Australia have almost certainly implemented quality assurance programs within the past five years, if they were not in place prior to then. Fundamental to whatever quality model being applied is an acceptance of the importance of collecting feedback from students about their study experience. The preferred method has largely been through student surveys, predominately paper based questionnaires administered in class. More recently some universities have introduced online surveys and other evaluation techniques such as student focus groups to collect feedback. In addition to the data that is collected internally by each university, a substantial amount of data on graduates is also available to universities from the nationwide Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS). However, to date the weakness reported across many universities, is that these valuable and growing data sources are not being routinely interrogated and acted upon to bring about improvements. Many faculties and academic staff do not systematically engage with the data and even when they do they are unsure how to respond effectively to the feedback. This paper outlines a systematic improvement strategy being developed at Monash which uses data sources (evidence) as the starting point for affecting change (improvement) in learning and teaching.

Keywords: Evidence based, affect change, strategic, continuous improvement

1.0 Introduction
Broadly speaking, higher education has changed markedly in Australia in recent years. Factors such as a growing demand for university places from an increasing diverse student population, the introduction of new competitive government funding models requiring greater reliance on full fee paying students and other funding sources and an increased focus on compliance and accountability have played a significant role in these changes. Quality and accountability is fundamental to all of these factors and with the inception of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2001, Australian universities have participated in quality reviews in which they were required to demonstrate that they have clear policies, systems and procedures in place to ensure a quality experience for their students. Universities have embarked on this ‘accountability journey’ by reexamining their pedagogy and curriculum and in particular by obtaining feedback from students from various angles. The paper presented by Bennett, Nair and Wayland (2006), identified numerous ways universities have approached the process of better understanding and meeting the needs of their students through student evaluations. Some of these purposes are as:

(a) diagnostic feedback to faculties about their teaching that can aid in the development and improvement of teaching;
(b) useful research data to underpin further design and improvements to units, courses, curriculum and teaching;
(c) a measure of teaching effectiveness that can be used in administrative decision making, e.g., performance management and development appraisal;
(d) useful information for current and potential students in the selection of units and courses; and,
(e) a useful measure for judging quality of units and courses increasingly becoming tied to funding.

The first two purposes are recognised universally as the basis for many evaluations (Fraser 1998; Marsh & Duncan, 1997). Purposes (c) – (e) are relatively new to many universities especially in the Australian context. For Monash the usefulness of measures related to the quality of the units, courses, programs and student experience are reflected in the values, aspirations, strategic documents and the nature of the organization (Monash University, 2004, 2005). While there is growing awareness across universities of the purposes of evaluations, it is only recently that universities have started to focus on the need to act on the data collected in a systematic and strategic manner. In terms of the standard quality cycle (plan, act, monitor-evaluate and improve) this addresses the improvement phase and is sometimes referred to as ‘closing the quality loop’. This paper describes how Monash, a large internationalised research-intensive institution that is home to about 56,000 students from over 100 countries is developing a systematic approach to affecting change utilising university wide unit evaluation data as a starting point for improvement.

2.0 The Approach

Data Collection
In 2005 Monash policy on evaluating units was amended to require evaluation of each unit at least once every year it is offered instead of the previous 3-5 year cycle. Evaluation is undertaken through administration of a survey which contains 10 standard University questions common to all faculties with the option to include up to ten further questions of their choosing common to all units within the Faculty. To facilitate the administration of the survey to all units on all campuses, the Centre for Higher Education Quality (CHEQ) introduced a new Survey Management System for the evaluation of units with the ability to have both paper and web based versions (Nair and Wayland, 2005). More than 6000 units were evaluated in 2006 using paper based or online methods.

The Institutional Strategy
In 2006 the university established the Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) to work alongside the Centre for Higher Education Quality (CHEQ). The expectation was that CALT and CHEQ would work collaboratively with faculties, drawing on student evaluation data and other performance measures, to establish goals and priorities to improve the quality of learning and teaching and consequently student performance and satisfaction levels. The challenge was to develop a methodology which would form the basis of a systematic improvement strategy in response to unit evaluation data. The guiding principles used to underpin the initial strategy included:

- working from data sources,
- targeting poorly performing units as a priority,
- establishing response teams consisting of CHEQ, CALT and faculty staff,
- linking staff and student development support,
- focusing initially on aspects which presented minimum obstacles to change,
• providing concentrated support over a short term to achieve high impact,
• documenting and demonstrating improvement as a consequence of the actions taken.

The four phases of the quality cycle - Plan, Act, Evaluate (Monitor and Review) and Improve were used as the framework for the methodology and appropriate tasks, responsibilities, timelines and measures were identified for each of these phases. The entire process was designed to take place over a six to eight week period to enable the improvements to be made where possible in time for the next teaching cycle.

TRIALING THE STRATEGY
By mid-semester 1, 2006 the CALT/CHEQ team was ready to trial the strategy in one of the smaller faculties. An important cornerstone of this strategy was to target poorly performing units as a priority. This did not mean that the team did not value or acknowledge highly performing units, in fact they were often referred to as exemplars of ‘good practice’, but as the resources available were limited, a decision was made early in the planning to focus on the units most in need of help, in other words to address the ‘hot spots’. Final selection of the units to target involved a fairly detailed process. Initially the bottom 25% performing units for the faculty based on the ‘satisfaction item’ from second semester 2005, were identified and other units where items were rated 0% below the faculty average for that item were added to the list. Other factors which were taken into account included the class size, the response rate and, for units taught on more than one campus, any campus specific trends. It was also helpful to identify sequential units and units that were in the same year level or course. During the selection process discussions with faculty staff including the associate dean teaching and relevant program, course and unit leaders were essential as they often flushed out contextual information which was not evident from the data sets. Although the ‘satisfaction item’ was used initially to select the units in the spotlight, further analysis was carried out on each of these units to see if other items in the survey were below the mean. The responses to the open ended questions for these units (the qualitative data) were also reviewed for further clues as to possible areas for improvement.

Eight out of the ten units in the bottom 25% of units were initially selected for the first trial and staff from five of these units agreed to participate in the program. The response team worked intensively with these faculty staff on the areas that were identified in need of improvement. The types of activities that were provided by CALT staff included: reviewing and reshaping unit objectives, aligning assessment tasks to objectives, providing advice and ideas on innovative assessment tasks, reviewing learning materials, providing unit guide and learning material templates, conducting workshops on giving effective student feedback and highlighting the role of learning objectives in curriculum development. In addition the response team also met with staff and students involved in the units to test out other ideas and to identify how else the unit could be improved. A detailed report of this case study ‘Implementing Strategic Policy for Quality Improvement in Teaching and Learning: A Case Report from Monash University’ has been prepared by the key team members (Spratt, Gilbert, Luckenhausen and Roller 2007).

SOME INTERESTING FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST CASE STUDY
Five units were ultimately involved in the initial trial. The data in the Table 1 below indicates that when the units were next evaluated, in second semester 2006 after the intervention program, the mean for the satisfaction item in four of the units improved with the fifth unit reporting a marginally insignificant lower satisfaction at 3.2 (3.23 cf 3.20).
Table 1: Mean Comparisons of the Satisfaction item for the Five Units involved in the Trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Units</th>
<th>2005*</th>
<th>2006*</th>
<th>Mean change (2006-2005)</th>
<th>% Change of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unit 1</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>4.6 ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 2</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>22.0 ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 3</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>16.7 ▲</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 4</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.93 ▼</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit 5</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>7.2 ▲</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean on satisfaction item

In achieving the above changes in units the response teams faced a number of challenges in the implementation phase of this strategic process. Some of these challenges included:

- finding the best way to introduce the process within the faculty, (staff were generally positive especially the Dean, Associate Dean Teaching and Faculty Manager but as it was a new process everyone needed to learn as it unfolded);
- high workloads of staff limited their availability for meetings to discuss the results and implement change;
- the perceived ‘threat’ faced by academics in general when engaging with poor feedback data and debate on the validity of the unit evaluation survey data needed to be handled sensitively.

These challenges along with interventions utilized in the process are documented in the paper that will be presented by Spratt et al at AUQF (Spratt, Gilbert, Lueckenhausen & Roller, 2007).

3.0 Concluding Remarks

It is still early days in the development of this systematic improvement strategy and while the initial trial provided several good ideas to add to the support activities it also highlighted the need for clarification and further detail throughout the process. A particular point raised by the team members was the need for the strategy to be sufficiently flexible to enable contingency plans to be promptly implemented as intervening variables such as conflicting demands on faculty staff time cut into the program.

One of the concerns expressed by faculty staff was that the identification of the target units relied too much on results from student unit evaluations. Staff were frequently assured that this was simply a way into the data and that other data sources and information were taken into account when working with the units for improvement. Hopefully the range of data which will be available to the teams in 2007 will increase substantially with the introduction of a course and unit profiling system. This will enable teams to easily cross reference unit evaluation data with information on student progress, retention and failure and grievance rates and will provide further background on what areas to address for improvement.

Another concern expressed by faculty staff was that the strategy only focused on poorly performing units and that there was not sufficient acknowledgment or celebration of the top performing units. This view is respected by the team and every effort was made to utilize
materials and examples of highly performing units. This will be further emphasized in the next version of the strategy.

A significant lesson from the trail was the need to build strong relationships at all levels within the faculty and to embed the strategy with a comprehensive communication plan. Even though the team worked with and through the dean, faculty manager and associate dean teaching some staff did not engage in the process and were unaware of the extent of the team’s activities.

The overall conclusion is that the strategy is worth pursuing as the results are quite encouraging in terms of the improvements in the overall student satisfaction levels recorded from 2005 to 2006. The results suggest a targeted intervention approach developed strategically and molded to the internal context of the faculty has the advantage of addressing issues that are easily correctable. This first attempt at a comprehensive approach to implementing targeted, systematic improvement in response to student unit evaluations shows not only a great deal of promise but demonstrates to students that their feedback is the backbone to changes. Further, the ability for faculties to also use the data to improve teaching and learning has resulted in students gaining confidence in the new unit evaluation process and is consistent with research findings (e.g., Leckey & Neill, 2001). This is demonstrated with the increase in overall response rates since the implementation of the new system for the unit evaluations. Response rates have increased from just over 32% to nearly 41%. This translates to actual responses increasing from 39,041 to 55,334.

Clearly the direction to an effective quality system as embodied by the Monash Quality cycle is the effectiveness of the evaluation system that is employed at the institution. In this case we have progressed in that we have engaged the system to move forward and divorced old processes, which did not give effective insights. Clearly the marriage of evaluations and quality is here to stay but most importantly the approach demonstrates that there is a symbiotic union between collecting data and evidence based decision making to effect change.

4.0 References


An Investigation into Student Comment Behaviours: Who Comments, What do They Say, and do Anonymous Students Behave Badly?

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Abstract
This paper reports an investigation into student comment behaviours in the implementation of a new university-wide system of student evaluation of learning and teaching. Once logged into the portal, students are assured anonymity. When the system was first introduced, some staff expressed fear that students in such a system follow certain behaviour patterns—that is, the academically poorer students are likely to use the system, that participating students use the system predominantly to complain about staff, and that the anonymity encourages abusive behaviour. Under strict confidentiality constraints the system development team was charged with investigating and reporting on whether there were grounds for these fears. The team undertook to read all student comments (approximately 30,000 in all) and report the findings. This paper reports the outcomes: it provides a snapshot of the student demographics of the participating cohort, which students were more likely to comment, what they tended to comment about, and whether they used the anonymity afforded to them within the system to abuse staff. In summary, students more likely to participate in this system are those who have higher grades and are more engaged; about two thirds of them provide comments; positive comments tend to focus on staff and good teaching practices; critical comments focus on the opposite, but even though comments sometimes allege that staff ‘behave badly’ in that teaching practice is poor, very few students write abusive comments. This research will be of use in allaying similar staff fears in comparable university circumstances.

Keywords: Student evaluation systems; qualitative feedback; CEQuery

Introduction
Large volumes of qualitative information are often collected from student evaluation surveys; in paper-based systems the comments are not analysed (often because they are handwritten) and accessible only to individual staff. Until recently, the massive amount of student feedback collected in the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) went unanalysed (on the national level) except when individual universities performed their own analyses (Scott, 2005). Whilst many evaluation surveys comprise qualitative items to evaluate educational outcomes, contemporary views on evaluation systems acknowledge the importance of providing qualitative information in order to promote critical interpretation and reflective practice and provide a broader picture of the effectiveness of teaching strategies and learning outcomes (Spratt & Walls, 2003). The relatively recent move of these systems from paper to online has several implications for results: students now choose to go online usually outside of class time; the time
they take to use the system is now unsupervised; greater anonymity is assured within online systems beyond the teacher’s reach; and responses to qualitative questions are more common and the responses are generally lengthier (Sorensen & Reiner, 2003). Qualitative data typed into the system by the students certainly makes analysis easier.

Staff acceptance of student evaluation systems is varied: many embrace and welcome such systems (either online or on paper); others are more fearful and defensive. For example, some academics fear that student evaluations provide students with the power to implement a personality contest between academics rather than evaluate effective teaching whilst others believe student feedback is meaningless (Kulik, 2001). Others view student evaluations as infringements on academic freedom (Haskel, 1997). This reflects the reaction at Curtin University of Technology when a paper-system was recently replaced by an online system. The University moved, using a highly consultative process, from the voluntary use of the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU)-approved Student Evaluation of Educational Quality (SEEQ) instrument (Marsh, 1982) in which results were confidential to individual staff to the automatic use of the eVALUate unit survey system (Curtin University of Technology, 2005), the full results of which are available to unit coordinators and Heads of School. Understandably, some staff felt anxious about the new system: it was alleged by some that the student-initiated use of the system would appeal more to the academically poorer students, that students would use the system predominantly to complain about staff, and that the anonymity within the online system would encourage abusive behaviour. It is important to understand the anonymity that students have within the eVALUate system: to access eVALUate, the students must log in to the student portal (OASIS). Once inside the portal, students are free to use the feedback system. It has been made clear to the students (particularly through the student representatives who were members of the steering committee) that tracking and identifying a student comment is possible (as it is within almost any technology system). Nevertheless, students and staff have been assured that this ability to identify will never be used under any circumstances, and this is now enshrined in University policy and reinforced with all staff and students.

**Which Students are more likely to Participate?**

There are limited and somewhat contradictory research findings on the characteristics of students who provide feedback (and therefore to what degree evaluation results might be biased by certain groups of students). There seems to be a trend in the findings that women, students in certain ethnic groups, and students with higher grade point averages are more likely to participate, but these findings are inconsistent (Sorensen & Reiner, 2003). Higher response rates have been reported by women for all modes (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003) and for online modes (Underwood, Kim, & Matier, 2000) and vice versa by Carini et al (2001) and Tomsic (2000). Sax et al (2003) reported differences in response rates for ethnic groups (Asian American students having the highest response rate at 30.8%) whereas Thorpe (2000) found no differences in response rates between minority and non minority students. Thorpe (2000) and Leigle & McDonald (2004) found that students with higher grades were more likely to give feedback. In contrast, Underwood et al (2000) and Tomsic (2000) found no differences in students according to grade point averages and expected grade. The small number of studies that have examined the difference in online and paper based instruments show no significant differences in mean scores for survey items (Brown & Glasner, 1999; Carini, Hayek, Kuh, Kennedy, & Ouimet, 2003; Gamliel & Davidovitz, 2005; Layne, DeCristoforo, & McGinty, 1999; Thorpe, 2002).

In the research reported here (June, 2006) the eVALUate unit survey was available for 1,911 undergraduate and postgraduate coursework units at Curtin’s Australian and Sarawak campuses. The eVALUate unit survey instrument asks students’ to report their level of agree-
ment with seven statements related to what helps their achievement of learning outcomes (Items 1 to 7), their level of motivation and engagement (items 8 to 10) and their overall satisfaction with the unit (Item 11). In June, 2006, there was a total of 88,116 potential survey submissions by 25,611 students enrolled in those units. At the close of data gathering, there were 25,090 surveys submitted by 8,379 students. This is an overall response rate of 28.5% by 32.7% of the eligible students. The participation rates of student subgroups were examined to see if there were significant differences. Overall there was higher participation by female students ($\chi^2 = 164.989, p<0.000$), external students ($\chi^2 = 2.744, p=0.434$) and Australian students ($\chi^2 = 623.815, p<0.000$). Students aged 21-25 years were less likely to participate than students from any other age group ($\chi^2 = 103.731, p<0.000$). Australian students are those with Australian Citizenship or Permanent residency or New Zealand Citizenship.

Further analysis indicated that some of these higher participating subgroups also tend to agree more with the quantitative items: Chi-square analyses were conducted for gender, attendance mode, citizenship, age group and semester weighted average; several subgroups showed very small (-2%). statistically significant differences in percentage agreement for items ($p<0.05$). The analyses showed that females are more likely to agree with most items, as are part-time students, international students, students in older age groups, external students and students with higher semester weighted averages. This may indicate the need for caution in interpreting results: percentage agreement with the quantitative items may be skewed positively if there is over-representation by some subgroups such as females who are more likely to participate as well as to agree with the items. As participation widens (as it presumably will as the new system is adopted by students), results may become less positive.

**Which Students are more likely to Provide Qualitative Feedback?**

There appears to be little research exploring which subgroups of the student cohort are more likely to provide qualitative feedback. Now that software systems can more easily analyse students’ typed comments in online systems, and analysis of qualitative feedback is more easily obtained, this is an area worthy of exploration. The eVALUate unit survey also includes two qualitative items asking students to say what were the most helpful aspects of the unit and how the unit might be improved (within a character limit of 400). Subgroups were analysed to see if any were more likely to comment. Chi square analysis revealed that some subgroups are more likely comment: females ($\chi^2 = 63.263, p<0.000$), older students ($\chi^2 = 257.899, p<0.000$), external students ($\chi^2 = 22.858, p<0.000$), Australian students ($\chi^2 = 439.005, p<0.000$) and fulltime students ($\chi^2 = 15.318, p<0.000$).

The average length of comments was 138 characters, although many were more lengthy: 4.7% ‘most helpful aspects’ comments were more than 350 characters in length and 14.2% ‘how unit might be improved’ comments were more than 350 characters. Students in Humanities tended to write the longest comments (average 155 characters), and students in Engineering tended to write the shortest comments (average 124 characters).

**What were the Students more likely to Comment on?**

Out of 25,090 unit survey responses submitted in June 2006, just over two thirds (67.4%) included data in response to at least one qualitative item. Slightly more responses were made about the most helpful aspects of unit (59.6%) than how the unit might be improved (58.0%). Interestingly, the average length of the ‘most helpful aspects’ comment was 137 characters, while the average length of the ‘how unit might be improved’ comments somewhat longer at 181 characters. Content analysis of the comments was performed using CEQuery which has
been developed to analyse Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) comments (Scott, 2005). The system automatically classifies comments into 5 main domains (Outcomes, Staff, Course Design, Assessment, and Support) and 26 subdomains as outlined in Table 1. The system was adapted to consider unit results instead of course results.

Table 1 The Domains and Sub-Domains within CEQuery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Course design</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Accessibility &amp; responsiveness</td>
<td>Practical-theory links</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work application</td>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
<td>Relevance (to work/life/discipline)</td>
<td>Marking</td>
<td>Learning resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/career</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further learning</td>
<td>Practical experience (current)</td>
<td>Flexibility/responsiveness</td>
<td>Feedback/return</td>
<td>Infrastructure/environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Quality &amp; attitude</td>
<td>Methods of learning &amp; teaching</td>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Student administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Structure &amp; expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Social affinity/support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows the top ten ranking in each CEQuery sub-domains for the data reported here. The table shows that students commented most frequently about methods of teaching and learning, learning resources, staff (skills, quality, attitude, accessibility and responsiveness), unit design and assessment.

Table 2 Percentage Hits and Top Ten Ranking Sub-Domains.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Sub-domain</th>
<th>Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNIT DESIGN</td>
<td>Methods of learning &amp; teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPPORT</td>
<td>Learning resources</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAFF</td>
<td>Quality &amp; attitude</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAFF</td>
<td>Accessibility &amp; responsiveness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT DESIGN</td>
<td>Structure &amp; expectations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STAFF</td>
<td>Teaching skills</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSESSMENT</td>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT DESIGN</td>
<td>Flexibility/responsiveness</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNIT DESIGN</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSESSMENT</td>
<td>Relevance</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Closer analysis of the two separate qualitative items shows some interesting results: when students answer in relation to the ‘most helpful aspects’ the five domains that register the highest numbers of hits in CEQuery are (in rank order):
1. Unit design: methods of learning and teaching
2. Staff: quality & attitude
Support: learning resources
4. Staff: accessibility and responsiveness
5. Staff: teaching skills

Three of those five subdomains are positive comments about staff—their quality, attitudes, accessibility and teaching skills. This is very reassuring to staff who fear that students will use anonymous evaluation systems predominantly to criticise staff. In contrast, the most frequent subdomains in the ‘how units might be improved;’ comments are (in rank order):

1. Support: learning resources
2. Unit design: methods of learning and teaching
3. Unit design: structure & expectations
4. Assessment: standards
5. Staff: quality and attitudes

Again, these results suggest that students focus on making comments on their learning resources and experiences, and also staff quality (when their expectations are not met). There is no evidence to support fears that students are unreasonably critical in their comments. These results are not unlike the findings in a recent large national research project on CEQ comments: Scott et al found that the things that students talk about most frequently are (in rank order) (Scott, 2005):

1. Course Design: learning methods
2. Staff: quality and attitude
3. Staff: accessibility
4. Course design: flexibility and responsiveness
5. Course design: structure and expectations

Student Misbehaviour: are Anonymous Comments Offensive?

Of the 25,090 unit survey responses in June 2006, 16,910 contained data in response to at least one qualitative item. In all, there were 14,946 comments about the ‘most helpful aspects,’ and 14,545 comments about 'how units might be improved.' The total number of comments was 29,491. In response to staff concerns that students were making abusive comments, all comments were read by three team members to identify comments which were contrary to the spirit of Curtin’s Guiding Ethical Principles in that the comment contained offensive language; was racist, sexist or personally abusive and focused on matters unrelated to teaching performance; or students made allegations of misconduct or criminal behaviour. All comments were completely de-identified so that there was no way of knowing which student had made any comment. Comments which were blunt, but which nevertheless gave useful feedback about the quality of the learning experience without being overtly offensive, were not counted as abusive. Overall, the vast majority of comments were polite, constructive and genuinely focused on learning. Many students used the language of teaching and learning very ably to describe their needs: for example, “make the learning outcomes more specific” and “make sure there is a clear link between outcomes and assessment.” Comments in response to the ‘most helpful aspects’ item indicated that students were very appreciative of many wonderful teaching staff, and they were effusive in their praise. Comments in response to ‘how units might be improved’ show two things. First, many of the comments made in this section repeat praise offered in answer to the previous question: “This unit cannot be improved—it’s fantastic as it is.” Nevertheless, students were direct, sometimes blunt, in their comments (although many were apologetic for giving negative feedback: “I’m sorry to have to say this but…”).

Among the nearly 30,000 comments, ten comments were identified as abusive (that is, 0.03% of the sample):
One used offensive language in an exclamation of praise: “X is a xxx fantastic lecturer”

Three contained low-level offensive terms eg “X is an airhead”

Six used offensive language in outbursts associated with feelings of frustration, anger and exasperation

These comments were isolated and appear unsupported in other comments about the same unit. While abusive student comments cannot be condoned, and students are strongly encouraged to give constructive and useful feedback, a very small minority actually abuse the protection of their anonymity. This confirms, as claimed in the literature, that students must be educated on how to provide effective feedback in order to decrease the possibility of offensive or useless feedback (Svinicki, 2001; Tucker, Jones, Straker, & Cole, 2003).

**Conclusion**

This study reports greater participation by some student subgroups in a university-wide online student evaluation system. Caution is advised in interpreting results when these same subgroups are more likely to agree with quantitative items, as well as provide more qualitative comments: there is a possibility that higher participation by some subgroups might skew results.

The study also reports that, contrary to staff fears, the vast majority of students do not use qualitative items to criticise or abuse staff: they comment most frequently about methods of unit design, the quality of staff, the learning resources, and staff accessibility and teaching skills. The results of this study suggest that students are very keen to praise staff when their expectations are met, and do not hesitate to draw attention to instances where improvements are needed. The vast majority of students, even when they felt that they were not being well served in their experiences of teaching and learning, did not abuse the privilege of giving anonymous feedback.

**References**


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Developing and Implementing Quality Assurance Processes in an Interdisciplinary, Multi-institutional, Vocationally based Postgraduate Course

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Abstract

The Master of Integrated Water Management (MIWM) is a new course developed and to be delivered by four Australian universities in July 2007. Staff from each university will contribute to teaching and students will move between institutions as deemed appropriate. The course is delivered by the International Water Centre in Brisbane and enrolment is through the University of Queensland. This paper considers how the quality assurance processes of each of the co-badging universities have been incorporated into the course design and evaluation. By looking for overlap and agreement of aims and objectives, essential aspects of each were aggregated and the resulting rubric used to devolve the characteristics of effectiveness to be used as the key indicators of quality in the course.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, multi-institutional, inter-disciplinary

1. Introduction

The newly developed Master of Integrated Water Management degree will be offered to its first cohort in July 2007. It will carry the imprimatur of four Australian universities: the University of Queensland (UQ) and Griffith University in Brisbane; Monash University in Melbourne and the University of Western Australia (UWA) in Perth. Offered by the International Water Centre, it will be administered in the first instance at least by the University of Queensland.

Content contributions to the program will come from a range of disciplines within from the four accrediting universities; Law, Business and Economics, Science, Engineering and the Arts; as well as Education. The curricular structure of the program is based on real world problem-solving and project design and management. The pedagogical approach is student-centered and the delivery will be mixed mode.

The course is structured to provide a Graduate Certificate in Integrated Water Management after the first 16 week semester. To graduate with a Graduate Diploma in Integrated Water management students will have the opportunity to pursue a number of specializations over the next 16 week semester: Water and Development Studies; Water Planning and Governance; Water Supply and Wastewater Treatment or Catchment and Aquatic Ecosystem Health. To complete the Master’s program students will be required to complete a significant project during the final 16 week semester.

Each of the three qualifications on offer – the Grad Cert, Grad Dip and the Master’s – will need to comply with each of the four accrediting universities’ quality assurance requirements, as well as the national requirements. A revised set of National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes are due to be implemented from 31 December 2007 pending...
legislative change in the Commonwealth and all the States and Territories. This paper looks at how this course is attempting to satisfy the many demands by implanting specific and ongoing processes into the program design.

One other strongly influencing factor will demand attention. After the first year, it is expected that domestic students will account for no more that a quarter of the cohorts – and even then the greater proportion of local students in the first in-take is planned primarily to lend credibility to the program:

_Australian students will be recruited particularly for the Water and Development theme, using a strategy that reinforces the IWC’s status as a small group of focused and prestigious institutions_ (IWC, 2006b; p9)

The anticipated market is firstly scholarship students from the developing nations in the Pacific and South-east Asian areas and secondly fee paying students from the same areas. Particular targets are AusAID recipients – who could have their assistance tied to the course. The aim is to attract 25 – 30 AusAID scholarship holders per year from 2008 onwards. Should the course be successful in that strategy, it may be anticipated that the majority of students will come from Indonesia, Vietnam or Papua New Guinea. This becomes an important consideration in what quality assurance processes are put into place and how they are designed to operate because all the co-badging institutions have specific processes in place for international students.

2. Federal quality assurance requirements

The Australian Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) is a network consisting of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), which reviews every Australian university’s quality assurance processes; the Australian Qualification Framework; the Department of Education Science and Training’s funding, performance and quality assurance plans; the universities who are responsible for their own academic standards and each state’s and territory’s accreditation systems.

The AQAF states that “institutions offering an award, regardless of whether they have used curricula and materials supplied by another institution, will be subject to the accreditation requirements of the State or Territory in which they operate.” (DETYA, 2000: p7) This does not make it clear what the requirements are when four universities from three different states co-deliver a co-badged course in what will be equal proportions. Nor is it clear whether the course is to be included when AUQA inspects the individual institutions. Rather than offering any kind of guide, the AQAF seems to have no clear idea how quality assurance in multi-institutional courses is to be externally evaluated. In the first instance however, the enrolling institution is likely to be held to account, and for the MIWM that is UQ.

The insistence on increasing amounts of data may in itself be problematic. There is little doubt that informed judgement is an essential component of quality assurance, but it is becoming increasingly obvious that the data upon which such a judgement is being made is at times far from accurate or appropriate. For example, the MIWM is faced with finding discipline-cognizant observers who are also versed in Problem-Based Learning and multi-institutional course structures. Simply being an expert in the field does not guarantee an understanding of the course’s pedagogical capacity, nor does it guarantee a meaningful and accurate evaluation of its effectiveness. Steven Crow points out that cognizance does not “prepare someone to evaluate the effectiveness of quality assurance in new multi-institutional collaboratives that create, mount, and service … programs offered by each of the participating institutions.” (Crow, 2002: p59)
To overcome this concern, particularly in on-line courses (because they are the most public), some of the larger and wealthier universities in the United States have employed freelance professional quality assurance agents to ensure that their courses pass muster. Crow (2002: p59) suggest that if “the demand for accountability rises much more, quality assurance will become a professional activity marked by significant new costs to our institutions. If the demand for a recognised international stamp of quality increases, we might all discover that only through a professional corps of evaluators can the goal be achieved.” (Crow, 2002: p59)

3. Institutional quality assurance requirements

As the enrolling institution, the University of Queensland aims to make their quality assurance processes “embedded in organizational processes and culture and contributing to enhancement of quality.” (UQ website) There are two important aspects to this. First the university seeks to normalize the process – to make it a usual and unquestioned part of all courses on offer. Second, it seeks to give the process a purpose of improvement rather than simply monitoring and evaluating. The other universities involved agree with such an approach: Monash University, for example, makes this even clearer: “There is clear acknowledgement within the university that commitment to quality assurance and improvement is critical to Monash’s success. This commitment is displayed in planning, policy, decision-making and practice throughout the university.” (Monash website) The point is that all the participating universities stress that Quality Assurance needs to be purposeful.

With reference to UQ’s Quality Management and Assurance Framework, the pathways for the monitoring and evaluating of quality feed into planning to facilitate improvement. Whilst this not overtly stated as an endorsement of continuous improvement principles, it certainly implies purposeful analyses of its programs. Courses and programs are reviewed by all the stakeholders including students, teachers, peers and management, and the data is fed into the strategic planning loop. In general terms, pursuing the notion of continuous improvement means having a systematic, all-encompassing and on-going procedure in place. Such a procedure is often referred to as a quality cycle, an approach that is again echoed in the other participating universities.

However although the UQ will likely be the university that comes under the initial spotlight, it is assumed that each of the accrediting institutions is likely to want the quality assurance process set in place for the course to align with their own processes. This point will be further discussed below.

4. Quality Assurance Processes in the Master of IWM course

During the setting up of the MIWM, an architecture of quality assurance processes was put into place, on the assumption that multiple views will provide the most accurate picture of quality of the course. As the delivery agent, the IWC has attempted to respond to both the Federal and institutional requirements; seeking to ensure that they are all met as efficiently and unobtrusively as possible.

1. Processes employed during the design and development stage

The MIWM course has one inherent quality assurance process in place: agreement on all aspects of its design, delivery, assessment and evaluation need to be agreed on by an organising committee drawn from four institutions, seven disciplines and numerous departments. The committee works primarily by consensus, which in itself may well guarantee that anything it approves will be high quality. Further, it has employed a program design and development consultant to add a neutral as well as experienced voice.
Further, in the development stages of the course, Industry leaders were invited to join the development group. This has allowed very practical advice to be put into the design and development process of what has been constructed as a vocational degree program.

II. Processes to be employed during the delivery stage
Particularly in its first iteration, each aspect of the course will be monitored by every member of the delivery team. As well as ongoing observations to facilitate immediate responses, staff will also be required to complete more detailed evaluations that will be used to analyse whether or not the course aims and objectives are being met.

Because the course is to be team taught, peer review has been embedded in the immediate review process. Teachers will be able to ask colleagues to comment upon teaching practice as well as content and student engagement.

Students will also be encouraged to comment on the course as it unfolds. As formative feedback this data will be used by the teachers to modify the course as warranted.

III. Processes to be employed during the review stage
Data collected from the various sources mentioned above will be collated and used to substantiate impressions and anecdotal observations: in practice as well as theory, a research-led approach to quality assurance. It is at this stage that the quality cycle becomes the driver of the process. Answers to the standard “quality” questions of what went well, what didn’t, what needs to be reconsidered, how was the course rated and so on, will be primarily found in the accumulated data sets, rather than post-hoc impressions.

As is standard in the Australian context, students will also be asked to evaluate the course post-completion. Combining these two data sets will ensure a more complete snapshot of student opinion because as graduates students will have a clearer appreciation of its industry relevance and may be more willing to be critical as comments can have no effect on grades.

Industry also has a voice at this stage because representatives will be invited to sit in and contribute to the program at various stages. Wherever possible their opinions will be sought and recorded to add to the analysis.

In the planning stages the emphasis is on defining goals, creating alternative strategies, optimizing and detailing the design, and describing the program to those who will actualize it. In the delivery stage, the QA process is based on product and process improvement: collecting and analyzing data from key stakeholders. In the review stage, data is gathered to be evaluated, analysed and diagnosed, which in turn feeds back into the planning stages.

5. Institutional alignment
The data sets, both formative and summative, will firstly be used to improve the course and secondly be forwarded to the relevant university authorities to authenticate evaluation of the course. Each will do so in its own terms because fundamentally each of the participating institutions must align the key indicators of quality to its strategic objectives. For example the UQ states that a key feature is a “focus on attaining UQ’s strategic goals and objectives through monitoring key indicators for … teaching and learning to assist in assessing performance against strategic objectives.”(UQ website) Monash University states that for “quality assurance and improvement processes at Monash to be effective, they must reflect the values, aspirations and nature of the organisation.”(Monash website) Griffith also asserts the improvement aspect of their QA processes and that “These improvement intentions will relate to our core business and the strategies of the Griffith Project and our new Strategic plan for 2003 – 2007”(Griffith website) The
University of Western Australia states unambiguously that its quality assurance processes are, amongst other things, “to facilitate a greater degree of policy compliance” (UWA website).

To make any kind of assertion about institutional compliance, it becomes apparent that the quality assurance processes imbedded in the Integrated Water Management course need to align with the strategic objectives of each of the participating institutions if they are to satisfy all their requirements. It is necessary then to first identify, in summary form at least, the institutional aims, policies and strategic goals of the participating institutions.

There are four characteristics that stand out as having obvious relationships to the aims of the Master of IWM. First, it is anticipated that the cohorts will be drawn from overseas, so it seems reasonable to ask where each university stands on internationalization. Second, quality assurance seems a legitimate concern. Third, because the degree is vocationally based, it seems reasonable to ask where each university places itself on the teaching-research continuum, whether its ambition is as a research or teaching institution. Fourth, and related to the third characteristic, it seems reasonable to ask where each university stands on graduate attributes and learning outcomes: what do they expect of their graduates.

The relative strength of each characteristic is summarised in table 1, below. Rating was done according to where each characteristic was ranked by the university, and whilst it is by no means exact, the table gives some indication of where each university stands. More importantly it gives some indication of what aims and objectives the Master’s course needs to align its quality assurance processes to.

Table 1. Institutional Characteristics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Internationalisation</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UWA</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRIF</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MON</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UQ</td>
<td>√√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√√√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monash has clearly stated international ambitions, expressing the aim to become highly ranked in reputable global surveys. On the other hand Griffith presents a much more local focus, whilst UQ and UWA push their preeminence in Queensland and Western Australia respectively. This may reflect the fact that UWA and UQ are pre-eminent in their states, whilst neither Monash nor Griffith is. Whilst Monash has adopted an assertively international approach to distinguish itself from Victoria’s pre-eminent university (the University of Melbourne), Griffith has assumed an approach that is more about servicing the local community. However, all four institutions have some ambition to be internationally recognized and to attract international students.

Whilst each of the universities has a strong commitment to quality assurance, neither Monash nor UQ include a statement about continuous improvement in their espoused values. UWA and Griffith on the other hand list it as a core value. To some extent, this is an arbitrary distinction because the former pair has value statements that are more discursive, and the commitment to continuous improvement is implied rather than stated. For example, Monash has a quality cycle firmly and pervasively in place.

The third characteristic describes whether the institution sees itself primarily as research-based or teaching-based; given that all four will claim to be both. Monash sees itself as a re-
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search university, Griffith as teaching-based. UWA asserts to be both equally, but also indicates that it values the generation and transmission of new ideas, which suggests a leaning towards research... UQ firmly maintains an equal hand: “The mission of the University of Queensland is to create a community dedicated to achieving national and international levels of excellence in teaching, research and scholarship, one that makes significant contributions to the intellectual, cultural, social and economic life of Queensland, Australian and international communities.” (UQ website)

The fourth characteristic, albeit as nebulous as the others, gives some indication as to the quality of graduate that each institution aims to produce. Here there is considerable overlap and agreement. UWA is committed to “fostering the values of openness, honesty, tolerance, trust and responsibility in social, moral and academic matters.” (UWA website) Griffith aims to produce graduates who are committed to “individual rights, ethical standards and social justice” and who contribute to “a robust, equitable and environmentally sustainable society” and who are “tolerant and understanding of diversity in society.” (Griffith website) Monash University “seeks to improve the human condition by advancing knowledge and fostering creativity. It does so through research and education and a commitment to social justice, human rights and a sustainable environment.” (Monash website) Only UQ is less forthright about a commitment to social justice and environmental responsibility, talking instead about the disinterested pursuit of truth and the enhancement of society’s core values (UQ website) without actually stating what those values are thought to be.

Undoubtedly all four universities will question their rankings on each characteristic; probably with some justification. However, for the purpose of gaining some alignment between the quality assurance processes to be put in place in the Master of IWM and each of the universities’ set of espoused values, some form of generalized rubric is needed. Whilst there is a variation in the emphasis each university places on the various characteristics, all are evident to some degree.

The quality assurance processes ought to evaluate the graduate outcomes: - specifically whether graduates have a sense of social justice and environmental sustainability. They ought to evaluate whether or not the course has an international focus. They ought to monitor whether or not there is a commitment to and standardized process of evaluation of teaching and learning effectiveness. Overall, the processes ought to be based on the intention to continuously seek improvement.

At present the M IWM has a set of graduate attributes that are concerned more with technical skills, knowledge and values than the attributes common to the accrediting universities: although there is an implication of social justice and environmental sustainability in the last of the nine attributes stated: “Recognise that water is subject to many economic and social demands; and acknowledge that effective water solutions must be based on tailored activities to individual country circumstances.” (IWC, 2006a; p4) However, the set is not yet finalized, and is likely to be recast in terms of the common institutional aims and aspirations.

The course does have a very deliberately international focus; both in where it seeks to find its student population and in its content. Most importantly, it aims to present the idea of water management as an international activity, with each location seen as an aspect of a global concern. As yet this is not reflected in the stated outcomes, an oversight which, again, is likely to remedied before the course commences.

6. Concluding Comment

The processes put in place to monitor the effectiveness of teaching and learning outlined above are mostly in alignment with the stated aims and values of the accrediting universities,
as well as the Federal requirements. The aim of embedding a quality cycle: plan, act, monitor, evaluate, review, improve, has been largely achieved in the developmental stages of the program. Data will be gathered from all key stakeholders (students, staff, funding organisations, industry representatives) and used to evidence quality to external agencies as well as forming the basis for the quality cycle. Fundamentally there is a strong and universal commitment to ensure that the course improves after every time is delivered.

The set of characteristics against which such effectiveness is based on an aggregation of aims and objectives of the participating universities, as each will badge the certificates on offer and none will want to accredit a course that does not at least broadly align with its own ambitions. It will be most interesting to see if this approach works in practice.

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Monash University [http://www.monash.edu.au]
University of Queensland [http://www.uq.edu.au]
University of Western Australia [http://www.uwa.edu.au]
Department of Science Education and technology: [http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/MCEETYAS]
Investing in One’s Future: Are the Costs of Pursuing Accreditation and Meeting Standards Worth it to an Institution of Higher Education?

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Abstract
Program-level accreditation is becoming more popular throughout the world as a means of enhancing the credentials and quality of professional programs at universities. Documenting performance excellence and the pursuit of program-level accreditation is an institutional investment with direct and indirect costs that must be borne by a university both in Australia and the USA in spite of their different approaches toward institutional quality assurance. Trust is the ultimate end-game as a means of generating benefits to the institution. Yet, there is the hidden question of whether the university is getting an appropriate return on its investment. This article presents a case study of an academic department who has made the decision to and is currently pursuing accreditation through the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). A discussion of perceived benefits to having CACREP is given along with concerns. Considerations and decisions leading to the application process are given as well as a list of direct and indirect costs linked to the accreditation process. The result of receiving program accreditation is a convergence of pathways in how to document performance excellence, from a review of allocation inputs to learning and other performance outcomes which ultimately will allow the department to document the value created by the institutional decision to pursue CACREP.

Keywords: CACREP, program-level accreditation, return on investment

1. Introduction

According to Australia’s Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST)(2004), the rationale behind the establishment of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) is to create a comparable large-scale reward/incentive schemes such as the Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) and the Research Training Scheme. The LTPF’s aim is to (1) reward universities demonstrating excellence in teaching and learning, (2) promote the overall quality of higher education institutions, and (3) enabling teaching and learning to achieve equal status with research at the different institutions of higher education in Australia. The Fund’s evolution has so far included feedback from universities which have raised concerns about the adjustment methodology for proposed indicators (DEST, 2005). As with most revenue-bearing programs, four concerns come to the fore. First, who qualifies (Stage 1)? Second, what are the criteria (Stage 1)? Thirdly, how is the request assessed (Stage 2)? And fourth, how much can one get? What seldom goes openly asked is how much will it cost the institution to qualify and meet the criteria? Also often ignored is the other question based on return on the investment: will the institution get more out of it than it paid to qualify?
One of this paper’s authors was at a conference in Sydney in early December 2005 when the first results of the LTPF were announced and what was striking to him was the concern many at the conference had about the cost of complying just to qualify and the fear that the Fund could have a homogenizing effect on institutions in various ways ranging from instruction to decision and reporting processes to definitions of institutional excellence – as illustrated in Australia’s Vice-Chancellor’s Committee (AVCC, 2006) recommendations on how to improve the LTPF. What was interesting was not the fact that these were newly heard apprehensions but very familiar ones at universities in the USA who felt this way whenever facing an accreditation review or pursuing a decision to acquire accreditation (usually at a programmatic level). But what was striking was the point the comments reminded him that documenting performance excellence is a form of investment whether required for compliance sake or to enhance quality or prestige based on external recognition.

While there are significant differences between Australian and American quality assurance for institutions of higher education, there are nevertheless, a number of similarities if, for no other reason, an across-the-board need for educational institutions at any level – whether public or private – to demonstrate that what they are doing has a legitimate value attached to it intrinsically (to the individual student and to the disciplines represented in the curriculum) and extrinsically (communities and government agencies). Both countries have a process of at least de minimis warranties of performance excellence either through national protocols as in Australia or through voluntary institutional accreditation from one of six regional accrediting agencies. Quality audits and accreditation reaffirmation processes ensure that existing criteria are met (and hopefully exceeded) and are extending their focus of attention to results and not merely inputs such as number of faculty and library books (Alstete, 2004).

Also, what both countries seem to have in common is an expansion in institutional interests pursuing program-level accreditation. There are 61 program-level accrediting agencies domiciled in the USA recognizing and accrediting over 18,000 programs in 95 countries other than the USA (Eaton, 2006). One can even argue that the expansion of program-level accreditation is in keeping with international expectations for enhanced quality assurance monitoring and capacity building (UNESCO, 2005). At times, the decision to pursue program-level accreditation is compliance driven because of legislative mandates or because professional licensing is involved. At other times, the decision is market-based, to attract more students because of enhanced reputation and additional interest from potential employers. In both cases, action is clearly an institutional investment with specific expectations. When compliance is the main reason, the expectation is to keep one’s doors open. The pursuit of marketing excellence is the result of a more complicated set of expectations ranging from improving performance to attracting better students to achieving enhanced external ratings! At stake is what the program/university get for its money. The remainder of this paper is a case study illustrating the considerations and steps required to pursue program-based accreditation in the area of Counseling to ensure that accreditation leads to a positive return on investment rather than a drain on resources.

2. The Institution and CACREP
Monmouth University is a Master’s Large University as per the Carnegie Classification Index of colleges and universities in the USA with an enrollment of 6,000 (1,500 part-time graduate students). The Psychological Counseling Department (PCD) offers two Master’s degrees (M.A. at 30 credits, M.S. at 60 credits) and one post-Master’s certificate (30 credits) leading to the preparation of mental health professionals. The curriculum of the program prepares students for licensing as Professional Counselors (the M.A. plus the Post-Master’s
Certificate, or the M.S. in Professional Counseling), and/or to continue their education in related doctorate programs. In the state of New Jersey, a mental health professional must attain the status of Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), a license requiring the completion of a partially prescribed 60-credit hour program from a regionally accredited university, three years of supervised full-time counseling (with equivalencies possible), and the passing of the National Counselor Examination of the National Board of Certified Counselors. At present, the PCD meets the regional accreditation requirement because of the university’s institutional accreditation; however, it does not currently have program-level accreditation because, as noted, it is not required by the state at this time. However, the department decided that it wanted to pursue program-based accreditation and the university is supporting its bid to attain accreditation through Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Only four universities have CACREP accredited programs in the state at present.

CACREP is an independent agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to accredit graduate level degrees for different counseling training programs (at the Master’s Level) plus a doctoral level program. As an agency, it develops preparation standards for the training of professional counselors as well as accredits professional preparation programs in the field. Established in 1981, it currently has accredited programs at 203 institutions (including 45 universities with mental health programs, which is the type of accreditation sought). Accreditation is a five-step process: (1) self-study, (2) application including self-study, (3) on-site team visit, (4) site visit team report, and (5) rendering of the decision (conditional acceptance requires an interim review after two years).

Name recognition is an issue that seems to be a challenge for CACREP (LaFountain & Baer, 2001). The more recognized association in the area of the helping professions tends to be the American Psychological Association (APA). Somehow the difference in name recognition has translated to a perception that CACREP better serves the interests of Master’s level program and the APA is better suited to doctoral programs (Sweeney, 1992). However, the reality is that counseling is a separate and distinct profession from psychology “by virtue of its organizations, standards, ethics, credentialing, and accreditation.” (p. 668).

Cecil et al. (1987) identify benefits in having CACREP accreditation while Bahen and Miller (1998) distinguish liabilities in pursuing program accreditation as well. Table 1 provides a summary of identified benefits and liabilities.

3. Decisions Leading to Institutional Investment

Making the decision to pursue accreditation occurred soon after the program was established. The initial 30-credit M.A. and the additional 30-credit Post-Master’s Certificate meet licensing standards in accordance to state regulations. The issue of which accreditation to pursue, APA or CACREP, was a major one given the differences of opinions between undergraduate and graduate programs based on disciplinary divergence. Thus, the first major decision was one of program alignment in relation to disciplinary interests. This led to the creation of a separate academic department for Psychological Counseling and for the faculty to agree on CACREP guidelines and standards in the mental health track as a frame of reference for the new department.

Prior to the creation of a separate department, the university agreed to have an external review of the Psychological Counseling Program by a consultant whose findings were used to guide the process to the next level, getting ready for the self-study and application. Two important results were the further tweaking of courses to meet standards and the creation of the 60-credit M.S. degree, the only one of its kind in the state, to allow interested students a
second approach at earning an LPC. The external study also identified other remaining deficiencies in terms of processes and resources.

Table 2 describes direct costs accrued in the pursuit of accreditation. As can be seen, costs beyond those identified by Bahen and Miller (1998) include ensuring proper facilities and equipment along with providing course release time and/or the hiring of additional contingency faculty to fill teaching gaps. Also, there are costs associated with meeting specified student-teacher ratios in certain course types and aligning faculty credentials to agency preferences.

**Table 1: Benefits and Liabilities of Pursuing CACREP Accreditation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Liabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Cecil et al., 1987)</td>
<td>(Bahen &amp; Miller, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhances licensure and certification opportunities for graduates.</td>
<td>Limits the freedom of programs through strict adherence to standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes program more attractive for recruitment purposes.</td>
<td>Increases requirements, decreases number of electives, and less flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflects personal commitment on the part of the faculty.</td>
<td>to accommodate student or program differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enhances the professional status of the program on campus and nationally.</td>
<td>Provides consumers with a false sense of security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves the quality of the program.</td>
<td>Lose potential students to less demanding programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improves the academic quality of students.</td>
<td>May limit a program's ability to advocate for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorably competes with programs that hold accreditation other than</td>
<td>Could stifle innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CACREP.</td>
<td>(Smaby &amp; D'Andrea, 1995)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorably competes with other CACREP programs in the region.</td>
<td><strong>Academic-related problems that act as barriers to accreditation:</strong> field-hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>requirements, different number of hours required for different specialties,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>number of course courses, and a perceived difficulty for smaller part-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>programs to meet standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(House as presented in Bahen &amp; Miller, 1998)</td>
<td><strong>Administrative concerns:</strong> getting faculty support, time and resources to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditations protects the public and guarantees competent practitioners.</td>
<td>complete self-study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Haight, 1992; McGlothlin &amp; Davis, 2001)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting of high standards allows CACREP to meet its social obligations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Direct cost of pursuing accreditation from a documented case study and MU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost (USD)</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost (USD)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>$60</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>$100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying/Mailings (self-study, correspondence, other)</td>
<td>$257</td>
<td>Copying/Mailings (self-study, correspondence, other)</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>$2822</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>$2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
<td>$3005</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>$500</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
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<td>Consultant expenses</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application Fees</td>
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<td>Degree marketing study</td>
<td>$4000</td>
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<tr>
<td>CACREP Liaison</td>
<td>$11000</td>
<td>Application Fees</td>
<td>$3900</td>
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<td>$3000</td>
<td>CACREP Liaison</td>
<td>$0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other related review team visit expenses</td>
<td>$220</td>
<td>Review team visit</td>
<td>$3800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recurring fees</td>
<td>$800</td>
<td>Other related review team visit expenses</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open house</td>
<td>$1000</td>
<td>Recurring fees</td>
<td>$1295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate assistant</td>
<td>$700</td>
<td>Open house</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Course Release</td>
<td>$3900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Contingent Faculty (additional courses to meet CACREP student: teacher ratio)</td>
<td>$16000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>Approx. $10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Construction (interview rooms)</td>
<td>Approx. $10000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Direct Cost:</td>
<td>$24,464</td>
<td>Total Direct Cost:</td>
<td>$61195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Years:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Number of Years:</td>
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</table>

*: Approximations due to ongoing cost accrual
Then there are the indirect costs of pursuing accreditation (Alteste, 2004). The administrative challenges identified by Smaby and D’Andrea (1995) translate to additional costs in terms of time devoted to writing reports and course syllabi, course and program redesigns and university approval processes, writing a student handbook and related and necessary policies and procedures to meet accreditation standards (Table 3).

**Table 3: Indirect Costs from Monmouth University to Pursue CACREP Over Past Four Years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Man-Hours</th>
<th>Cost rate</th>
<th>Amount (USD)*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dir./Dept. Head (Research, self-study, reports, student handbook)</td>
<td>1750</td>
<td>$47.59</td>
<td>$83,282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty (self-study, reports, syllabi, handbook)</td>
<td>Yr. 1-3: 50 x 6 = 300</td>
<td>$28.00</td>
<td>$8,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yr. 4: 100 x 6 = 600</td>
<td>$28.00</td>
<td>$16,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Indirect Expenses:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$108,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Direct Expenses:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$61,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total to date:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$169,677</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Discussion and Conclusions

For some, the costs of accreditation are in terms of the direct costs of application fees and the costs incurred from the application process (self-study, site visit, etc.). However, when a program wants to pursue accreditation and it does not have an existing infrastructure to meet criteria, these costs are also part of the costing process. The PCD had to buy equipment, construct special observation rooms, and hire part-time contingent faculty to cover additional sections of courses that are “capped” at ten or five students due to CACREP standards (Table 2). So, rather than simply being a cost of over $10,000 USD without labor costs, at the end of the day, the cost thus far stand at approximately $169,677 USD, making the decision to pursue program accreditation one of administrative importance, especially for a small program.

Based on cost benefit, pursuing accreditation is a gamble because a program cannot guarantee that it will automatically generate desired benefits. According to AUQA (2007), “[e]ffective quality assurance in higher education requires the use of external academic and professional points of reference.” (p. 10) Program-level accreditation enhances the qualifications criteria for many professions. Their popularity is increasing because these can be channels of recognition and acceptance from one country to another (UNESCO, 2005). Program-level accreditation provides another external point of reference to determine how the institution effectively faces the many internal and external pressures of cost, improving and verifying student learning, receiving useful feedback from peer institutions, and fare in interdepartmental competition for institutional resources (Alteste, 2004).

Counseling programs use CACREP as “front-end framing” for program evaluation, focusing on people, contextual characteristics, policies, and products/outcomes (Vacc & Charkow, 1999). Sometimes the issue is not accountability; rather, it is the fight between educators and policymakers as to how to get better results (National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, 2005). Ultimately, the issue is trust, a trust that the decision is in the
best interest of the institution and its students, a trust that the institution is accountable in its academic performance and stewardship of allocated resources. Reframing the four concerns regarding qualification presented in the introduction to this paper to the acquisition of program accreditation, the first of who qualifies presupposes that the resources are already in place or these are acquired. The second question of standards defines performance expectations and type and amount of resources required to meet performance expectations. The third question of how the program is assessed is partially embedded in the standards; however, it is defined in process protocols that are separate from the standards. The success of the review is based on how well the institution demonstrates alignment, linkage, results, and improvement that occurs from the accountability mechanism that is put in place. Finally, the fourth question, what can one get – i.e., success – requires a multi-dimensional answer. One dimension of success is getting the institution to buy-in to the “need” of pursuing program accreditation and providing the necessary resources. The second dimension is faculty interest and participation. The third dimension is defining what the desired outcomes as suggested in Table 1 and monitoring the degree of success of those outcomes. Generating external funds is a legitimate outcome either through a program like the LTPF or through grants or performance contracts; however, it may work better to not to link these program outcomes with external review because it may miss the essence of what a review is all about, showing that one is doing a good job by any definition.

References


The UTS Course Performance Report

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Abstract:
The UTS Course Performance Report (CPR) is an online Business Intelligence Portal and Scorecard used by the University to monitor Course Quality and Viability. In order for UTS to improve the process for “closing the loop” on poorly performing courses the Course Performance Report (CPR) was developed and trialled in 2005. The CPR focuses on course level information reports and the process provides information and data on how courses are performing in each Faculty. The report delivers a set of course viability indicators, which can be viewed from the top down; viewing UTS results as a whole, then drilling down to identify outliers in each of the performance areas. The metrics used are driven by selected UTS Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and targets are developed for each Faculty, ensuring that UTS targets have a good chance of being achieved. The CPR process is in fact assisting in embedding the university KPI framework and is developing a continuous improvement approach to course performance.

Keywords: AUQF 2007, Course Performance Review, key performance indicators

1. Introduction

In order for UTS to improve the process for “closing the loop” on poorly performing courses, the Course Performance Report (CPR) was developed and trialled in 2005. The CPR builds on the strengths of the previous system known as the Course Monitoring and Improvement System (CMIS) and adds additional indicators. The CPR focuses on course level information reports and the process provides information and data on how courses are performing in each Faculty. The report delivers a set of course viability indicators, which can be seen from the top down, viewing UTS results as a whole, then drilling down to identify outliers in each of the performance areas. The metrics used are driven by selected UTS key performance indicators (KPIs). Targets are developed for each Faculty, ensuring that their contributions to the UTS KPI outcomes are understood and UTS targets have a good chance of being achieved. The CPR process is in fact assisting in operationalising the university KPIs.

2. “What you Measure is What you Get” (Kaplan and Norton, 1992, p.71)

A wealth of literature is now available on measurement and the application of business intelligence systems in organisations. The development of the Course Performance report has been heavily influenced by Kaplan and Norton’s work on the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan and Norton, 1992). In particular the early research on the balanced scorecard and how the scorecard encourages and develops a strategy focused organisation (Kaplan and Norton, 2001).

Whilst UTS cannot yet claim to have developed a balanced scorecard, the University has commenced this process, through the development of a course performance report scorecard to make better sense of the array of course performance data that is currently collected on a regular basis. Many organisations grappled with considering how to make the best business
use of data in terms of monitoring and reporting; and in developing a continuous improvement approach to data. The course performance metrics system has been developed in conjunction with Cognos a UTS information technology partner. Cognos recognised one of the biggest challenges UTS would face would be “… consolidation performance data from disparate sources into a coherent system that people can trust” (Cognos, 2005). This issue, of tracking too many metrics, and “having a lot of data, but not getting management information from it” are highlighted as two of the major stumbling blocks in developing scorecards (Lawson, Stratton, Hatch, 2006, p.37).

This initial course report scorecard has been developed with a large input from staff at all levels predominantly working in the areas of teaching and learning across the University, as advised in (Niven, 2003, p.69) the responsibility for the development of the scorecard was firmly based within the senior executive with the senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) taking on the role of Executive Sponsor for the project. The Executive Sponsor ensured that the UTS, Planning and Quality Unit received “…the human and financial resources necessary for a successful implementation” (Niven, 2003, p.66).

Early versions of the scorecard were tested with an array of stakeholders and the Course Performance Report has continued to, and will continue to, evolve.

3. The UTS Course Performance Report: Embedding a Quality System

The UTS Course Performance Report (CPR) tracks the performance of Faculties, their substructures and individual component courses to help identify which parts of the University are achieving above agreed standards and targets and which parts are falling below agreed standards and targets. It facilitates identification of outlying performances, both excellent and poor, and allows UTS to ensure that problem areas are addressed in a timely and effective manner. The CPR uses Cognos® Metrics Manager as the tool for delivering the scorecard. Metrics used in the CPR link directly to the UTS KPI’s and give an overall view of the health of Faculties and their courses across a range of metrics, which answer important questions:

- Is there a strong market for the course?
- Is the course big enough to have economies of scale?
- Is the teaching of the course efficient?
- Do the pass rate and attrition rate for the course fall within acceptable limits?
- Are students happy with the overall quality of their subjects as they progress through the course?
- Do the graduates get good employment outcomes?
- Are the graduates satisfied with their course?
- Is the overall rating, combining all metrics, at an acceptable level?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>CPR Definition</th>
<th>Related KPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Demand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>All UAC Preferences</td>
<td>TL 1 Domestic Market share.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>UAC preferences 1 – 3</td>
<td>Inexact match of KPI as mapping of UTS courses to other competitor courses would be contentious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>UAC Offers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Ratio of UAC preferences 1 – 3 to offers made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Direct applications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Load</td>
<td>Total EFTSL full year</td>
<td>OS 4 Student load</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table showing the KPI –CPR linkages:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>CPR Definition</th>
<th>Related KPI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timetable Hours/EFTSL</td>
<td>Timetabled hours per enrolled EFTSL for subjects with timetable data only.</td>
<td>No KPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pass Rate</td>
<td>Subject pass rate</td>
<td>TL 2 Student Success and Attrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attrition Rate</td>
<td>% not re-enrolled/previous year total enrolments, after completions, LOA are</td>
<td>TL 2 Student Success and Attrition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accounted for.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Feedback Survey</td>
<td>% Agreement with overall satisfaction item in SFS</td>
<td>TL 5 Student Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Respondents to the GDS/CEQ</td>
<td>Number of completers who respond.</td>
<td>No KPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Salary FT Employed</td>
<td>Average Salary of Australian resident graduates in FT employment</td>
<td>No KPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FT Employment Rate</td>
<td>% Australian residents in FT employment of Australian residents available for</td>
<td>TL 4: Graduate Workplace Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FT employment (excludes graduates in FT study)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Good Teaching Scale</td>
<td>Mean of GTS in CEQ</td>
<td>TL 6 : Graduate Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inexact match of KPI, CPR uses mean, KPI uses % agreement. Mean used in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CPR to allow more accurate measurement of difference from ATN benchmark.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Generic Skills Scale</td>
<td>Mean of GSS in CEQ</td>
<td>No KPI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Overall Satisfaction Item</td>
<td>Mean of OSI in CEQ</td>
<td>No KPI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Screenshot of a Faculty Scorecard, showing users can drill down to Individual Courses within the Faculty, source: Course Performance Report

Figure 2: Screen shot showing how individual metrics can be further explored, comparing results with the target and tolerance range (the range below the target before a ‘red light’ is triggered).

Source: Course Performance Report
Figure 3: Screen shot of Metrics Summary, shows a summary page of the number of active courses in each Faculty by their status.

4. **UTS Business Intelligence systems which underpin the CPR**

The CPR is supported by a Business Intelligence Portal, delivered using Cognos® Business Intelligence, which contains a large repository of data marts, aggregating competitive intelligence about the performance of UTS and all other Universities in the Australian Higher Education Sector. The data marts contain historical snap shots, which support good decision making and they provide much of the data for UTS KPIs. For UTS-specific data, the data marts contain historical snapshots of data mapped down to individual Faculties and courses. These allow tracking of KPIs across the full spectrum of the student life cycle, from applications through to feedback from graduates. In this context a data mart is defined as:

>a specialized version of a data warehouse (DW). Like data warehouses, data marts contain a snapshot of operational data that helps business people to strategize based on analyses of past trends and experiences. The key difference is that the creation of a data mart is predicated on a specific, predefined need for a certain grouping and configuration of select data. A data mart configuration emphasizes easy access to relevant information. (Wikipedia)

Development of the CPR was only possible after the datamarts and related cubes had been developed over a number of years, UTS then had to spend a considerable effort ensuring that the contributing data marts had conformed dimensions (ie identical organisational and data structures). This was an innovative application of the Cognos Metrics Manager software, and we are not aware of it having been utilised in this way at any other University in Australia.
5. Faculty and Executive participation
Central to the development of a scorecard, is the need for Faculties to agree on targets and standards across a range of metrics, which directly link to the University-wide KPIs. Benchmarking against ATN averages has been a well established practice at UTS, however good benchmarking data were not available for some metrics (eg attrition), so internal standards and targets were developed for these.

All Faculties and some of the UTS executive have online access to the CPR, they can explore the scorecard, which allows ‘drilling through’ to the underlying data marts which are packaged in dimensionally arranged explorable cubes of data, thus giving a strong capability to identify cause and effect relationships.

The University has a Course Review Advisory Group (CRAG), which reports to the DVC (Teaching, Learning & Equity) on courses falling below standards. The Faculties are asked to advise what actions are being put in place to improve under performing courses, and these actions are followed up by CRAG on an annual basis.

The CPR has become the authoritative sources of data about course performance. Some poorly performing courses have been terminated. For some problematic courses, the Faculty have implemented changes and CRAG monitors results in a ‘watch list’ developed within the scorecard. It has streamlined course review activities, so Faculties can now focus on strategic fit, rather than providing tables of statistics.

6. Changing the way we work
The Business Intelligence Portal, of which the CPR is one aspect, has resulted in the minimisation of ad-hoc requests for data and analysis at UTS, as these are answered within the business units. The portal is the single source of truth at UTS. Plans are now well advanced to extend the scope and coverage of the portal into the finance, human resource, facilities and research domains, in an integrated platform.

The CPR Scorecard needs quality data arranged in data marts containing the key metrics. It needs a scorecard tool such as Cognos® Metrics Manager or similar. The scorecards and supporting data have to be delivered over a secure web portal; staff must be trained to use them. UTS has a mature Business Intelligence Portal, which has been in use for about ten years. Numerous data quality issues have been solved over the period of development of the portal, which is widely used by staff and is the key source of authoritative data about the performance of the University particularly with respect to Teaching & Learning activities.

7. Managing the Course Performance Report
To manage the Business Intelligence Portal, UTS has a manager and a senior business analyst who scope requirements, ensure data quality and publish reports, two staff are deployed to building cubes, scorecards and maintaining the supporting data marts and resolving data quality issues. They are supported by technical experts in the Information Technology Division who support the technical infrastructure and by a trainer who conducts hands-on training session in portal navigation. In addition documentation is provided to help staff understand the data and build reports off the BI Portal.

8. Future development of the Course Performance Report
In the future, the scorecard technology will be used at UTS to measure achievement of Equity Targets, aggregating the access, participation, success and retention across all of the DEST
defined student equity groups as well as staff equity groups. This will provide faculty equity scorecards across both student and staff data. Further it is proposed that research performance scorecards will be developed, showing the contribution of different parts of UTS to its research performance outcomes. It is intended that scorecards will be developed to focus on high level KPI’s across all academic and support areas of the University, once the scope of the portal has been increased.

9. Conclusion
Over the last three years considerable effort has gone into trialling and further developing the Course Performance Report at UTS. Staff across the University have been enthusiastic in both using the system and in providing input into the further development of the system. It is pleasing to note that as the system continues to develop, the Course Performance Review also becomes embedded into the activities of the University, and has become integral to, quality and the continuous improvement of courses at UTS.

References
Institutional Support for Quality Learning and Teaching  
— What’s Missing?

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b Dean Academic Development, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

Abstract

Universities are increasingly focusing attention on the quality agenda and its impact on their standing and success. Institutional responses to enhancing and assuring the quality of learning and teaching and the overall student learning experience typically focus on developing plans and policies, implementing systems, creating organisational structures and roles, and devising special initiatives. As AUQA Audit report commendation and recommendations show, the effectiveness of these responses varies across the sector. A number of factors may impact on the success or otherwise of these approaches. Drawing on our experiences and the literature on learning and teaching in Higher Education and on change management, we suggest that a crucial factor often overlooked is the values and beliefs that academic staff have about quality and the impact of these on their engagement with institutional efforts to respond to the quality agenda. Addressing this oversight has important implications for maximising institutional efforts aimed at quality learning and teaching.

Keywords: academic staff beliefs about quality, learning and teaching improvement, managing change

1. Background

The quality of learning and teaching is now being taken seriously across the Higher Education sector both nationally and internationally. The key drivers for this increased focus include a growth in student numbers and a more diverse student body, a view of the student as customer, a rise in internationalisation and global competition, a reduction in government funding, and an increased demand for accountability (Harvey, 2006; Marginson, 2006). In addition, universities have recognised the importance of improving and evidencing quality for both institutional reputation and standing as well as for long-term sustainability.

There are many ways in which universities, both in Australia and internationally, have responded to the quality agenda in order to demonstrate their commitment to quality enhancement and assurance of learning and teaching. For example, universities have developed learning and teaching strategies (Gosling, 2004; Newton, 2003); introduced performance review and student feedback systems (Anderson, 2006), created special roles to support learning and teaching such as Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning (Marshall, 2007) and quality officers (Hodgson & Whalley, 2006), and established institutional support, and recognition and reward mechanisms (Ramsden & Martin, 1996). In addition, universities have designed and implemented numerous special initiatives to address learning and teaching quality, including incentive schemes such as the Teaching Performance Index (Asmar, 2004), learning and teaching grants (Chang et al., 2004; Radloff, de la Harpe & Wright, 2001), special projects focussing for example on developing generic skills (Crebert, 2002; de la Harpe & Radloff, 2000;
Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004), formal tertiary teaching qualifications, such as the Graduate Certificate of Higher Education (Dearn, Fraser & Ryan, 2002), and learning and teaching fellowships. The AUQA Good Practice Database (http://www.auqa.edu.au/gp/search/index.php) provides numerous examples of good practice in learning and teaching from Australian and New Zealand universities.

Many of the ways that universities have responded to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching have been commended in AUQA Audit reports. An analysis of the 24 AUQA Audit reports available as at January, 2006, identified 125 commendations of a total of 328 (38%) that focused on processes, activities or initiatives aimed at supporting student learning and enhancing teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels (de la Harpe & Radloff, 2006a, 2006b). These commendations yielded 133 separate statements, across six categories of learning and teaching. However, AUQA Audit reports also indicated that there are many areas related to learning and teaching where universities need to address quality issues. A further analysis of the same 24 AUQA Audit reports, identified 220 recommendations of a total of 431 (51%) that related to learning and teaching with an average of nine, and a range of three to fifteen, recommendations per university (Carmichael, 2006). Table 1 provides a description of the categories and the number of commendations and recommendations for each category.

Table 1: Number of Commendations and Recommendations by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Commendations</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality: Related to systems and processes aimed at quality assurance for learning and teaching</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching: Related to professional development, learning and teaching roles, and initiatives including incentive schemes, fellowships and projects</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social: Related to institutional climate and activities that encourage and support student engagement</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual: Related to activities that support student intellectual engagement</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum: Related to program structures and mode, and the design of courses including learning resources</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical: Related to resources and infrastructure that support student learning</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A comparison of the number of commendations and recommendations shows that AUQA Audit reports identified considerably more areas of learning and teaching requiring improvement (220) as areas of good practice (133). Carmichael identifies a unifying theme for improvement from the AUQA reports, namely that there is a need for more consistent implementation of quality processes such as closing the loop with student feedback, assessment moderation and validation, and consistent application of standards with clearer delegation of responsibility for action. As Carmichael (2006, p. 8) concludes, “[i]n a nutshell, this review…suggests that there is a need for more ‘quality systems thinking’ by academic planners, and more systematic deployment of such plans is needed to assist staff to teach more effectively, and ultimately for students to learn more productively.”
2. Factors impacting on quality efforts

There are a number of factors that may negatively impact on universities’ efforts to address the quality of learning and teaching and to implement innovative ways of achieving quality learning outcomes. Learning and teaching are complex activities that take place in complex contexts. Enhancing the quality of learning and teaching takes time and effort to achieve. Efforts to achieve quality outcomes require dealing with multiple interdependencies within and outside of the institution. Further, there are many and often competing priorities facing universities such as maximising performance in the Research Quality Framework process and in international university rankings and league tables, and in ensuring ongoing financial viability and long-term sustainability. These factors may detract from efforts to address the quality of learning and teaching.

Universities have for a significant number of years had to manage with reduced government funding for their core business of learning and teaching, research and innovation, and community engagement. Therefore, many have needed to both diversify their sources of revenue and to seek additional funding wherever possible. Such revenue raising activities can put pressure on quality. Moreover, there are competing demands for whatever resources are available and the resources that are directed to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning and teaching, may be allocated to activities that do not result in the intended outcomes.

Universities may put more effort into the development of plans, policies, processes, structures and systems for quality learning and teaching than on their implementation and review. Further, these may not be sufficiently aligned to support quality learning and teaching. For example, processes may undermine policies which in turn, may not support good practice, organisational structures may not have kept pace with changes in plans and policies, systems may be poorly developed, and the data needed for assuring and enhancing quality may be invalid, out of date or difficult to access. Finally, a culture of evidence may not be well developed throughout the institution.

Universities are often described as inherently conservative and resistant to change. Their culture is seen as individualistic and competitive as opposed to team based and collaborative, characteristics typically needed for creating and supporting quality learning environments. In addition, change management processes are often not well understood and systematically applied and there may not be enough staff who are able and willing to take on the leadership and management roles required to bring about change. Indeed, evaluations of learning and teaching innovations demonstrate a lack of effective change management which leads to difficulties with dissemination, take up, and sustainability of projects thus limiting their impact (de la Harpe & Radloff, 2006c).

Finally, universities are showing signs of change fatigue and, as a result, staff have limited energy and enthusiasm for undertaking additional and /or innovative activities to support learning and teaching and assure quality.

3. Academic Staff Values and Beliefs

Working as both academics and in learning and teaching leadership and support roles for a number of years has reinforced for us the importance of the factors outlined above. However, reflecting on our experiences and the research literature, we have come to believe that a crucial factor, often overlooked in discussions on implementing the quality agenda, is academic staff values and beliefs about quality and the importance of these on the success or otherwise of such efforts. As Newton (2002, p. 50), points out, the perspectives of academic staff who are the “front-line” actors engaged in implementation of policy is often neglected when implementing a quality agenda. This oversight is significant given that the values and beliefs that academic staff have regarding quality, have a major impact on their engagement with institutional efforts to respond to the quality agenda.
Academic staff are or should be key players in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching. However, they may have beliefs about the quality agenda, in particular, what quality means and how it is best achieved, that may be at odds with those of university ‘management’, external agencies such as audit bodies (QAA in the UK, AUQA in Australia) and governments, thus making their role in implementing the quality agenda problematic. The typical view of quality that these groups espouse is derived from definitions developed and used by business and adapted to higher education during the 1980s and 1990s and focuses on meeting requirements of external stakeholders (Harvey & Newton, 2004; Vidovich & Currie, 2006). External stakeholders such as accreditation and auditing bodies focus on the quality of programs of study and on the institutional quality of processes and outcomes, respectively. For these stakeholders, quality is associated with accountability which is demonstrated primarily through compliance and control (Harvey & Newton, 2004). In addition, institutions are sensitive to the views of students especially in the context of global competition between universities and develop quality systems to manage the ‘customer’ relationship which typically emphasise compliance to policies and procedures. The result of this approach to quality by institutions is that by the mid 1990s, as pointed out by Henkel (2000), ‘quality’ was associated with ‘bureaucratization’, ‘educational orthodoxy’ and ‘conformity’. In our experience, such negative perceptions of quality are held by many academic staff.

In contrast to the institutional approach to quality assurance in terms of compliance and control, academic staff are more likely to view quality in terms of academic standards (Anderson, 2006) or transformation of the learner (Watty, 2006). The prevailing view of academic staff is that quality assurance involves self and peer assessment and self improvement. In other words, it is based on professional autonomy and trust that all academic staff are engaged in this process voluntarily as part of academic work (Laughton, 2003). Moreover, academic staff complain that the externally driven managerialist view of quality results in additional workload, gamesmanship, and box-ticking without achieving the desired outcomes (Anderson, 2006; Harvey, 2006).

These differing beliefs about quality influence academic staff reactions to institutional efforts to address quality (Anderson, 2006; Jones & de Saram, 2005; Newton, 2002). For instance, academic staff when faced with the requirement to contribute to quality assurance or enhancement activities may respond by not complying, paying lip service to or sabotaging the activity (Laughton, 2003). Another way they may respond is by coping with, shaping or subverting the quality agenda (Newton, 2002). As Jones and de Saram (2005, p. 48), note, “[i]t is relatively easy to develop a system and sets of procedures for quality assurance and improvement on paper. To produce a situation where staff on campus ‘buy into’ this in an authentic and energetic manner is much more difficult”.

4. Reactions to Values and Beliefs

In our experience, attempts to respond to and manage academic staff beliefs about quality and their role in assuring and enhancing quality learning and teaching have often been inadequate or even counterproductive. Senior managers and those responsible for implementing quality policies and processes may ignore or downplay staff reluctance to implement policies and make changes to learning and teaching practices; they may perceive (or pretend) that staff resistance is isolated to a few ‘recalcitrant’ individuals rather than being widespread; they may try to work around reluctant academic staff by shifting responsibility to other staff such as quality officers, directors of teaching and learning, curriculum designers; they may attempt to increase ‘central control’, for example, by making more top down decisions and/or centralizing activities such as curriculum design; they may redesign initiatives ie restart, or refresh failing initiatives; they may reduce expectations and accountability or even abandon implementation of the initiative or process altogether.
It is not surprising then, that the research on the impact of implementing quality assurance and enhancement initiatives shows that there is little evidence that such initiatives have resulted in improved learning and teaching practices and the overall student learning experience (Harvey, 2006; Harvey & Newton, 2004; Laughton, 2003).

5. Moving forward

If we are serious about using the quality agenda for improvement and not just for compliance and accountability, we cannot ignore the values and beliefs that academic staff have about quality and how these may differ from university management and external stakeholders. Nor should these differing values and beliefs be regarded as an obstacle to be worked around but rather as a problem to be solved. Neither a purely managerialist compliance approach nor an entirely collegial *laissez faire* approach are likely to achieve the goal of quality learning and teaching to which all stakeholders aspire. We need to focus our change management efforts on finding a new language to describe quality and a new way to implement quality processes that result in shared understanding and ownership of the quality agenda and a commitment to collaborative action. Specifically, academic staff and university managers need to engage in genuine discussion about the quality agenda with the aim of finding a common language for talking about quality, and agreeing on a definition of quality and on actions to enhance quality that reflect the values of each. Further, both groups need to agree on the kinds of institutional recognition and reward systems associated with enhancing quality that should be in place and see the value of these for their own professional identity and career advancement. Finally, both groups need to acknowledge that, while each may take on different roles in improving the quality of learning and teaching, both need to accept collective responsibility for institutional quality assurance processes and outcomes.

This approach is easy to describe but in our experience, the hardest thing to implement especially in the current Higher Education context. Why? Because achieving engagement, dialogue and collective action requires serious reflection on past and current practices by all parties (government, audit bodies and universities) responsible for designing, implementing and managing quality systems and process. It requires that we engage with the relevant research literature and identify and build on good practice. Further, it requires that we have high degrees of empathy and social intelligence (Goleman, 2006). Finally, it requires that we take responsibility for undertaking this work in a sustainable way. The challenge for all of us is to see this problem as an opportunity to re-engage with renewed energy in building a shared understanding, ownership and commitment to quality. It is only then that efforts to enhance the quality of learning and teaching are likely to be successful.

References


Measuring the Impact of External Quality Audit on Universities: Can External Quality Audit be Credited for Improvements and Enhancement in Student Learning? How Can We Measure?

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b & c Corporate Services, Central Queensland University (CQU)

This paper presents a brief review of literature on the impact of external quality audit on universities. It presents the thoughts of many higher education professionals who have responsibility for quality assurance and enhancement. The paper presents both national and international perspectives. Secondly the presenters of the paper will provide several possible strategies to carry out an impact study and participants will be invited to critique the proposed strategies and engage in discussion about how to measure the impact of external quality audit on universities. There will also be an opportunity for participants to discuss the impact of external quality audit on their own institutions.

The review of literature on the impact of an external quality audit brings together the findings of various writers on impact studies. The sources of information used include: journal articles, research findings and review reports of various quality audit agencies. The review of literature is based on the Australian, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Swedish, Denmark and Hong Kong experiences. It is worth noting that external quality audit in these countries are at different stages. Attachment one provides an analysis of the impact of external quality audit in various contexts.

It would be worthwhile to first define what external quality audit means and how it differs from internal reviews and audits within an institution. An external quality audit is an independent audit aimed at checking whether the organisation is structured to achieve its objectives; or whether, on the contrary, the objectives are simply theoretical or public-relations statement, unrelated to the way in which the organisation goes about its business. The aim of the external quality audit is to identify areas of good practice, areas where improvement is needed and to develop systems and processes for effective quality management. External quality audit also provides benchmarking possibilities and informs the government on the quality standards of the institution. External quality audit involves independent panel members auditing an institution’s overall activities such as: governance, learning and teaching, research, community engagement, internationalisation, human resources, support and infrastructure, commercial entities and other activities the institution undertakes in its name.

Literature Review

Askling, (1997) discusses the impact of external quality monitoring on internal strategic management and quality enhancement. She concludes that external evaluation is only one of several factors influencing institutional quality enhancement. Other demands come from, for example, increase in the number of students, growing diversity in terms of previous knowledge, and the need for external funding. Swedish experience shows that developing a culture of systematic quality improvement across an institution is a long process (Wahlen, 2004). Research on the impact of quality monitoring is difficult because it is impossible to control all relevant factors to be able to map causal relationships (Harvey & Newton, 2004). There is little explicit evaluation within institutions of the impact of changes made as a result of quality
assessment. Evaluation of impact is difficult because of the complexity and pace of change in most institutions (Brennan, Fredericks & Shah, 1997).

There are methodological problems attached to studying the effects of the many external audit initiatives (Stensaker, 2003) and measuring impact is complicated due to universities' complex forms of information-processing and decision-making traditions (Weusthof, 1995).

Massy, (1999) also points out that it is a mistake to say that evaluations have transformed higher education in Sweden and Denmark. Universities are too complex, their governance systems too convoluted, and their faculties too traditional for real transformation to take place in only a few years. Various studies do not provide us with the full picture of the many effects related to external quality audit. While there are positive claims, such as increased attention to teaching and learning and signs of cultural change occurring, studies have also shown that the money spent on external quality audit outweighs potential benefit and various evaluation and monitoring systems trigger greater centralisation and more 'bureaucratization' (Stensaker, 2003). Brennan & Shah, (2000), suggest that there are three types of impact: impact through reward, impact through changing policies and impact through changing higher education culture. So far the answer to the question whether external quality audit has transformed higher education has been ambiguous and not very positive when it comes to quality improvement. The findings support claims from the organisational theorist Henry Mintzberg that change seeps in by the slow process of changing the professions (Mintzberg, 1983).

Harvey, (1999) suggests that impact studies can fall under three broad types. The first type includes ‘opinionated’ or ‘theoretical’ analyses which tends to ‘predict’ the likely impact (Wilson, 1996). The second type is based on limited evidence, much of it is anecdotal (Harvey, 1998). The third type is analysed based on systematic data collection (Harvey, 1999). A study at Sheffield Hallam University by Harvey, Brown & Leman sought academics’ perceptions of the different external monitoring processes in England. They found that some processes, notably external examination, were perceived as providing a check on standards, however there was little support for the view that external quality evaluation improved the student learning experience (Harvey, Brown & Leman, 2003).

Harvey, 2006 also conducted a workshop at the 2006 International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) in The Netherlands. His discussion with representatives from various countries of external quality assurance agencies focused upon the impact of quality assurance. The following change was mentioned:

1. things change from one review to another given that agencies undertake follow ups to see if recommendations are implemented.
2. tracking of performance indicators suggest improvements are following in the wake of quality assurance processes. Such indicators include: retention, graduations, graduate employment, and employability attributes e.t.c.
3. internal reviews as part of quality management system and establishment of quality office or responsible person.
4. surveys of institutions on the benefits of external audit.
5. self assessment report and improvements as a result.
6. outcomes of student satisfaction surveys and student engagement.
7. graduate survey on their preparedness of the demands of the industry/profession.
8. employers satisfaction with university graduates and their preparedness for the world of work and community satisfaction.
9. cost and benefit analysis.

To this point this point the paper has reviewed the literature on the impact of external quality audit. It is worthwhile to provide some analysis of the impact of external quality audit in New Zealand and United Kingdom (UK) where audits have progressed at different stages.
The New Zealand experience highlights the positive contributions external quality audit has made to the higher education sector. The report on the review of the New Zealand University Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) in 1997 and 2001 highlights that the audit process has been effective in encouraging a cultural shift in the universities with respect to quality matters, although this has been uneven across the sector.

However, there is a broad acknowledgement within the universities that positive benefits have resulted and the outcomes have been worth the cost. Overall, external quality audits in New Zealand have provided a stimulus for reform resulting in many initiatives.

There is little doubt that external quality audit has an impact upon institutions in the UK. It has provided an impetus for institutions to give more attention to the quality of their teaching. On the down side it has used a lot of time and resource and caused some stress. The first cycle of audit outcomes in the UK resulted in more than 50 items of negative media coverage about the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and outcomes of the audit reports. Several prestigious universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, challenged the QAA and its audit process (THES, 2000 and 2001). The first cycle of AUQA audits in Australia resulted in twenty-four critical, four mixed and seven constructive media stories about the outcomes of audits.

The cost of the first cycle of quality audits in the UK was approximately £250 million a year for the sector and £80,000 – £100,000 for an audit (THES, 2000). An analysis by the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee (AVCC) in 2002 of seven universities audited by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) shows that universities had spent between $350,000 to $852,000 in audit preparations. This includes both direct and indirect costs related to the audit preparations. Assuming that each university spent an average of $426,000, this means that approximately $16 million is spent on AUQA audit preparation by 38 Australian universities.

An analysis of twenty five progress reports of Australian universities shows that institutions have actioned 527 affirmations and recommendations and there are 1599 actions underway. The external review report of AUQA dated May 2006 suggests that there is evidence from feedback by the higher education sector, that AUQA has had a positive impact in raising the awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector, and also showcasing good practice within the sector (AUQA, 2006). Based on the Australian experience it is predicted that the second cycle of audits will provide more evidence as to whether external quality audits has resulted in positive outcomes in the institutions core business and impact on student learning.

**Conclusion**

The literature review and the New Zealand and United Kingdom experience shows that external quality audit has made both positive and negative impact on the sector. The experience from different countries also tells us that it is possible to measure the impact of the external quality audit using both qualitative and quantitative data. However such analysis should be undertaken in countries like New Zealand and UK and others where audits are in their second or third cycle and recommendations coming out of the audits have been acted upon.

It is important to note that the outcome of the external quality audit and actions/improvement is a single factor contributing towards institutional improvement. Most institutions change and improve due to external and internal environment such as: increased student demand and diversity, competition, innovation and use of technology and many others. Many institutions already have internal quality management systems such as planning, reviews and improvement as part of the planning and quality framework. In most cases internal or external reviews initiated by institutions are for the purpose of change and improvement. Having said
that, external quality audit can be very effective and can be used as a lever for internal institutional change and improvement. Such change and improvement can only be strengthened if the follow up audit is focused on checking the progress an institution has made on the audit recommendations and effective use of tracking data from one audit to another on the institutional performance in various areas.

It is yet to be seen as to how the second cycle of AUQA audits unfolds in Australia from 2008 and how institutions learn from previous audits in both the national and international context. Recent media reports highlighting a number of issues that have emerged after two years of the audit recommendations and progress reports to AUQA have raised a number of questions such as:

1. To what extent is AUQA going to review the progress on affirmations and recommendations which came out the first cycle?
2. Is AUQA only going to review the progress report of institutions or are they going to look at evidence on whether the actions taken has had positive impact on the institution?
3. Is AUQA going to look at tracking data on institutional performance from cycle 1 to cycle 2 audits?
4. How is AUQA going to measure whether the first cycle of audit and its outcomes has had positive impact on student learning?
5. What would AUQA do if there is no evidence of progress made by institutions?
6. Is AUQA going to review how effectively institutions have closed the loop on the forward actions or improvement priorities which universities have mentioned in their performance portfolio in the first cycle?

**Participant discussion - Way forward**

- Participant experience on the impact of an external quality audit on their institution.
- Engaging participants in discussion on various ways to conduct impact studies.
- Getting participants to critique on proposed methodology to conduct impact study.

**Proposed method**

Survey of all quality contacts around Australian and New Zealand universities. Survey items will be related to the themes coming out of the Australian and New Zealand audits. Rating on (how important each item is on the effective operation of the university and performance as a result of the audit).

Secondly use one or several universities as a case study and review the outcome of the audit by monitoring trend data on various performance indicators before and 2-3 years after the audit. Also look at student surveys like national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), student satisfaction, employee, employer, community survey results.

**References**


Media articles on UK audits: [http://www.rhes.co.uk/]

**Attachment One**

**Review of Impact Studies on External Quality Audit**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Areas of impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) | United Kingdom (97 and 01) | - Two thirds of the panel recommendation has been acted upon  
- Actions taken involved formalisation of procedures and improved documentation  
- Reviews and revision of curricula and teaching assessments  
- Recommendation were more likely to be acted upon at departmental than institutional levels  
- Actions were more likely when assessment results fell below institutional expectation and  
- Recommendation which appeared insensitive to context or mission were less likely to be acted upon |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Impact and Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| HEFCE       | United Kingdom | (2005) | - The cost of the external review for the English higher education sector is approximately 40 million pounds a year  
- Impact is mostly on institutions in small institutions with wide spread vocational programmes  
- Increased data requirements by the external agency  
- Unquantifiable cost related to the diversion of academic staff time. Danger of the creation of a culture which is cautious about innovation, or sees quality as about satisfying external agencies, rather than as an intrinsic academic objective  
- Being strategic about reviews and having systems and process for cyclical reviews. |
| Wahlen      | Sweden | (2004), (1995-96) and 2002 | - Leadership and organisation  
- Student influence  
- Policy and strategy  
- Cooperation with stakeholders  
- Evaluation and follow up  
- Educational development  
- Internationalisation  
**Note:** Second cycle showed improvements compared to the first cycle  
Second cycle followed up on the recommendations from first cycle  
At least one panel member from the first cycle was also in second cycle |
| Dill        | United Kingdom, Sweden, New Zealand and Hong Kong | (2000) | - Helped initiate development of quality assurance systems within institutions  
- Placed attention to improving teaching and student learning on institutional agendas  
- Helped clarify responsibilities for improving teaching and student learning at the individual academic unit faculty, and institutional level  
- Reinforced institutional leaders in their effort to develop institution wide quality cultures  
- Facilitated discussion, cooperation and development within academic units with regard to means for improving teaching and student learning  
- Providing system wide information on best practice and finally  
- Offered visible confirmation to the public that attention is being paid to academic quality assurance. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Improvements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| New Zealand | (1997-2001) | - Improvements in strategic planning  
- Increased emphasis on the codification of process and practices  
- Strengthened internal review mechanisms  
- Specific staff appointments such as Quality Managers  
- An increased recognition for staff development  
- Improved promotions policies and procedures including increased recognition of teaching excellence  
- Streamlined and strengthened programme design process  
- An increased willingness to seek feedback from students  
- Graduates and employers and to incorporate their views in programme development and monitoring  
- Raised the profile for Treaty of Waitangi and social conscience issues  
- Enabled student groups on campus to highlight areas of particular concerns to students and finally the audit process  
- Has increased the credibility of the New Zealand university sector both nationally and internationally |

| Australia | (2006) | The recent external review report of AUQA suggests that there is evidence that external quality audit has had positive impact in raising the awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector, and also showcasing good practice within the sector AUQA. Feedback from the higher education sector shows that AUQA has had a positive impact in raising the awareness of quality matters, in developing a commitment to quality and quality enhancement across the sector and also showcasing good practice. |

| Denmark | | Large majority of stakeholders interviewed found the evaluation carried out was valuable. |
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External Quality Audit Outcomes in Australia & International and Possible Benchmarking Opportunities

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Abstract

This paper provides an analysis of the external quality audit reports of all Australian universities audited between 2002 and 2006 by the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA). It provides an analysis of the recurring themes, related to recommendations from all audit reports. The analysis also triangulates the themes coming out of external quality audits in Asia, Europe and South Africa where quality audits have progressed in different stages. Secondly, the paper presents another dimension of benchmarking possibility. A commendation to university X could be a recommendation to university Y. Therefore the paper provides an analysis of University of Western Sydney (UWS) AUQA audit recommendations mapped against those commendations from other universities. The approach currently used at UWS in regards to benchmarking as a result of quality audit is also discussed. This analysis provides an opportunity for the university to target benchmark areas and start dialogue with other universities who have been commended in similar target areas.

1. Introduction

This analysis of recurring recommendations extends a similar analysis conducted by (Martin, 2003), and considers audits between 2002-2006 with the analysis of recurring recommendations. Likewise, the Carrick Institute of Learning and Teaching in higher education also conducted an analysis in 2005 of twenty five AUQA audit reports in learning and teaching related issues (Carrick Institute of Learning and Teaching, 2005).

The analysis of the first cycle of AUQA audit reports provide a snapshot of recurring issues on areas where improvement is needed (recommendations). Apart from the recurring recommendations, the paper triangulates the audit outcomes in New Zealand, Europe and South Africa. Finally another dimension of benchmarking is presented where university(s) could collaboratively work together for mutual benefit as a result of the audit outcomes and other strategic needs. Example of such needs could be competitive edge, networking, negotiating funding as a group in an environment of decreased funding, sharing systems and processes and being innovative, strategic marketing, and raising a common voice in the higher education sector. An example of such a network is the Australian Technology Network (ATN) which consists of five universities.

2. External Quality Audit Outcomes (Australia & International)

The analysis of audit outcomes in Australia and internationally informs us on the areas of good practice in the university sector and areas where improvement is needed. This analysis also tells us that the common weaknesses identified in the audits in various countries are not unique, and there are common themes coming out of audits. The challenge for the universities is to act on areas of weakness with practical solutions which will result in positive outcomes and also enhance the student experience. Such weaknesses would have been identified in
universities internal reviews and trial audits, however the external audit outcome can be used as a lever for improvements. Based on the first cycle of AUQA audits with 39 institutions with the exception of one university yet to audited, there are 517 commendations, 191 affirmations and 641 recommendations. A large percentage of recommendations are in areas related to Governance, Strategic Planning and Reviews, Learning and Teaching, Human Resources and Internationalisation. Table One presents the number of commendations, affirmation and recommendation based on AUQA audits, sorted by key themes.

Table 1: Number of Commendation, Affirmations and Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Commendations</th>
<th>Affirmations</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance, Strategic Planning &amp; Reviews</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Research Training</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity &amp; Access</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalisation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities &amp; Services</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AUQA Audit Reports 2002-2007

A Chi-square test was used to examine the pattern of relationship within this cross-tabulation table. The result suggests that some themes receive significantly more commendations than recommendations on a proportional basis. This particularly refers to themes such as: community engagement, equity & access, and facilities & services with (ratio > 1). Some receive equal percentages of either (ratio close to 1). Others receive significantly more recommendations than commendations, and they are area like: internationalisation, human resources, governance and strategic planning and reviews (ratio < 1).

The triangulated analysis of audit outcomes in Australia and South Africa is based on recurring recommendations of audits in the first cycle. The analysis of recurring recommendations in Australia is based on 39 audits conducted between 2002-2006, and as for South Africa, it is based on nine audit reports published by March 2007. The triangulated analysis also provides the improvements/changes that have taken place as a result of external quality audits in New Zealand, Sweden and United Kingdom (UK) where audits have progressed in their second or third cycle. The findings clearly show that external quality audits has resulted in both a positive and negative impact to the university sector. For example, in New Zealand, the audit process has been effective in encouraging a culture shift in the universities with respect to quality matters, though penetration has been uneven across the sector. However, there is broad acknowledgement within the universities that positive benefits have resulted and the outcome has been worth the cost (NZUAUAU, 1997). Another report suggests that external quality audit has acted as a stimulus and catalyst for universities to build robust quality systems (NZUAUAU, 2001). The New Zealand experience shows that quality reviews have caused universities to examine and monitor processes in ways which they had not done before. Under such examination, defects have been identified and addressed rather than lingering to face public exposure (Woodhouse & Meade, 2000).
The Swedish experiences show that the external audits and together with other measures, have had impacts on the university management and faculty levels but that building a generally accepted systematic quality assurance and development measures take a considerable amount of time in universities (Wahlen, 2004). In the UK, external quality audit have been criticised by the university sector. It is believed by some that the cost involved in the preparation of the audit in UK outweighs the benefits. Also, audit reports had limited improvement impact at the learner-teacher interface nor did they appear to inform choice. Quality monitoring in UK has been beset by overlapping and burdensome processes, competing notions of quality, a failure to engage learning and transformation, a focus on accountability and compliance (Harvey, 2005).

Table Two provides a triangulated analysis of audit outcomes in Australia and internationally with recurring recommendations in the Australian and South African context and improvements in the New Zealand, Swedish, and the UK context.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Australia (Recurring recommendations) Based on 39 audit reports</th>
<th>New Zealand (Improvements as a result of external quality audit) Based on all institutional audits</th>
<th>United Kingdom, Sweden (Recurring recommendations in Sweden and improvement in UK) Based on all institutional audits</th>
<th>South Africa (Recurring recommendations) Based of seven audit reports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governance, Strategic Planning and Reviews</td>
<td>Benchmarking, Strategic Planning, Academic and administrative reviews, Closing the loop on reviews, Key performance indicators, Communication, Budget process, Committee structure, Quality management, Framework, Risk management.</td>
<td>Strategic planning process, Emphasis on the codification of process and practices, Strengthened internal review mechanisms, Appointment of quality managers, Enabling student groups on campus to highlight areas of particular concerns to students, The audit process has increased the credibility of the New Zealand university sector both nationally and internationally.</td>
<td>Leadership and organisation (S), Policy and strategy (S), Initiating the development of quality assurance systems within institutions (UK), Reinforced institutional leadership in endeavours to develop institution wide quality cultures (UK), Facilitated discussion, cooperation and development with regard to means for improving teaching and student learning, providing system wide information on best practice (UK).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning &amp; Teaching</td>
<td>Development of key performance indicators and benchmarking, Streamlining academic governance, Strategic planning and review processes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: External Quality Audit Outcome (Australia and International)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduate attributes,</th>
<th>Improved promotions policies and procedures including increased recognition of teaching, Streamlined and strengthened programme design processes, An increased willingness to seek feedback from students, graduates and employers and to incorporate their views in programme development and monitoring.</th>
<th>Evaluation and follow up (S), Attention on improving teaching and student learning on institutional agendas (UK), Clarified responsibility for improving teaching and student learning at the individual, academic unit, faculty, and institutional level (UK).</th>
<th>Mentoring programs &amp; support for previously disadvantaged students, Systems and processes for the evaluation of teaching, Academic reviews &amp; improvements, Consistency of assessment practices and equivalence of quality provision at various campuses.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Systemic way to collect student evaluations of teaching/units, Closing the loop on survey findings, Assessment, Use of data and information, Quality assurance processes, Nexus between teaching and research, Academic staff development.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research &amp; Research Training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources for research students, Research centres, Research supervisors.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>External examination for PhD programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td>Leadership and planning framework, Infrastructure to support community engagement.</td>
<td>An increased willingness to seek feedback from employers and to incorporate their views for improvement.</td>
<td>Co-operation with stakeholders (S).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>University wide strategy for community engagement, Incentives for staff and integrating community engagement with the curriculum to enhance learning and teaching and research).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Strategic workforce planning, Academic staff workload, Training based on needs analysis.</td>
<td>An increased recognition for staff development.</td>
<td>Staff development (S), Work environment (S), Gender equity (S).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff equity issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity &amp; Access</td>
<td>Monitoring performance of equity groups.</td>
<td>Universal participation (S).</td>
<td>Equity issues (equity strategy, access, participation, retention and success).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internationalisation</td>
<td>QA processes for the management of offshore programs/partners, Induction and training, Admissions criteria, Resources and support services for offshore students, Risk management framework, Evaluation of teaching, Marketing and advertising, Local accreditation.</td>
<td>Internationalisation (S).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities and Services</td>
<td>Library and student support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: AUQA audit reports, 2002-2007
3. **Benchmarking**

Benchmarking is a key element of an effective quality management system. It enables institutions to improve systems and processes by comparing with other like institutions. Among many other benefits, benchmarking enables a university to engage and build relationships with similar organisations nationally and internationally. External quality audit outcome and institutional recognition of benchmarking should result in universities engaging in benchmarking to work collaboratively and for strategic mutual benefit. Such benefit may include: strategic marketing, benchmarking performance, being competitive and playing an important role in negotiating funding with government as a group. One such example of this in Australia is the Australian Technology Network which consists of five universities. Full details of ATN network and its objective can be viewed at: [http://www.atn.edu.au](http://www.atn.edu.au).

In Australia and New Zealand, an analysis of the first cycle of external quality audit indicates that benchmarking is a recurring recommendation and is an area where improvement is needed. Further analysis of AUQA audit reports indicates that there are nineteen recommendations and five affirmations specifically concerned with benchmarking. Apart from specific affirmations and recommendations, most audit reports suggest universities to engage in formal benchmarking. As originally indicated by (Martin, 2003), benchmarking is typically an area where improvement is needed. A recent study undertaken by (Garlick and Pryor, 2004) of twenty eight Australian universities indicates that the first five reasons institutions engage in benchmarking include:

- for general management improvement,
- strategic planning,
- research performance,
- substantiating improvement; and
- functional area improvements.

Based on the analysis of AUQA audit reports, a number of universities have formal and informal benchmarking relationships with other universities in the following areas:

- Benchmarking similar academic programs to validate its approach and outcomes (e.g. UG/PG curriculum- development process, learning outcomes, assessments, reviews and improvement)
- Benchmarking key performance indicators (e.g. CEQ/GDS)
- Benchmarking various student, staff, employer and community survey results
- Process benchmarking (e.g. complaints management systems in universities)

The external review of AUQA in 2006 also provided a recommendation regarding benchmarking:

> Consideration is given to an enhanced focus for AUQA in providing advice and support to Self Accrediting Institution (SAI) and Agencies in terms of quality matters, including institutional and agency benchmarking activities nationally and internationally (AUQA, 2006).

The recurring recommendations with regard to benchmarking could be as a result of a number of factors. One such reason is the lack of information sharing within the university sector in Australia. This is due to competition with universities and also its strategic intelligence in an environment where stakeholders have wider choices of study, different modes of teaching, increased industry engagement in research and international competition, where universities operate campuses offshore. Universities are fiercely competing for the same students in the same market. Such factors have played key roles in limiting universities in sharing their ideas and long term strategy.
To enable an effective benchmarking culture, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), Universities Australia and AUQA could play an important role in engaging universities and fostering benchmarking relationships. Such a strategy should provide incentives for universities where there is a benefit in mutual relationships and in maintaining Higher Education’s “brand Australia” in the international arena.

Significantly, every recommendation in a university’s quality audit report is an area of weakness which requires an action for improvement. The mapping of recommendations with best practice commendations on similar topics or issues is another possible dimension of benchmarking which could allow universities to develop and engage in mutual relationships and share best practice.

For example one recommendation in the University of Western Sydney AUQA audit report was:

AUQA recommends that UWS develop and implement for all staff a more rigorous system of performance review and evaluation (R7).

An analysis of similar commendations in other audit reports indicate that the following universities received commendations in the same area:

- Edith Cowan University C20,
- University of Sydney C17,
- Deakin University C9,
- Queensland University of Technology C9
- University of Tasmania C11,
- Monash University C5 and
- Victoria University C12

Note: Commendations etc. are numbered sequentially as per each audit report

The outcomes of AUQA audit reports provide opportunities for universities to engage in benchmarking relationships. The AUQA good practice database is also a mechanism to learn what other universities are doing and engaging with possible benchmarking activities in academic and administrative areas. The first cycle of audit outcome in Australia enables universities to learn lessons especially in areas where improvement is needed. The audit outcomes should foster benchmarking relationships and eliminate barriers between universities to share best practice. The public reports of the audit outcomes in many countries such as, Australia, New Zealand, UK and South Africa could also enable universities to engage in international benchmarking opportunities particularly where universities have been highly commended. Benchmarking should be seen as a learning process from one’s own experiences (internal benchmarking) and from experiences of others (external benchmarking). Some possible areas where universities could engage in benchmarking as a result of audit outcomes include:

- Process benchmarking (e.g. complaints management process, risk management, management information systems, survey management systems etc).
- Academic programs in comparable discipline (e.g. curriculum development and review, assessments, assessment criteria, learning outcomes, teaching methods).
- Performance data in learning and teaching, research, community engagement, internalisations, finance, human resources, infrastructure and student support and other survey tracking data.

Attachment Two shows a more detailed analysis of UWS AUQA audit recommendations mapped with similar commendations. At UWS, the university has progressed dialogue with regards to benchmarking with several universities like Monash, Griffith University and Canberra University. In 2005 a delegation from the Centre for Higher Education Quality (CHEQ) at Monash University visited UWS to discuss the AUQA audit preparation strategy.
and share practices related to quality management. The outcome of the visit resulted UWS and Monash memorandum of understanding to share survey data. In late 2006, UWS initiated discussions with Griffith University to work together to benchmark and exchange information in a number of key strategic areas. Both UWS and Griffith are multi campus and have a student body that is widely dispersed; both universities have a strong commitment to equity and access and student retention and success. In June 2007, a delegation of senior staff from UWS visited Griffith to discuss benchmarking and possible collaboration.

4. Conclusion
As mentioned earlier benchmarking is highlighted as an area of improvement in Australian universities and in other countries. Benchmarking is essential not just for each university to achieve its mission but also for it to respond successfully to an operating environment which is currently characterised by decreased funding, increased competition, growing student expectations, increased student diversity and greater external scrutiny of performance by agencies like DEST and AUQA. One way to involve universities to engage in benchmarking at national levels is by providing incentives. Both DEST and AUQA could play an important role in facilitating further benchmarking discussions with universities.

Attachment One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UWS AUQA Audit Recommendations</th>
<th>Mapped with Commendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS develop a more pervasive and systematic approach to benchmarking program quality and services with an aspirational national and international peer group.</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS define the desired distinguishing characteristics of the UWS student experience and develop a whole-of-institution strategy to implement and track the progress of this strategy.</td>
<td>MCD C8, UOW C2, Murdoch C5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS further develop the business development office and associated University systems to promote income generation from consultancies, commercial research and other external sources.</td>
<td>Murdoch C2, UWA C11, UOW C9, LTU C9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS develop an effective strategy to increase higher degree research (HDR) enrolments and completions, and ensure that all HDR students have appropriate facilities and support regardless of campus location.</td>
<td>Adelaide C3, RMIT C6 &amp; C7, Griffith C9, UWA C13, CSU C7, Deakin C5, LTU C7, UoM C12, Murdoch C11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS develop appropriate systems to implement the Indigenous education commitment including redeveloping the resource plan and giving consideration to adding a graduate attribute.</td>
<td>UN C8, UC C10, CUT C10, SCU C11, UNE C9 &amp; 14, UWA C10, Deakin C8, CDU C7 &amp; 8, UNSW C5, CQU C11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS reconsider the approach to offering transnational UWS award programs to ensure that the UWS brand is solid and that quality is assured in practice.</td>
<td>USQ C4, CUT C9, UniSA C8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS develop and implement for all staff a more rigorous system of performance review and evaluation</td>
<td>ECU C20, Sydney C17, Deakin C9, QUT C9, UTas C11, Monash C5, VU C12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUQA recommends that UWS develop a more robust strategic approach to the governance of information technology (IT) services across the University and build a stronger client service ethos among those responsible for IT service planning and delivery.</td>
<td>UQ C19, UoM C17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Commendations etc. are numbered sequentially as per each audit report
References


Engaging Staff in the Strategic Planning Process by Changing Approaches and Attitudes

Pam Smith\textsuperscript{a} and Denise Martin\textsuperscript{b}

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\textsuperscript{b} Faculty Registrar, Flinders University, South Australia, Australia

Abstract
This paper presents a case study of the approach being implemented within the Faculty of Science and Engineering to improve communication of, and engagement in, the annual strategic planning process.

The viability of this approach is assessed, in the context of the strategic planning framework in place at Flinders University, using a model for auditing change presented by Cacioppe (1998), which contends that seven critical factors need to be met if successful change is to be achieved.

Performance against each of these factors is explored sequentially, with reference to a review conducted into how the Faculty was formerly operating to meet its strategic planning obligations, and an examination of how it has now adjusted its processes and communication mechanisms in light of the shortcomings which this review highlighted.

This examination finds that, in the drive to achieve genuine engagement by staff throughout the Faculty, based on acceptance that strategic planning has real value and is not simply "administrivia", critical elements have been to:

- ensure that the content of the Faculty's strategic plan is relevant, concise and effectively communicated;
- enable progress in achieving change to be monitored, evaluated and reinforced;
- clearly ascribe responsibility for implementation;
- stimulate buy-in by the Faculty's senior management enabling them to lead change, in particular by demonstrating to staff that effective planning can lead to tangible outcomes which are of value to them.

Key words: strategic planning, Flinders University, change management

Background
A famous Cheshire Cat once said “If you don’t know where you are going, how will you know when you get there,” Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

Unfortunately, whilst senior managers may know where they want to go they do not always communicate this effectively to others in their organisation. Harris suggests that communication in an organisation may not be successful because senior managers come up with the ideas, commit them to paper and call the exercise strategic planning, even though no actions or measures of progress are put in place. Without specific assignments to individuals, due dates and measurable objectives, the plan may be little more than a wish list.

This paper presents a case study of the approach being implemented within the Faculty of Science and Engineering to improve communication of, and engagement, in the annual strategic planning process. The viability of the approach will be assessed using a model for auditing change presented by Cacioppe (1998).
Cacioppe suggests that to achieve successful change seven critical factors need to be in place. The factors are linked, weighted equally, and ordered in sequence beginning with pressure for change and running through to evaluate and improve as the last required step. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Factors needed for Successful Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pressure for change</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Clear Shared Vision</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Capacity for change</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Actionable first steps</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Model the way</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Reinforce Solidify Change</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>Evaluate &amp; Improve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Further, Cacioppe argues that if one of the critical factors is missing symptoms of unsuccessful change management will be evident. For example, if there is no pressure for change yet the six remaining factors are in place it is likely that change will not occur; with insufficient stimulus the new process or method will be likely to be ignored.

**Context**

Flinders University Strategic Planning model is an integrated framework for strategic planning and quality assurance which comprises the following major components:

- A Mission Statement;
- Flinders Strategic Priorities and Future Directions Mark III 2006 – 2010 which identifies strategic directions in the four key areas of Education, Research, International and Community Engagement;
- Key Accountability Measures (KAMs), which enable the University to monitor performance against goals in these four key areas;
- Annual performance reviews including the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors and the heads of the major cost centres, (there are six major cost centres: four faculties, the library and central administration) in which performance against KAMs is monitored;
- Strategic Overview Action Plans (SOAPs) which are prepared annually to implement the goals and strategies of FSPFD.
- Annual Priority Actions which are the major priorities determined by the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellors for the four key areas and the heads of the major cost centres.
- Annual reporting to Academic Senate and Council on SOAPs and the University’s performance.

An overview of the strategic planning and quality assurance framework is summarised at Appendix 1.

**Pressure for Change**

In April 2005, in preparation for the 2006 AUQA Audit, the University commissioned a Trial Audit. From the Report of this Trial Audit, the Faculty identified a number of areas that it could consider addressing to ensure it was well prepared for the AUQA Audit. A statement made in the Trial Audit Report that “There is less evidence that evaluation of performance systematically leads to actions for improvement...” was identified as an issue which the Faculty could usefully address through improving the process for development and implementation of annual strategic planning.

A review of the Faculty’s annual strategic planning process was conducted by the Faculty QA Coordinator. This took into account anecdotal information from a range of staff.
throughout the Faculty which suggested that knowledge of the process was limited. With this in mind, the QA Coordinator then spoke with senior academic and general staff, including Heads of Schools and the Faculty Registrar to gauge their understanding of the process and to seek views from them about the way in which information about the plan was conveyed. During the course of these discussions the following issues were identified:

- delegation of responsibility for implementing actions associated with the strategic priorities and SOAPs was not communicated well nor was it formalised.
- monitoring and review of progress against strategic priorities and actions was not well developed
- the determination of strategic priorities and actions was top down
- the people closest to the issues were not encouraged to engage

In relation to point 1 above, the University template used to report the Faculty annual strategic priorities and actions, does not require the Faculty to report delegation of actions to individuals, due dates or measurable objectives. The review found that, because these details were not sought by the University, the Faculty had not generally considered these factors either. This also made it difficult for the Faculty to monitor and review progress.

The Faculty had tried to engage staff, but the approach used traditional hierarchical channels and the method of communication was written. Each year the Heads of Schools were sent a Memo seeking comment on the annual SOAP, a document of some 50 pages. This draft SOAP was prepared by senior management, without substantive input from other staff. Primarily, this was to spare other staff from having to commit time to what was viewed as an administrative activity driven by the University, with which the Faculty was obliged to comply.

The review was unable to establish if the memo and draft SOAP were relayed on by the Heads of School to staff in their Schools or if, in some other way, Heads sought the input of others in their School. The review thus had to conclude that, in all likelihood, communication onto staff in each of the Schools was likely to have been patchy at best.

Not surprisingly, little or no feedback was ever received. Whilst the review was unable to identify any one cause for this lack of engagement, it concluded that even Heads of Schools did not consider they needed to provide feedback as the link between developing the SOAP and their involvement in implementation was not clear. Further, the SOAP was seen as an administrative activity, adding no value to their roles, having no worthwhile connection with their “real” work, and thus not relevant to them.

Finally, the lack of engagement of people closest to the issues was clearly evident in the manner in which Education KAMs were responded to. The Course Coordinators, who had a vested interest in these data, generally did not even receive the data nor were they invited to comment. The Heads of Schools prepared responses for the Faculty; one of their major motivations being to spare their staff from what was seen as yet more “administrivia”. This issue will not be explored further, but it is further evidence of impediments in the communication style of senior managers.

**Clear Shared Vision**

The review recommended the following steps be followed to change the approach to strategic planning, and hence the attitude of staff, in order to improve engagement:

- define the implementation process and identify responsibility, timelines, means of verification and reporting
- develop a streamlined SOAP – the “less is more” principle
- develop a model to enhance engagement with the KAMs and improve the understanding of the link between KAMs and the strategic priorities and SOAP
The Executive Dean’s Advisory Group (EDAG) accepted the review recommendations. We cannot claim that this equated in practice to all of the members of EDAG equally and genuinely sharing the vision for change. However, acceptance by the senior management group in the Faculty was undoubtedly essential in ensuring the access to, and degree of receptiveness from, staff in the Schools that was necessary to begin to build improved levels of engagement.

**Capacity for Change**

It was proposed to EDAG, and they accepted, that an initial trial of a new approach for delegation and monitoring of actions was needed to gauge its effectiveness before attempting to roll it out to all areas of the Faculty. Two of the Faculty Committees were identified to pilot the new approach: the Research Committee and Teaching and Learning Committee. Each of these two committees covers a key area under the University Strategic Plan: Research and Education.

These committees were also selected because their executive officers, respectively the Faculty Registrar and the Faculty QA Coordinator, had been involved in the review, understood the issues and were committed to changing the approach to strategic planning. They were given responsibility for implementing the trial, tracking and reporting the outcomes.

The trial concluded at the end of 2005. The committees struggled initially to take responsibility for actions related to the strategic plan when, in some instances, these were actions they had neither endorsed nor regarded as relevant. Further, it was a distraction from their normal business and required additional effort.

However, the committees came to recognise, albeit somewhat reluctantly, that if they were to be responsible for actions in future Faculty strategic plans, they might as well become involved in the process by identifying and working to achieve actions they believed to be relevant and worthwhile. The chairs of both committees, with encouragement from the executive officers, helped stimulate this growing acceptance in the way they led and managed committee discussion.

The trial did not change hearts and minds in a single year. However, by the end of this first year there was evidence of a growing recognition within both committees that an improved model for strategic planning at a Faculty level might improve the use of resources and see key priorities being achieved. This was considered to be a sufficient basis for rolling out the new approach more widely.

**Actionable First Steps**

The first step in rolling out a new approach throughout the Faculty was to determine what the Faculty annual priority actions would be in 2006. The Faculty held a retreat in late 2005, attended by key decision makers in the Faculty and including representation from Faculty academic and general staff. The retreat identified a number of issues and possible actions to address them. From these, four priorities and a small number of key actions were agreed upon.

In terms of where the Faculty needed to head, the priorities were well chosen, in that they were clearly necessary if we were going to succeed in the future, pressing, framed succinctly and, as a result, readily able to be understood by most staff in the Faculty. For example, it is widely known that science faculties in Australia and elsewhere in the developed world are experiencing considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining students. Selecting a priority and associated actions which aimed to address these problems made sense and related directly to the interests of staff.

The number of actions was much smaller than in previous years and all were contained on a single A4 page of text. There was therefore a significant reduction in the size and scope of the Faculty’s strategic plan. Previously the annual SOAP had exceeded 50 pages. For 2006, the
key priorities and associated actions were contained within a single page. The Executive Dean was responsible for leading this substantial reduction, recognising that the Faculty’s ability to communicate its goals was significantly reduced the greater the length of the strategic plan; it followed, too, that it would be easier for individual staff members to understand their roles if the number of actions were refined in this way.

While the Faculty was still required by the University to submit a more detailed SOAP with actions addressing all elements of the University’s FSPFD – about 130 in total – this document was not issued widely throughout the Faculty. Instead, the single page document was used to communicate to staff what our key priorities and actions for the year were, and to seek to enlist their engagement in helping the Faculty to achieve those outcomes. And, rather than use just the traditional hierarchical channel of written memo sent to Heads of School and hopefully relayed onto School staff, the single page document was placed prominently on the staff section of the Faculty’s website.

As a second step, responsibility for implementation of actions was clearly assigned to key individuals with decision-making responsibility, principally the Executive Dean, Heads of Schools and Associate Heads of Faculty, some of whom also chaired Faculty or School Committees, and a timeframe for implementation of each action was determined.

The third step saw another change of approach. Whereas in previous years, there had been no systematic monitoring of progress in achieving actions, the Executive Dean now assigned responsibility for tracking of priority actions to the Faculty Board; giving the Board a central strategic planning role commensurate with its responsibilities as the senior decision-making body in the Faculty.

Despite being given this responsibility, it became evident during the first year of implementation that the Faculty Board was not really engaged in the tracking process. Whilst reports on progress were submitted for consideration, the Board provided little or no comment and appeared to see the exercise primarily as one for noting not for active engagement. To a large extent this seems to have been because written reports were provided. A culture had developed within the Board of getting through meetings quickly by minimizing the numbers of items discussed and disposing of written report items as unstarred (ie, not for discussion) matters. For 2007, reports will be provided in person by the person responsible for leading the implementation of a particular priority/action. Consequently, these items will be starred and will afford opportunities for Board members to ask questions and offer suggestions.

**Model the Way**

Cacioppe proposes that senior management should model the way so staff will adopt new approaches. We have seen from the steps outlined above that senior management had been given responsibility for key actions. These senior managers were not necessarily the ones who would implement actions but they did have a significant role in directing working groups, committees or individual staff members to take action. Focusing on only a limited number of highly relevant key priorities and actions, and clearly assigning responsibility, did assist the senior managers to view the exercise as significant and valuable. As a result, they were able and prepared to model the way by genuinely leading staff at all levels to engage more fully in working towards achieving the Faculty strategic priorities.

An example of this was the introduction of a transition program for commencing BSc students. This action was one which would contribute to Priority 1, “Implement activities that will increase enrolment from local and international students and improve attrition rates across the Faculty”. In 2006, the Chair of the Faculty Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) worked closely with teaching staff of the BSc to develop and deliver a transition program for new students. All staff attended the transition activities and were able to see first hand how their
input was valued by the students. The 2006 program highlighted some areas for improvement and, with the continued support of the Chair of TLC and input from the Executive Dean and Faculty Registrar, the BSc teaching staff redesigned the program for 2007. We can report that the 2007 program was much more successful and the Faculty is now considering introducing transition programs for all commencing students. By engaging the staff in development and delivery, it became possible for them to see, first hand, the benefits and to have tangible proof that a specific activity in which they were involved could directly contribute to achieving a major priority of the Faculty.

Perhaps, also for the first time, they knew where they were going and could tell when they had got there. Previously a lot of action was promised but, with little sense of clear direction, no-one really knew how it fitted with the priorities of the Faculty.

An approach whereby those responsible for actions would report directly to Faculty Board was not adopted in 2006. Instead the QA Coordinator was charged with seeking advice on progress and collating the information into a reporting template which was submitted to each meeting of Faculty Board. Some information was obtained through regular meetings held with the Executive Dean and Faculty Registrar, other information was sought directly from those responsible. The approach was not ideal and did not lead to a change of staff attitude, as the approach was administrative not engaging.

The changes to strategic planning made by the Faculty in 2006 focused on changing the approach. However, they were not completely successful in changing staff attitudes.

**Reinforce and Solidify Change**

The tracking process, whilst not ideal, did add some value. For the first time it made a concise record of progress against actions readily available to members of the Faculty, in particular senior management.

By the end of 2006, the Faculty was able to clearly identify what had and had not been achieved. It was then evident that, although some progress had been made towards achieving the priorities, there was still some way to go. Further, the external and internal factors which had led to the determination of priorities for 2006 had changed little. Consequently, the Faculty decided it would maintain the same priorities in 2007. A small number of actions were identified, some new and some carried over from 2006. Actions which had been successfully implemented in 2006 were mainstreamed as ongoing operational activities.

Faculty Board’s role in tracking progress will continue in 2007. However, there will be greater emphasis on fostering the Board’s engagement in the process, with Board members being encouraged to comment on progress and provide feedback directly to those responsible for taking action. Consequently, it is proposed that those delegated with responsibility for actions will report directly to Faculty Board. This approach will be trialled and evaluated to see if direct communication rather than written reports generates greater immediacy and interest and, as a result, improves the extent and quality of engagement by the Board.

**Evaluate and Improve**

The final factor which Cacioppe says is critical to any successful change is evaluation and review. In this case it has been an integral part of the approach, with the Faculty undertaking an initial review of current practices back in 2005, which then led to a trial of a new approach and its wider adoption across the Faculty in 2006. As has been noted above there is still some way to go before we could claim success. However, the Faculty now has in place an approach which enables continual evaluation and improvement and which is showing signs that it is achieving changes in attitude of staff at a variety of levels.
There continues to be pressure for change, there is growing evidence that commitment to a shared vision is growing, our capacity for change is stronger, the first steps have been taken and we are modeling the way. A continued commitment to reinforcing and solidifying the change and evaluation and improvement will, we believe, enable us to successfully change the approach, encouraging staff to understand that strategic planning can be a useful tool to map the way and helping them to see where and how they are travelling.

References
Harris, H., Eight Problems with Your Firms Strategic Plan, retrieved from http://www.planning.org/content/eightpr.html
Appendix 1

Flinders model for integration of planning and quality assurance
Implementing Strategic Policy
for Quality Improvement in Teaching and Learning:
A Case Report from Monash University

Christine Spratt, Kara Gilbert, Gillian Lueckenhausen and Louis Roller

Abstract
A major aim of the Monash University 2006-2010 Education Plan is to ensure that Monash courses are relevant and responsive to the needs of students and key stakeholders and that teaching is of the highest quality. Monash’s goals for quality learning and teaching, articulated in the Education Plan, reflect the quality imperatives in higher education which are now well entrenched in the sector. In 2006, Monash’s newly created Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) began a major strategic development initiative, the ‘Systematic Improvement Strategy in Response to Unit Evaluation Data’ project. This institutional project anticipated that faculties, collaboratively with the Centre for Higher Education Quality (CHEQ) and CALT, would implement and evaluate improvement approaches for teaching and learning based on relevant performance indicators; that is, data drawn, in particular, from the University’s standard unit evaluation surveys and other institutional datasets. The processes and outcomes of the pilot project at the Victorian College of Pharmacy (VCP) are reported.

Keywords: unit evaluation data, quality improvement, strategic policy

1. Introduction
A major aim of the Monash University 2006-2010 Education Plan is to ensure that Monash courses are relevant and responsive to the needs of students and key stakeholders and that teaching is of the highest quality. Monash University believes that its quality frameworks ought to be integrated, explicitly and transparently, with the daily activities of individuals across the University. Consequently, and as Australia’s largest research-intensive university, it:

places major importance on individuals and work teams taking responsibility for their own quality assurance and improvement processes. Such an approach is consistent with the needs of a large, diverse, international and knowledge-based organisation (Quality at Monash: Values and Principles).

In keeping with this quality philosophy, in early 2006 CALT with CHEQ initiated an institutional strategic development scheme, the ‘Systematic Improvement Strategy in Response
to Unit Evaluation Data’ project. The project anticipated that faculties, with CHEQ and CALT, would implement and evaluate strategies to improve student satisfaction in teaching and learning based on key performance indicators; in particular data drawn from the University’s standard unit evaluation surveys. The project’s broad intentions were to:

- work from data sources,
- target poorly performing units as a priority,
- establish response teams consisting of CHEQ, CALT and faculty staff,
- link staff and student development support,
- focus initially on aspects that were perceived as being relatively easy to improve,
- provide concentrated support over a short term to achieve high impact,
- document and demonstrate consequent improvement.

The project was conceived within Monash’s existing quality framework (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: The Monash Quality Cycle](image)

The Victorian College of Pharmacy (VCP) agreed to pilot the project. In 2006, VCP had an EFTSL of 1130, compared to the Faculty of Business and Economics with 10 000 and the university overall with 50 000 (Monash Pocket Statistics, 2006). The largest program at the VCP is the Bachelor of Pharmacy and the VCP offers a number of other programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels in pharmacy and the pharmaceutical sciences. The VCP is committed to quality improvement in teaching and learning through its various educational governance structures, which are overseen by the Associate Dean (Teaching) (ADT). The Senior Executive, in particular the ADT (then, the fourth author), played an important and proactive role in establishing the project. The Dean and the Faculty Quality Management Group were receptive to the intentions of the project and the Dean and ADT were visible in the project through their attendance at academic staff development workshops.

The pilot project aimed to effect change in a number of prioritised units prior to their delivery in Semester 2 2006. It was anticipated that the improvements implemented would be reflected in improvements in the relevant unit evaluation survey data. Moreover, it was intended that the project contribute to further developing the VCP’s existing quality teaching and learning environment and that it inform the project’s broader implementation across the remaining Monash faculties.

This paper reports the processes and outcomes of the pilot project at the VCP.

2. Project Methodology

The Project Team comprised representatives from CALT (The Deputy Director, a Senior Lecturer and Lecturer in the Strategic Development portfolio and a Lecturer who then worked at the VCP in student learning support), CHEQ (a Senior Lecturer Quality Advisor) and the VCP (the Associate Dean Teaching and a well experienced Senior Lecturer). A smaller
working group (excluding the Deputy Director CALT and the CHEQ adviser) administered the project and the CALT staff (the first three authors) were responsible for the operational management of the project.

The project team reviewed the Semester 2 2005 unit evaluation data and analysed the bottom 25% units, based on the quality satisfaction item (Item 8). (The survey items include university-wide and faculty-designed items and are listed in Appendix 1). Units that had items with scores 10% or more below the Faculty mean were also identified and discussed. The CALT/VCP working group reviewed the identified units in more detail (unit outlines and assessment strategies) and gathered useful additional data and information relevant to the broad pedagogical context in which the units were taught at VCP. Subsequently, ten units across two degrees were prioritised for the project; they ranged from Year 1 to Year 4 and enrolments varied from 28 to 245 EFTSL. The project aimed to identify curriculum improvements that could be most readily made so that changes, once implemented, would have a beneficial effect on student learning experiences and, consequently, be reflected in the unit evaluation survey data.

In general, the units that were part of the project were weak in two key areas: clarity and transparency of unit learning objectives and appropriateness and timeliness of feedback to improve learning. Of interest, these issues were not only reflected across the VCP but also institutionally across Monash.

3. Implementation Stages

The ADT discussed the project with relevant unit coordinators and notified them that the CALT operational team would contact them to collaborate on initiatives to improve the units in preparation for Semester 2 2006. The operational team met the unit coordinators over a period of a week and formally summarised, in writing, the meetings and agreed interventions (see Table 1).

As anticipated, there were a number of complex curriculum issues that were uncovered in the meetings, which were beyond the scope of the project. These issues, principally related to the politics of cross-Faculty teaching in one unit and internal curriculum restructuring in others, were discussed with the ADT as they arose and resulted in the withdrawal of some units; consequently, five units remained in the project following the consultation period.

Table 1: Units and Agreed Interventions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit/Year Level</th>
<th>Agreed Interventions</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1/1</td>
<td>Introduce low-weighted assessment mid-semester assessment task for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implement exam review and a practice session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4/4</td>
<td>Redevelop objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implement self-assessment quizzes on MUSO (Monash's online learning management system) for feedback.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Team meeting for sessional staff to reiterate unit objectives, focus of lecture series, their teaching roles.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clarify presentation of unit objectives and learning expectations in introductory lecture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the four weeks prior to the commencement of Semester 2 2006, members of the operational team met with unit coordinators to ensure commitment to implementing the agreed upon improvements and to provide further advice. Academic staff development workshops (for all VCP staff) to discuss learning objectives, assessment alignment and feedback were planned, conducted and evaluated. Attendance figures at these workshops were rewarding and the workshops were well evaluated. The majority of unit coordinators whose units were part of the project attended the workshops. The operational team planned focus group interviews with students in each unit, to complement the routine unit evaluation surveys. A survey was sent to participating coordinators to evaluate their perceptions of the project, especially the consultation process. This completed Stage 1 of the project, Planning and Implementation.

**Monitoring Improvement Outcomes**

As stated earlier, the quantitative part of the monitoring strategy (Stage 2 of the project) consisted of analysing the relevant standard Monash University online unit evaluation surveys which were undertaken at the end of Semester 2 2006 and comparing them with Semester 2 2005 data. CHEQ oversaw the survey administration and data analysis. In Table 3 improvements in the mean are noted for the quality item (Item 8) comparing Semester 2 2005 with Semester 2 2006. Unit P8/2 was excluded as the sample size and response rate was considered too small (CHEQ does not routinely interpret unit evaluation data with less than five responses). The comparative means across university and faculty items are illustrated in Table 4 for all units remaining in the project.
The interview questions were structured to enable feedback from students that was directly related to the improvement approaches implemented in each unit. As noted above a qualitative dimension was added by gathering information from focus group interviews with students. Unfortunately, it was difficult to recruit students for the interviews despite the best efforts of CALT and VCP staff. As a result, an anonymous asynchronous online discussion was established as a contingency strategy to collect qualitative data for two units.

It is beyond the scope of this short paper to discuss the issues raised from the qualitative data for each unit. However, it was evident in the qualitative data that students reflected positively on their learning in direct relation to the unit improvements implemented. Moreover, students expressed strong views about what they characterise as ‘good teaching’. Units where the learning expectations were made clear, where learning objectives were transparent and where they have opportunity across the semester to assess their own learning, were perceived positively. Students appreciated well-organised and approachable teaching staff who engaged them in interactive learning opportunities. Students valued learning collaboratively with their peers and being engaged in problem-oriented activities that test their developing knowledge.
they valued opportunities to develop research skills and to be engaged in authentic learning opportunities that prepare them for professional practice.

**Discussion**

The evolution of the project reflected Monash’s views that often institutional datasets relating to teaching and learning are under utilised for quality improvement and policy development. Yorke et al (2005) report a similar view broadly across the sector in the UK and reported a ‘data mining’ exercise to determine if demographic variables (student place of residence etc) were influential in academic performance. The extensive cross-institutional exercise aimed to inform related institutional policy development. In Australia and internationally, there has been a healthy debate about the use of various institutional, national and international datasets for quality improvement purposes in the higher education sector, in particular data drawn from the Course Experience Questionnaire (Bedggood & Pollard 1999, Ramsden 2003, Richardson 2005).

Barrie, Ginns & Prosser (2005) presented a review of the evidence-based quality assurance system in place at the University of Sydney. Their paper reported the implementation of a particular strategy that aimed to develop:

- systems to enact the policy in ways that would promote alignment between policy and management directives, faculty strategic initiatives and teaching and learning practices at the level of actual subject (Barrie, Ginns & Prosser 2005, p. 642).

While the authors offer an evidence-base of their system’s success, they acknowledge the difficulties of implementing a major teaching and learning improvement initiative in a research-led university. Therefore they argue that the gains made at their institution have been substantial over a five year period.

Of particular interest to this paper is their discussion regarding the operational implementation of the institutional policy at faculty level, which included responding to unit survey data by implementing staff development initiatives and curriculum improvement projects (Barrie, Ginns & Prosser 2005). The long-term sustainable operational outcomes of such initiatives are, of course, difficult to measure and resource intensive to implement, as the research literature in impact evaluation across disciplines attests (Patton 2002).

The project reported in this paper, while reflecting many of the attributes of similar initiatives across the sector, is distinct from others in its unique methodological approach. This approach is embedded in close collaboration between central quality improvement groups, faculty executive and academic teaching staff to implement rapid curriculum change for improvement over a short time frame that would be reflected in key performance indicators immediately after the improvement approach was implemented.

In employing the project methodology, it was anticipated that the project implementation would be ‘completed’ within a six-week time frame. In the VCP, a small faculty with 10 units initially included in the project, the planned time frame appeared ‘feasible’. However, the practicalities of academic life meant that the timeline was contingent and numerous obstacles presented themselves. The first meeting of the project team was May 5 2006 and the implementation strategies were completed by July 10 2006. A Stage 1 Report was completed by early July 2006 and presented to the VCP Executive Management Committee on August 17 2006.

The Stage 1 Report recommended that the VCP consider reviewing its academic administration in relation to the way it responds to evaluation data of units, programs and ‘shared degrees’. The Stage 1 Report, in particular, recommended clarification of the role, expectations and accountability of degree coordinators and unit coordinators in implementing identified quality improvement approaches for teaching and learning.
In the project overall, academic staff in identified units approached the project with varying degrees of commitment and some debated the validity of the unit evaluation survey data as a key performance indicator for curriculum improvement. Some academic staff were, therefore, less enthusiastic than others in engaging with the project and taking accountability for implementing agreed upon changes. Moreover, several staff, while acknowledging the need for change and improvement, were constrained by research and other workload demands which, they believed, militated against their engagement. Subsequently, some staff appeared more inclined to effect change in incremental stages. Inevitably, the above factors influenced the project outcomes. Furthermore, the Stage 2 improvement monitoring strategy was constrained by difficulties in recruiting students for focus group interviews and the limited survey data in one unit.

However it is important to note, that in two units the project served to give additional impetus to effect curriculum change that was already in train. Consequently planned work occurred sooner than the curriculum team anticipated.

The unit with the most marked improvement was P4/4 with a 22% improvement in the mean for the quality item and substantial improvements across all other university and faculty items (see Table 4 above). It is our contention that this unit evidenced the best outcome due to the commitment and perseverance of the unit coordinator in engaging with the project, their acceptance of the survey data as a meaningful performance indicator of the students’ perceptions of their learning in the unit and a willingness to accept advice and implement pragmatic and transparent strategies directly relevant to the identified issues. The effective collaborative relationship which developed in the short period of consultation between the unit coordinator, CALT staff and the relevant VCP IT staff who assisted in implementing the online feedback strategies, was in our view the key driver for the successful improvement evidenced in the Semester 2 2006 survey data and the related qualitative data for this unit.

A review of assessment and feedback approaches, initiated by the VCP Faculty Education Committee in mid 2006, was a positive outcome of Stage 1 of the project. Curriculum issues related to assessment and feedback appear, however, to be of continuing interest to students, as evidenced from the Stage 2 qualitative and quantitative data, and will most likely require ongoing monitoring at the VCP.

It is important to note that, as a result of discussion during the project, the VCP Faculty Education Committee has mandated that there will be more continuous assessment in all units across the VCP programs. As well, there has been a total restructuring of the Faculty academic structure; a new ADT and a new position of deputy ADT along with three new course directors and appropriate deputies for the VCP’s major programs have all been appointed.

The VCP Faculty Education Committee has extended its attention to feedback in a number of other ways; for example, through implementing the ‘Lectopia’ pilot project, a facility allowing students to download and review lectures. We also acknowledge other excellent initiatives at the VCP related to improving student feedback (e.g. the use of audience response systems in large lecture classes, and the growing use of online and multi-media learning support strategies).

Conclusion and Implications for Operational-level Quality Improvement Practices

Executive level academic and general staff involvement (for example, the Dean, the ADT and Faculty Academic Manager) is essential to successful outcomes for any quality improvement strategy. As key stakeholders, they ought to make their commitment and support visible and transparent through contributions at committee level and, ideally, their participation in relevant aspects of the project (e.g. attending and participating in academic staff development workshops). In other words, departmental cultures need to reflect ‘an environment in which
teaching, learning and the needs and interests of students are given greater priority’ and department-level leadership plays a key role in this developing such cultures. (Knight & Trowler, 2000, p. 78).

Transparent communication pathways ought to be established early to help facilitate staff participation and commitment to improvement projects such as this. The onus lies with the Faculty to inform academic staff, whose units are selected as part of any improvement project, of the nature and scope of the project and their expected role in it. In certain circumstances, consideration may need to be given to the role of performance management in assisting to assure accountability for quality improvement in teaching and learning.

A Department, School or Faculty-wide workshop that explains Unit Evaluation Surveys (including the survey items, analysis and interpretation) and their integral role in the institutions’ quality cycle ought also to be conducted by the appropriate group (in our case CHEQ) prior to project commencement. Furthermore, the project management team should agree, in the first instance, on strategies to adopt if identified units require more detailed intervention for improvement beyond any rapid and easily implemented pedagogical modifications anticipated by the project.

For us, the greatest challenge rests in sustaining over time curriculum change and improvement initiated by projects such as this. Consequently, faculties and departments need to identify strategies to sustain accountability pathways within existing organisational structures or, alternatively, develop new ones to assure the ongoing monitoring of unit evaluation data and improvement strategies.

We do believe that the CALT/VCP pilot project affected varying degrees of enhancement in the units that were targeted for improvement. It should be noted that while the University-wide items (in particular Item 8, the quality item) are of most interest for policy makers institutionally, other successful implemented improvements were measured by Faculty items and their successful implementation is reflected in both qualitative and quantitative data. The project also highlighted that the University’s quantitative unit evaluation data is one part of the pedagogical evaluation ‘story’ and in our case, the qualitative data drawn from the focus group interviews with students while limited reflected the findings of the survey analyses. Particular departments, schools and faculties have their own peculiarities and contexts, which can be highly influential to students’ experiences of learning and which ought to inform improvement approaches along with available department and institutional quantitative datasets.

**APPENDIX 1:**

**SEMESTER 2 2005 AND SEMESTER 2 2006 UNIT EVALUATION SURVEY QUESTIONS**

**University Items**
1. The learning objectives of this unit were made clear to me
2. This unit enabled me to achieve the learning objectives
3. I found the unit intellectually stimulating
4. I found the resources provided for the unit to be helpful
5. I received useful feedback on my work
6. Feedback I received on my work was provided in time to help me improve
7. The overall amount of work required of me for this unit was unrealistically heavy
8. Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this unit

**Faculty Items**
9. The sequence of topics in this unit made sense to me
10. The assessments so far this year comprehensively tested my achievement of the unit’s learning objectives
11. The practical classes, tutorials and/or workshops were relevant and useful to the learning objectives of the unit
12. I had sufficient access to teaching staff for this unit.
13. I was encouraged to explore more information than was given in lectures associated with this unit.
14. I found the information for assessment tasks so far this semester were clear
15. At this stage of the course, I found this unit integrated well with other units in the course.
16. I could see how the material taught in this unit might be relevant to my future career.
17. If the unit included an on-line or flexible delivery component please complete the following question:
18. The on-line teaching materials associated with this unit were a useful resource.
19. What were the best aspects of this unit?
20. What aspects of this unit are most in need of improvement?

References
Academic Board and the Academy: Seizing the Moment

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Abstract
In the past decade, much has been written about the governance of universities from the point of view of the superior governing body, frequently called the ‘Council’. Less has been written about the academic body, sub-committees to council, usually named, ‘academic board’. The dearth of writing on academic boards relative to that on university councils, does not reflect the high level of interest in academic boards of Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) auditors. The AUQA audit reports, their recommendations, affirmations and commendations, demonstrate the important and changing role of academic boards, driven by change in the style of management of universities and the quality framework of which AUQA is a part. They also demonstrate the need for universities to pay closer attention to their academic boards. Other circumstances surrounding higher education in Australia, including the commencement of the second cycle of AUQA audits, continued discussion of the National Governance Protocols and implementation of the revised National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes reinforce the author’s view that universities must seize the moment and embark on more careful discussion of the role of academic boards, their interrelation with council and university management and their role as the voice of the academy.

1. Introduction
In the past decade, much has been written about the governance of universities here and overseas from the point of view of the superior governing body, frequently called the ‘council’. Less has been written about the academic body that usually consists of a majority of academic staff, a few general or professional staff and students and ex officio members of the executive or senior University management. In Australia, these academic bodies, sub-committees to councils, are usually named, ‘academic board’. The dearth of writing on academic boards relative to that on university councils does not reflect the high level of interest in academic boards of AUQA auditors. The AUQA audit reports, their recommendations, affirmations and commendations, are replete with references which demonstrate the important and changing role of academic boards, driven by change in the style of management of universities and the quality framework of which AUQA is a part. They also demonstrate the need for universities to pay closer attention to their academic boards. This paper will discuss changing approaches and attitudes to the academic board.

2. Origins of the academic board
Like the councils, academic boards have evolved over time. They have origins in professorial boards and sometimes retain this element in their contemporary form. They vary in size, from very large bodies with an unspecified number of members, determined according to the constituent parts of a particular university, to smaller ones that are less representative in their composition. They are often seen as slowing decision-making, a necessary outcome of their relation to the governing council and the layers of subordinate committees with which they share the work load. They are also seen as collegial and as a forum for debate.
3. **Council reforms and academic boards**

The Commonwealth Government’s scrutiny and Minister Julie Bishop’s continuing interest in university councils, their size, focus, role, corporate interest and expertise, is resulting in the council becoming more like a corporate board. As councils have been reduced in size and their membership transformed to be primarily external and to include more members with business expertise, academic boards remain as perhaps the most significant, formal, contemporary expression of the medieval heritage of modern universities and the characteristic collegiality associated with the academy that is often contrasted with the ‘new’ managerialism of universities (Meek and Wood (1997), Marginson (1999), Considine M. (2001), Coaldrake et al. (2003), National Institute for Governance (2003), Considine D. (2004), Thornton (2005), Edwards (n.d.)).

In Australia, most universities are established by legislation and the changes to councils have required amendments to university acts. Usually, the university act refers to the academic board as a sub-committee of council and the chair of the academic board is named as an *ex officio* member of the council. Of course, as the ultimate governing body, the council of the university has primary responsibility for the corporation. Academic boards usually recommend on matters academic, with some academic decisions made by the council, depending on how power has been delegated (Meek and Wood, 1997; Coaldrake et al., 2003).

The result of the changes made to councils has led to a clearer divide between the role of council and the role of academic board. Though this has arisen largely from recent history, it is also a product of historical factors and legal principles, of the structure of the historical corporation of the university and the people who make up the membership of the university corporation. Members are usually described in the university act and consist of the academic and other staff, students and sometimes graduates, who may or may not have a place on council or some decision-making role as a convocation. One of the outcomes for most universities of drastically reducing the number of staff and students on council is to escalate ‘a split’ between custodianship of the organisation’s purpose and custodianship of the assets (Corcoran et al., 2000). This is an important distinction.

Corcoran says purpose resides with the members, the assets with the council or governing body. Considering the governance of universities and the membership, this would make the academic board the custodian of academic purpose of the university, while council is the custodian of assets. Academic purpose includes the academic voice and the guarantee of quality of academic programs. As a result of the changing role of councils there emerges a dichotomy between quality concerns of program approval and review and purely financial and commercial decisions. At the extreme, it could be argued that anything that is essentially commercial in nature - including research grants, and the commercial basis of international student and fee-paying postgraduate coursework load - could be removed from the province of the academic board. The council role which is delineated as having to do with finances, commercial interests and risk, effectively leaves the academic board with no substantive role other than as guardian of academic quality.

One of the recommendations in AUQA audit reports alludes to this division in responsibilities:

Council develop strategies to ensure it is able to inform and balance its fiduciary governance responsibilities with its academic governance responsibilities.

University acts generally prescribe the function and powers of councils without distinguishing how these are shared or delegated to academic boards. Neither do they usually define the powers of the chief executive or management. In some cases, statutes help, setting out par-
ticular powers or functions of the vice chancellor and the relationship of the council and the vice-chancellor and other executives. Outside legislation, the terms of reference of academic boards describe their role. Within the tripartite divide (council, academic board, management) usually the council would decide on resources, finance, commercial interests and the corporate plan, and management would make industrial relations and other decisions. Academic board would determine CGS load, approve programs, admissions and academic review and a host of other things for which academic board, composed largely of academic staff, has expertise. One can test this proposition drawing upon the work of the many teams of AUQA auditors who have examined nearly every university in Australia in the first cycle of audits. What have the audits revealed about academic boards, their role and function in Australian universities?

4. Academic boards through the eyes of AUQA auditors

In a recent paper for Higher Education Research and Development, Jeanette Baird (2007) analysed commendations, recommendations and affirmations on councils and academic boards in AUQA reports. For the reasons articulated by Baird, this article has drawn from AUQA reports without identifying particular universities. She found that recommendations and affirmations on academic boards fell into three main subject areas: roles; leadership; and quality assurance (Baird, 2007).

Some of the auditors’ recommendations are particularly relevant within the context of governance reform outlined above. They include statements that refer to roles of academic boards and the relation with councils, in some instances pointing to a need to clarify their respective roles and responsibilities:

- academic board should ‘strengthen its ability to maintain oversight of the academic activities of the University, and, in particular, assure the quality of teaching and learning activities’;
- academic senate’s relationship to council ‘with respect to governing and assuring the quality of the University’s academic activities also needs to be clarified’;
- ‘consider clarifying the relationship between the Academic Board and the Academic Council in terms of their respective responsibilities and purpose’;
- ‘ensure its governance and management processes enable academic representatives to play a substantive role in the academic affairs of the University, and in recommending to Council on significant academic initiatives’;
- ‘review outcomes from the review of Academic Board to ensure that it is effectively fulfilling its functions as the principal academic authority within the University’.

AUQA recommended that one university ‘reconsider the roles and functions of the various committees related to teaching and learning with a view to clarifying their roles in relation to quality management of the University as a whole’.

Several recommendations deal with the need to clarify the roles in relation to academic matters not only of academic board, but also of other components the governance system. Examples include suggestions that the university:

- ‘Senior Executive Group provide clarity to the University about the respective roles of the Academic Senate and the Portfolio Committees’;
- ‘commission a review of the recently established Programs Committee to ensure that it is operating effectively and that its delegated responsibilities for overseeing the quality assurance of teaching activities are being appropriately fulfilled’;
- ‘identify the role that it wishes the Research and Development Board to play in the academic governance and management of the University; and ensure that this role is communicated and acted upon in a clear and open manner’;
• ‘review the role, membership and terms of reference of the Academic Board, and in the light of the increased devolution of responsibility of academic quality assurance to other bodies … consider strategies for involving the Board earlier, and more formally’ in the University’s ‘systematic, planned and structured approach to the review of organisational performance’

In some instances, discussion of the academic board has not led to a recommendation, but the audit report has contained similar views to those above. For example, one report refers to the need for the academic board ‘to reaffirm its role in regard to its main responsibility for the supervision of the academic direction of the University and maintaining high standards of excellence in teaching and research’. The report continues: ‘This will involve a clarification of its role in regard to the Education Committee and its two sub-committees and the Senior Management Committee and the deans’.

These extracts from audit reports indicate the existence of a surprising lack of clarity in governance and suggest that there is room for closer study of academic boards and clearer definition of their role within governance structures, a conclusion also reached by Baird (2007).

The AUQA audit recommendations itemise some of the academic activities which form the agenda of academic boards. They include:

• entry criteria
• articulation arrangements
• program approval/accreditation, monitoring and review
• academic review, for example. 5-yearly unit, program or faculty reviews
• academic quality and standards
• academic policy and policy implementation
• quality of teaching and learning
• attrition rates
• graduate attributes across curriculum
• off-shore programs.

Only five commendations have been made in relation to academic boards. Four congratulated specific universities on the strong role of their academic boards in program accreditation and review, school review, faculty review and the quality management framework used to consider overall academic performance. Two of the commendations singled boards out for achieving continuing improvement through reviews.

The fifth commendation, in a recent report, may be taken as a good example of ‘best practice’ in relation to the division of responsibility between council and academic board. It is worth quoting not just the commendation, but also the text because it illustrates the division in responsibilities of the two bodies in terms similar to Corcoran et al. (2000). This university’s act:

provides for the Academic Senate to be the primary custodian of academic values and standards for the University and so the Senate provides advice to the Board of Trustees on a range of academic issues. It is responsible for accrediting and approving courses, programs and units, and promoting the quality and development of research. The Audit Panel found that the Academic Senate is functioning effectively and exercising commendable oversight and leadership of (the university’s) academic activities.

AUQA commends [the university] for its strong corporate and academic governance under the leadership of the Board of Trustees and Academic Senate.
The recommendations by AUQA auditors over the first cycle of audits also address the function of academic boards in relation to the academy. For example, one suggests that the university should ‘reinforce University academic board’s’ strategic role’ in relation to the objectives of the University’s long-term strategic plan, with the purpose of ensuring that University Academic Board provides strategic leadership on academic issues.

Another recommendation states that the University should:

clarify for all staff the intended role to be played by Academic Senate in fostering collegial discussion and debate and in leading academic policy development and monitoring.

This recommendation appears to indicate that the auditors share the traditional view of the academic board as the appropriate forum for collegial debate. Alternatively, they might simply be commenting on a failure of the academic body to live up to its terms of reference. However, from the text of this audit report, it appears that the recommendation does reflect a view held by the auditors on the role of the academic board as a leader for the university community on academic issues:

As it currently operates, Academic Senate functions as the final arbiter on academic regulations and related decisions brought forward by its sub-committees. In this technical role it appears to be performing satisfactorily, although it is heavily reliant on the effective performance of its sub-committees. On the other hand, it is not taking an active role in fostering discussion of, and leading the University’s response to high level matters of current and emerging academic policy. It appeared to the Panel that the mechanistic nature of much of Academic Senate’s activity had led senior academic staff to disengage from active involvement. Discussion and debate of strategic issues occurs within some of the sub-committees of the Academic Senate, particularly the Learning and Teaching Committee and as noted earlier (see section 1.2.1), cross-University fora such as the Professorial Forum are also providing opportunities for collegial discussion. Senior management needs to facilitate a discussion within the University of the desired role of Academic Senate and clarify this for all staff.

Some reports focus on the role of academic board in relation to strategic planning. For example, where one academic board, in this case referred to as ‘Senate’, seems to the auditors ‘to play a minimal role in establishing strategic directions’, they suggest:

Dedicated strategic planning forums to enable members to provide greater strategic input into the development of the University’s strategic directions, targets and performance measures could more effectively harness the wider expertise within the Senate.

Similarly, at another university:

The Audit Panel did not find evidence that the Board is systematically involved in development of strategic and functional plans. The University is urged to ensure that, in further developing its planning framework, the Board plays an integral role in developing, monitoring and reviewing planned objectives.

It is clear that AUQA auditors see the academic board as a key custodian of academic values and standards. Some audit reports appear to have moved beyond that to suggest that academic board should play a role in the strategic direction of the academic enterprise. It is this role in academic leadership which lies at the intersection between academic board, management and council.
5. **Seize the moment**

Auditors appear to see the academic board as the voice of the academy and to say that they should have a strategic leadership role to focus on academic issues. This support for academic boards may be a reaction to some of the assessments of academic boards in the literature where they have been described as ‘little better than imitations’ (Marginson and Considine, 2000) of collegial forms, or as unambiguously collegial bodies, everywhere Academic Boards are becoming more marginal, principally due to their exclusion from resource allocation decisions. (Marginson)

Marginson and Considine also refer to the boards as ‘shadow-form collegiality’ that university executives allow to survive. The latter remark does not seem to take into account the powerful force of university legislation.

Nearly a decade has passed since publication of *The Enterprise University* (Considine, 2000). Shortly, the second cycle of AUQA quality audits will commence. These two circumstances suggest that the time is opportune for more careful scrutiny of university academic boards.

There are other circumstances which suggest the time is ripe for a re-assessment of academic boards. The Minister continues to talk about university governance reform and continues the focus on university councils when referring to the National Governance Protocols. Significantly, the Minister has spoken of the ‘minimalist approach to good governance’ of some universities versus those that have ‘embraced a culture of good governance’ (Bishop, 2006). The Protocols require university councils to adopt a statement of their primary responsibilities, which must include:

a. appointing the vice-chancellor as the chief executive officer of the higher education provider, and monitoring his/her performance;

b. approving the mission and strategic direction of the higher education provider, as well as the annual budget and business plan;

c. overseeing and reviewing the management of the higher education provider and its performance;

d. establishing policy and procedural principles, consistent with legal requirements and community expectations;

e. approving and monitoring systems of control and accountability, including general overview of any controlled entities;

f. overseeing and monitoring the assessment and management of risk across the higher education provider, including commercial undertakings;

g. overseeing and monitoring the academic activities of the higher education provider;

h. approving significant commercial activities of the higher education provider.

In addition, they state that an institution’s governing body, ‘while retaining its ultimate governance responsibilities, may have an appropriate system of delegations to ensure the effective discharge of these responsibilities’. I argue here that it is appropriate for university councils to delegate the responsibilities listed above under (g) as the ‘academic activities’ to the academic board, which has the academic expertise which constitutes the purpose of the university.

The Minister has amplified her own interpretation of the National Governance Protocols. In her speech to the National Conference on University Governance in October 2006, the Minister said:

it would be a valuable enhancement of the National Governance Protocols to require the governing body to take the distinctive role of the institution into account in
approving the mission and strategic direction, annual budget and business plan. What is distinctive about my university’s course offerings, mode of delivery, mission, what do we do best? What will make my university competitive?

This statement, made in the context of requiring differentiation within the university sector, contains an interesting twist. It seems to invite the governing body, now populated with a required number of financial and commercial experts and having a majority of external members, as set down in the Protocols, to make decisions on matters that are essentially academic - course offerings and delivery modes. My argument is that a council requires the voice of the academy on these matters.

The National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (DEST, 2003) revised and ready for implementation from December this year, provide further evidence that it is time to devote more attention to academic boards. These protocols govern the establishment of new universities and accreditation of other higher education providers. This year Guidelines will be issued for the protocols; the draft documents (circulated for comment in February 2007) include references to the academic board of applicants:

- The institution has a properly constituted academic board or equivalent whose membership provides the institution with the expertise to ensure that standards are maintained at the level of Australian universities.
- The academic board plays an active role in the approval and review of the institution’s courses.
- The academic board considers and acts on relevant data such as teaching evaluations, student feedback, student attrition, progress rates, grade distributions, course completions, graduate satisfaction and employer satisfaction.
- The academic board plays a key role in the development, dissemination and monitoring of academic policies related to academic standards.

While the Guidelines (to date only in draft) may establish minimal requirements for the academic board, the fact that they refer to academic boards and that the guidelines will be relevant to existing as well as new universities, suggests that the time really has come for discussion of governance to shift from council and to focus in a more rigorous way on the role of the academic board within the overall governance system.

This discussion would include many of the points dealt with in relation to councils, including:

- Clarification of the role of academic board
- The powers that council should delegate to the board
- The most useful size for such the academic board
- The membership, including the balance between management, academics, professional/general staff and students
- The independence of the chair from management.

More important, it would deal with the interrelation of the two bodies — council and the academic board — and also between the academic board and university management. In insisting on including the voice of the academy in the governance equation, I differ slightly from Baird who concluded:

The time is now ripe for a broadly-based conversation about the continuing rationale for academic boards and ways of improving their operations for good institutional governance (Baird, 2007).

I argue that the rationale for academic boards is clearly as custodian of academic values and standards, and in so doing they provide the expert voice on the academic purpose of the
higher education enterprise. It is now time to apply mechanisms of good governance to this clearly defined purpose.

6. Conclusion

The need for analysis and scrutiny of university governance must move beyond considerations of council to encompass the academic purpose of the higher education enterprise. As councils have become smaller and more corporate, the number of academic staff has been reduced and those who remain are not and cannot be representatives of the academic voice. The academic purpose of the enterprise should therefore be delegated from council to the academic board, which would provide a legislatively-based rationale for their operation and scope. In this new environment, the role of the academic board is clearly as the custodian of academic quality. It is now timely to apply the principles of good governance, so touted at the council level, to the custodians of our academic enterprise and to clarify its role in academic quality which has proved so problematic for AUQA auditors in the first cycle of the Australian Universities Quality Agency.

References


WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Making AUSSE Engaging
Fostering Interest in Using Student Engagement Survey
Data for Academic Quality Improvement

Tom Angelo

The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) will be piloted later this year in a number of universities, under the aegis of the Australian Centre for Educational Research. This workshop will explore practical ways to interest academic and student support staff and managers – and students – in paying attention to and using AUSSE results. The workshop draws on several years of experience by many universities with a related survey, the NSSE – National Survey of Student Engagement – in North America. Participants will generate possible applications of these good practices to their units/institutions and suggest additional strategies for fostering AUSSE engagement.

Focus of the workshop
1. Describing, very briefly, the AUSSE instrument and the 2007 pilot project
2. Noting significant differences and similarities between AUSSE and CEQ
3. Providing a ‘thumbnail’ review of key research findings on engaging academics in evaluation and change processes
4. Presenting examples of field-tested strategies for fostering interest in using NSSE data
5. Identifying applications and implications of those strategies for the AUSSE pilot
6. Sharing workshop participants’ promising/field-tested strategies

Sharing good practice
In addressing the above topics the emphasis in the workshop will be on:

- Reviewing and analysing strategies used in North America to interest staff and students in paying attention to and making use of data from a standardised, national student engagement survey similar to that being piloted in Australasia
- Sharing possible applications of those strategies – and of “home-grown” good practice – for use in the upcoming pilot and in other similar survey projects

Workshop Leader
The workshop will be led by Tom Angelo, Professor of Higher Education and Director of the University Teaching Development Centre at Victoria University of Wellington, NZ. He is involved in the current AUSSE pilot as part of the ACER’s AUSSE Advisory Group and in coordinating institutional administration for Victoria. Prior to his 2004 move to NZ, Tom had experience in the US administering the NSSE, developing related surveys, and promoting effective use of the survey within and among universities.
Towards a Quality Management and Development Framework for University Engagement in Australia

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1 Need & Background

There are many examples of exemplary university engagement activities within and beyond Australia, but these are often operating in isolation and are not part of a coordinated, systematic approach. It is more difficult to find a coherent, transparent, linked, systematic and institution-wide approach underpinned by an explicit quality management framework.

It is this need which the proposed AUQF workshop seek to address.

At the 2005 AUQF conference Julie Jackson (La Trobe) and Geoff Scott (UWS) proposed a Quality Management framework for University Engagement in Australian higher education with links to Quality Management for Learning & Teaching and Research (see www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/2005/proceedings/full_proceedings.pdf 62-8). The paper was reviewed and enhanced in the light of feedback from local and international participants expert in the area.

Since that time the members of the Northern Australian Universities Community Engagement (AUCEA) Group have field-tested the framework and found it accommodated their various approaches. Universities such as UWS have completed university wide reviews based on the framework and the framework has also been tested internationally. In early February 2007 a group of Pro Vice-Chancellors and managers involved in university engagement met for two days to review progress and look at how the participating institutions might work more closely to develop and an enhanced version of framework for managing strategy and quality in the area. This framework will be presented at the workshop as a foundation for further discussion and critique from a much broader audience.

2 A definition of University Engagement?

In a field that encompasses a range of diverse activities and is reflective of a wide range of regional, cultural and historical imperatives there are numerous definitions of engagement.

One of the most widely cited is that proposed by the Association of Commonwealth Universities:

\begin{quote}
\textit{strenuous, thoughtful, argumentative interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities’ aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbours and citizens. (ACU 2001: i).}
\end{quote}


In Australia, the recent formation of (AUCEA, 2005:2), a formal alliance involving 32 of 39 Australian universities, has begun to articulate the activities that may (or may not) be included in universities’ concept of engagement, with AUCEA describing university engagement as:
… a two way-relationship in which the University forms partnerships with the community that yield mutually beneficial outcomes such as:

- Productive research outcomes that are, among other things, socially robust;
- Regional economic growth;
- Linking the community and the world (boosting local/global connectivity);
- Social capital development;
- Progress towards a region’s sustainable development;
- Human capital development;
- Development of corporate and private citizenship attributes;
- Driving social change including helping to solve some social issues especially in areas of disadvantage; and
- Development of the cultural and intellectual fabric of the community.

3 Draft national quality university engagement framework

The elements of the proposed framework fall into four quality management clusters:

- Good governance and the quality of strategy formation for university engagement;
- Ensuring that resourcing and rewards are aligned;
- Ensuring that the institution has clear leadership for implementation; and
- Putting in place a systematic approach quality tracking and improvement for the area.

The proposed quality framework seeks to ensure that each university’s governance, strategy formation, resourcing, delivery, quality monitoring and improvement processes are soundly formulated and explicitly linked.

The proposed framework does not constitute a prescriptive list of what needs to be done. Rather it is primarily intended to provide a ‘big picture’ of what quality management for the area entails. It is primarily presented, therefore, to enable institutions to self-assess, to reflect on what aspects of their approach to the area are well conceived, systematically leveraged, well implemented, and which are not. In this sense what is presented is simply a number of quality checkpoints for reflection; they are not a framework for compliance; nor is there one best way to address each of them.

4 How the participants will be involved in the workshop

During 2007 the draft framework will be widely distributed across Australian universities and international partners for feedback. Prior to AUQF the framework will be presented and refined at a NAUCEA workshop in Brisbane and at the AUCEA conference in July. The outcomes of these events will form the basis of a presentation by the authors at AUQF and, depending on the number of participants at the workshop, there would be discussion groups around the four clusters identified above.

Feedback from the workshop will result in the refinement of the framework. Later in the year the framework will be workshopped at the AAIR Conference in November where the focus will be specifically on enhancing the online tracking system for the area.
Student Participation in Quality Assurance

Jagannath Patil

Deputy Adviser, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India

Workshop Outline
The facilitator of the workshop is a senior officer in the national quality assurance agency for India. He is leading a project on Student Participation in Quality Assurance supported by the Asia Pacific Quality Network. As a part of that project, surveys have been conducted in the Asia Pacific region and the results have been analysed. The project leader will be spending three months in Australia during June-August 2007 to further study this topic in the Australian context. The AUQF will be a good forum for the project leader to share with a wider HE group what has been achieved in the project so far, and for the participants to give further inputs on the topic.

A. Objectives of Workshop:
- To share and disseminate theory, and experiences of student participation in quality assurance in the Asia Pacific Region.
- To promote exchange of good practices in student participation in quality assurance.
- To identify strategies that work well to involve students and student organisations in quality assurance, both internal as well as external.

B. The Context
The workshop will cover the following aspects:

Student Participation in Quality Assurance - Concept:
- Student, the most important stakeholder
- Learner centered campus life
- Rhetoric and Reality
- Need for efforts

International Experience:
- Efforts of ESIB (National Unions of Students in Europe)
- Luxembourg Declaration
- SPARQS (Student Participation in Quality Scotland)
- HEQC Quality Literacy Project and other Initiatives (South Africa)
- Indian Experience

Different Approaches:
- Student Feedback Approach
- Student Rights Approach
- Students Co-constructor Approach
C. Workshop Methodology:

1. The workshop is expected to share information on the following aspects of student participation in various HEIs of the Asia Pacific that have been surveyed.

   I ) Internal Quality Assurance (HEI):
   - Representation of students in decision-making bodies (Academic Committees, Courts, Senates etc.)
   - Staff student consultative committees
   - Feedback mechanism, both informal and formal; questionnaire – feedback on courses, teachers and campus experience
   - Adoption of Student Charter
   - Grievance Redressel
   - Student satisfaction surveys
   - Alumni representation
   - Representation of students in Internal Quality Assurance Cells/Quality Assurance offices of HEIs

   II ) External Quality Assurance (Agencies):
   - Weightage given to student involvement in internal quality assurance as reflected in the Self-Appraisal Manuals of the Quality Assurance Agency.
   - Representation of students in peer review process.
   - Representation of students in Accreditation decision-making body.
   - Importance given to student feedback/interactions during assessment and accreditation process.
   - External Student Satisfaction Surveys and its linking with Accreditation.
   - Alumni feedback in accreditation process.

2. A pre-workshop online forum would be conducted inviting various Australian HEIs willing to share experiences. (This will be done as a part of the fellowship program).

3. Lead presentation by the facilitator; who will present information based on the surveys done in India and the Asia Pacific region as a part of the APQN project on the topic.

4. Sharing of good practices of student involvement identified so far.

5. Identifying areas of co-operation and networking to benefit from experiences of HEIs.
Accessing the Student Voice:  
Using CEQuery to Improve the Quality of Engagement  
and Retention in Australia’s Universities

Geoff Scott  
Pro Vice-Chancellor Quality at UWS

This workshop will explore the latest developments in using the qualitative software CEQuery to improve university student engagement in productive learning and retention.

Focus of the Workshop
1. Latest ways of applying CEQuery analyses to comments written on surveys – from surveys covering the total university experience down to surveys of specific units of study;
2. How to use the results of CEQuery analyses to identify:
   a. Key quality checkpoints for course accreditation and monitoring of the total student experience of a university;
   b. The recurring ‘hot spots’ for quality improvement in our universities;
   c. Actual solutions from the student perspective to key improvement priorities.
3. Identifying and sharing the strategies which are currently being used successfully to:
   a. Encourage a wide range of staff to engage positively with such data;
   b. Improve retention and overall satisfaction ratings.

These strategies will be compared with the findings on effective change implementation which have emerged from the current Carrick-funded study of 513 Learning and Teaching Leaders from DVC to Head of Program in 20 Australian Universities.

Sharing Good Practice
In addressing the above topics the emphasis in the workshop will be on:
• Studying practical examples of how CEQuery has been used: this will include a case study from UWS where there has been an improvement in retention by 3% and overall satisfaction by 7% over the past 2 years;
• bringing together the successful approaches being used by different workshop participants to deploy CEQuery in a similarly productive and helpful way.

Workshop Leader
The workshop will be led by Professor Geoff Scott, Pro Vice-Chancellor Quality at UWS. Geoff was the Director of the national HEIP project that studied 280,000 comments by students across Australia on the CEQ to develop CEQuery and to identify its implications for quality improvement in Australia’s universities. He is currently Director of a national Carrick Project on Learning and Teaching Leadership in 20 Australian Universities and has sat on a range of advisory committees, including the Ministerial Advisory Committee for the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund.

This work has attracted widespread interest around Australia and internationally in the UK, South Africa, Canada and New Zealand where Geoff has been invited to run similar national workshops over the past two years.

In 2000 Geoff was elected as a Fellow of the Australian College of Educators for services to higher education quality nationally and internationally.